

Wednesday, January 29, 2020

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE OF GREAT CITY SCHOOLS/MALES OF COLOR OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held January 29, 2020, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:22 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Dr. Melissa Jenkins, JoAnn Kennedy, and Dr. Carmen McPherson. Natasha Noel joined the meeting subsequently by telephone.

The first agenda item was on the committee's direction and goals. Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to expand the committee's outreach, expand the mentoring groups, finish the white paper, work on legislative suggestions, and work on a professional development course on implicit bias.

Dr. Jenkins said the social-emotional committee in the district has been doing work around implicit bias, particularly Ms. Ramanuskas. She described some of the work that has been in social-emotional learning in the district.

Ms. Kennedy moved approval of the committee's minutes of November 26, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved. A correction was noted.

Mr. Sokolovic said the same budget for the committee's initiatives as last year was on track to be approved by the board.

Regarding adding data to the white paper, Dr. Jenkins said she did not have access to historical expulsion data. There was a discussion about the data on the state website and how to get further data broken down by race. Dr. McPherson said the data indicated in 2014 there were 44 expulsions in the district; in 2015-16, 76 expulsions; 2016-17, 90 expulsions; 2017-18, 59 expulsions; and 2018-19, 41 expulsions.

Dr. McPherson said it would be good to look at the numbers of black males compared to Hispanic males.

Dr. Jenkins said there was 9th grade data indicating 24 percent of the black male population had been suspended compared to 15 percent of Hispanics.

Dr. McPherson suggested language for presenting the data as part of a five-year trend. Regarding the presentation of data and its implication she said we want to surface what is happening and at what grades changes occur.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to request the percentage of Hispanic staff members compared to African-American staff. Dr. McPherson said state data as of 2017-18 indicated certified staff included 8 American Indians, 35 Asians, 215 African-Americans, and 182 Hispanics or Latino, and 1,253 white, so 13 percent of the educators in the district are black or African-American; 11 percent are Hispanic or Latino; and 74 percent are white.

Ms. Kennedy suggested the numbers be broken out by male-female as well.

Dr. McPherson described the enrollment figures located on the state website. In 2017, black and African American were

7,262 students(34.8 percent) and 10,031 were Hispanic or Latino (48 percent); and whites were 2,651(12.7). She said for the same year suspensions/expulsions were made up of 19 percent of blacks or African-Americans, 12 percent were Latino or Hispanic.

Ms. Noel joined the meeting by telephone.

Dr. McPherson said the white paper would highlight the data to make recommendations. Dr. Jenkins said culturally relevant pedagogy factors in as well.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said the law was changed to prohibit suspensions of K to 2 students except under extreme situations.

Dr. Jenkins said there is a data available on the frequency of suspensions for an individual student. She said most of the students in the data have been suspended one time.

Mr. Sokolovic said it had to be a goal to expand the mentoring program.

Ms. Noel said vendors were being paid and she asked whether there would be reimbursement once the budget conversation happens.

Dr. Jenkins said she believed only independent contractors can be reimbursed for approved expenses. She said John Ramos and Dr. McPherson received reimbursements because they are district employees.

Ms. Noel said the mentoring program came out of the work of the committee and she was frustrated because it seemed like we are pulling teeth to get the work done. Mr. Sokolovic

said last year was the first year the committee had a budget and it was right around this time last year that the money came through. Ms. Noel said she was frustrated because people at the middle schools are not familiar with the mentoring program.

Dr. Jenkins said she knew it was challenging to get to the boys at the middle schools. She requested Ms. Noel send her a simple flyer in Word format about the mentoring program. She said the budgets had to be formatted in a specific way to ensure quick payment. She noted trips and purchases of pizza seemed to be paid for seamlessly.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was not sure why the budget had to go through the board. He said there were other programs that were not filtered through for board approval.

Ms. Noel asked if a presentation could be made at a principals' meeting. Dr. McPherson said that was a good idea. Mr. Sokolovic said he would contact Mr. Testani about it.

Ms. Noel said it was frustrating because the program was only getting 15 to 20 kids every month. In response to a question, Ms. Noel said she would need five to ten minutes in front of the principals to present the program.

Dr. Jenkins described the reimbursement process for expenditures, which includes gathering price quotes and a lengthy process for payments.

Dr. Jenkins asked Ms. Noel to add a paragraph to the draft of the white paper on mentoring.

Ms Noel said it was important to make the board aware that work is happening in the mentoring program. Mr. Sokolovic noted there was pressure to complete the white paper. He said to remain viable as a committee it had to be completed.

The next agenda item was on issues and advocacy. Mr. Sokolovic said the Council of Great City Schools will be putting on a seminar and conference in Washington, D.C., in March. He said he would be attending and paying for his own hotel. He said he would try to set up a meeting with Connecticut's congressional delegation in Washington.

Ms. Kennedy suggested pursuing the issue of more male teachers of color. Mr. Sokolovic noted his wife was recruited to teach in Stamford by financial incentives. Dr. Jenkins said housing incentives could be effective in a district such as Bridgeport.

Mr. Sokolovic said the next meeting would be on February 25th.

Ms. Kennedy moved to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was seconded by Dr. Jenkins and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod