

Tuesday, March 26, 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE OF GREAT CITY SCHOOLS/MALES OF COLOR OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held March 26, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:42 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Dr. Melissa Jenkins, Sauda Baraka, Maria Pereira, Martin Rubin, John Brockenberry, JoAnn Kennedy, Dr. Carmen McPherson and Terry Walden.

Mr. Sokolovic noted there was a typographical error on the agenda and the minutes to be approved were dated February 26, 2019. Ms. Pereira objected to proceeding with the item. Ms. Baraka suggested proceeding.

Ms. Baraka moved to approve the minutes of the committee's meeting of February 26, 2019.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda was on the Males of Color forum encumbrances.

Dr. Jenkins said the encumbrances needed to occur by Friday. She said the budget did not include specific items for the forum, but \$1500 was allocated for the forum.

Ms. Baraka suggested setting \$900 aside for a speaker or speakers, although the committee could look for a speaker

who did not need to be paid. She said chart paper and materials would be needed for breakout sessions. Ms. Baraka said the cost of food would be several hundred dollars, which she provided at the last forum. She said the nutrition department was a little pricy at that time, exceeding the committee's budget of zero.

Ms. Pereira said the nutrition center may be willing to provide the food for free. Dr. Jenkins said she would check on that. It was suggested to encumber \$300 for food pending information from the nutrition center.

Mr. Rubin said he had some extra paper from his classroom. Dr. Jenkins suggested Mr. Rubin keep the paper because there may not be such supplies in next year's budget. It was suggested \$300 be allocated for the supplies.

Dr. Jenkins moved to approve \$900 for a speaker or speakers, \$300 for food, and \$300 for materials. The motion was seconded by Ms. Baraka.

Mr. Sokolovic said this would be sufficient for the April 1st date by which time expenditures must be encumbered and Ms. Siegel would allow shifting money among the items.

Mr. Rubin suggested a possible speaker, Nate Taylor, whom he has used successfully in the past. He said Mr. Taylor, his college classmate, has his own company, Nate Taylor Coaching, and is a certified motivational speaker. He said Mr. Taylor comes from a low-income family and immediately connects with everybody.

Mr. Brockenberry said Mr. Taylor's style is very interactive and he highly recommended him.

Mr. Rubin said he would contact Mr. Taylor. He said the amount needed to pay Mr. Rubin would leave funds for other speakers if necessary.

Mr. Sokolovic said with the money saved additional speakers for breakout sessions could be explored.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was an update on the Males of Color middle school and high school mentoring programs.

Dr. Jenkins said the middle school program just launched on Saturday.

Mr. Rubin said he is working with Mr. Brockenberry at Bassick. He said we are already seeing a positive impact on the young men who have attended the sessions, including bonding with each other. He said there are challenges around attendance, but many of the students are enthusiastic about the project. He said goal-setting is being worked on now, with a literacy component coming up soon.

Mr. Brockenberry said there was a great session with Nate Taylor. He said in April Craig Kelly, a Bassick alum and retired firefighter, will present on anger management and aggressive behavior. There will also be a trip to Fairfield University, a trip to an adventure park and a trip to Sleeping Giant state park. He said another project is having the students write their own stories in composition books.

Mr. Brockenberry said a solid number of 25 students would be going to the adventure park. He said he was trying to find a happy place between getting more students involved and keeping them committed.

Ms. Pereira said when she read the plan she noted the program at Bassick was open to all grade levels. In response to a question, Mr. Brockenberry said the program had twelve to fifteen consistent participants. He said many young men have other commitments to sports and the videogame club.

Ms. Pereira said there are 437 black and Hispanic males at Bassick and she asked how they would be reached. Mr. Rubin said before the program was created there were meetings with Mr. Brockenberry, two other teachers and the director of the in-school suspension program. It was decided to reach the students who were most in need of mentoring. He said fifty students were sought out, but the initial presentation may have scared some of them off. He said he was confident the amount of students the program would engage would grow. He said no males of color were turned away from the program.

Mr. Brockenberry said there is a process of tiering in the program because some of the students are in a desperate state academically. He said every day there is a dialogue on how to engage the students in the group. Mr. Rubin said many of the men of color in Bassick already have goals and incredible role models in their lives.

In response to a question, Mr. Brockenberry said there will be discussions about what will happen to the students over the summer. Ms. Kennedy suggested some approaches to take during the summer. Mr. Rubin said he was going to explore a program called The Chosen Ones, which is run by a Bassick alum.

Ms. Baraka said the concept of mentoring came out of the early work of the committee after interactions with young people. She said the goal should be to develop wraparound services or create the environment to change behavior through board policies and procedures. She said it was important to hear what the young men tell us will work for them.

Mr. Rubin said he was trained in college in motivation. Mr. Brockenberry said they wanted feedback from students so they can tell us what is missing.

Ms. Baraka asked that the data gathered at Bassick be given to the committee to help with the writing of the white paper. She said in California juvenile adjudications had gone down so much that their juvenile detention halls are almost empty. She said that is the work that is being done; the conversation has been changed from criminal to a public health crisis for children and families. She said Dr. Nadine Burke, the new surgeon general in California, has written a book about generational trauma. She said we have to go in this direction.

Dr. McPherson reported on the Central program. She said the fifth session was upcoming, with a focus on career and college readiness with guidance counselors and a discussion of goal-setting. There will be a Saturday field trip to an urban poetry slam at the Apollo Theater for thirty young men.

Ms. Pereira asked why the Central program only had freshmen and sophomores. Dr. McPherson said the program is open to everyone, but the focus was on those two grades. She said the average number of participants was about

twenty. The meetings are every other Thursday at Central except for the two Saturday events.

In response to a question about background checks, Dr. McPherson said none of the listed volunteers are left alone with the students. The mentors also include SROs.

Dr. Jenkins said the middle school mentors for Saturday events will go through background checks. She said this is because the lead person is Natasha Noel, who does not work for the district. She said Dr. McPherson, Mr. Brockenberry, and John Ramos were all board employees. Ms. Pereira said she was concerned about the possibility of someone being left alone with children due to liability concerns.

Mr. Sokolovic said it's been likened to school volunteers who come into classes to read. Ms. Pereira said when she was a school volunteer she had to go through a background check.

Ms. Pereira suggested listing the guest speakers separately from the mentors. Mr. Sokolovic said it was more of a group mentorship rather than one-on-one.

Ms. Pereira said of the twelve middle school students she noticed on Saturday at Batalla School, there were two Hispanics and ten African-Americans. She noted 45 percent of the student population is Hispanic. Mr. Sokolovic said right now the numbers of attendees are so small even one or two participants would throw off the percentages. Ms. Baraka said the Harding program had been around for a while and the numbers would probably be different.

Ms. Pereira said free bus trips by We Transport should be explored. Dr. Jenkins said Mr. Ifill does give a reduced rate.

Ms. Pereira said she would like to reach out to Mr. Ifill through Mr. Laffitte. She said the district gets a hundred free bus trips in Bridgeport from We Transport.

Ms. Baraka said she hoped to learn soon whether someone would fund the approximately \$2,500 previously encumbered for books. Dr. Jenkins said there was discussion of redirecting those funds to a speaker, Tommie Harris, a former football player.

The next agenda item was on the Males of Color white paper and community forum work sessions to replace scheduled meetings.

Ms. Baraka said there was a discussion of substituting work sessions for meetings. Subcommittees have been formed for the forum and the white paper.

Dr. Jenkins said there was plenty of data available for the white paper.

Ms. Pereira said minutes would have to be produced of all the meetings according to the Freedom of Information Act. Ms. Baraka said the committee could engage in work sessions, although minutes could be produced if necessary.

Mr. Sokolovic said if Dr. Jenkins goes off to do work she does not have to have a transcriber following her around. He described it as if she was working in her living room. He said there would not be a single board member at the work sessions.

Ms. Pereira said the board was promised a white paper in April 2016. She said the board had spent almost \$7,000 on meeting minutes for the ad hoc committee. She said she

read all the minutes of the committee from this year and it seemed there was not even an initial draft of the white paper yet.

Dr. Jenkins said she had been working on the white paper during the current school year. Mr. Sokolovic said we can't talk about the past, but need to move forward into the future. He said he was very confident that Dr. Jenkins would finish the white paper in a timely fashion. He said last year the chair of the committee did not even call meetings. He said he did not want to press Dr. Jenkins with a deadline because it should be done right instead of quickly. He said in a worst-case scenario Dr. Jenkins may have to do the work alone without compensation.

Dr. Jenkins said in March 2016 the committee was applying for a grant, with the help of Nadira Clarke, with the intent of getting someone to help us write the white paper.

Ms. Pereira said Dr. Jenkins is amazing, but the committee had been in existence for four years. Mr. Sokolovic said the committee's length of existence was not on the agenda. Ms. Pereira said he was being ridiculous.

Ms. Kennedy said perhaps things could have been done better in the past when Mr. Bradley was the chair. She said we had to move forward now with Mr. Sokolovic. Mr. Brockenberry said he would expect to see a product that we can all be proud of.

The next agenda item was on the Buddy Jordan Males of Color orientation and the first mentoring session. Mr. Sokolovic said he attended and was quite pleased. He said the orientation was awesome. Ms. Baraka said Ms. Noel did a phenomenal job with the training. She said a copy of the

PowerPoint was available. She noted it was group mentoring. She said if issues connected to mandatory reporting or a crisis come up the mentor is directed to see the district personnel in charge of the group. She added the male mentors committed to attending every session.

Ms. Baraka said there were about twelve mentees at Saturday's middle school event. She said more outreach was needed. Mr. Walden noted the young men were accompanied by their parents.

Dr. Jenkins said she would follow up with a conference call with building principals and ask if the social worker or counselors could identify potential students. She said phone blasts are most effective coming from principals.

Dr. McPherson described her discussions with parents when the Central program was getting off the ground.

Ms. Pereira said she attended the recent event. Mr. Walden said there were more mentors in attendance than mentees. In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said three of the mentees were charter school students. She noted the program was a partnership with the Buddy Jordan Foundation. Ms. Pereira said that meant there were only nine district students involved out of 10,000 minority students in the district.

Dr. Jenkins said the program was publicized on the district's website, one Power School phone blast and a flyer from Dr. Johnson's office. She said it really had to be a school-level initiative. Ms. Pereira said from her experience in grassroots organizing she suggested targeted flyers and phone-banking, particularly by home-room teachers. She said personal phone calls are very effective.

Ms. Kennedy and Ms. Pereira volunteered to help make calls if necessary.

The next agenda item was on suspension and expulsion data received by the committee.

Mr. Sokolovic said she would like to see the percentage of enrolled students added to the data. He noted ten percent of African-American males at Columbus School have received out-of-school suspension. Ms. Pereira said columns should be added giving the percentage of African-Americans. She said we know that African-American males are disproportionately disciplined.

Mr. Sokolovic noted twenty percent of African-Americans at Cross had been suspended while 6.91 percent of Latinos had been. He said the committee had to look at why this happening. He said he had some ideas from having a child in school and talking to parents. He said from what he had observed and heard the bias is not coming from white males. He said more cultural sensitivity was needed.

Mr. Walden noted the figures do not break down the cause for the discipline. Dr. McPherson said the type of offenses can be provided in the data. Ms. Pereira said the board used to get that information.

Dr. McPherson said perhaps Hispanic males are not identifying themselves as males of color. Ms. Pereira said the last census included a large of amount of Hispanics consider themselves Hispanic white. Dr. Jenkins and Dr. McPherson said they often encounter students who do not identify as males of color, but may be viewed as such by society.

Mr. Walden said he encounters students at Housatonic Community College from multiple backgrounds who identify as “other” on such surveys.

Ms. Pereira said from her experience her neighborhood includes a lot of people from the Bronx, including an increasing amount of those of Haitian and Jamaican ancestry. There was a discussion of various ethnicities and their attitudes.

Mr. Walden said more Latinos were needed on the committee in order to successfully reach out. Dr. Jenkins said she agreed with Mr. Planas’s suggestion that the flyer should go out in Spanish as well. Dr. Jenkins suggested Haitian Creole also be used.

Ms. Pereira said she learned some important things at the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic asked the committee members to look at the data that was provided for discussion at the next meeting. He said he could see tailoring professional development around some of the data received. Ms. Pereira suggested the committee look at policy changes that can help the district.

Mr. Walden moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Brockenberry and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the committee on April 23, 2019