

Tuesday, January 8, 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF AD HOC COMMITTEE OF GREAT CITY SCHOOLS MALES OF COLOR OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held January 8, 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, Sauda Baraka, Tekanya Monteiro, Eric Alicea, Terry Walden, Dr. Carmen McPherson, William King, Jonathan Brown John Brockenberry, Dr. Melissa Jenkins, John Ramos and Sana Shah. Dr. Sheila Kearney and Natasha Noel participated via telephone.

Ms. Baraka gave a survey of the work of the committee, which focuses on the needs of boys of color. She said there had only been support from the administration in the last two years. A survey tool has been administered districtwide. The goal is to create a white paper that will impact and influence policy and programming of the district. Another goal is to create a district office where everything would flow through so the impact on boys of color of district policies could be looked at. She added the committee is affiliated with the Council on the Great City Schools. She noted Bridgeport was the second school district in the country to require African-American studies as a requirement for graduation, with the additional options of Latin Caribbean studies and Perspectives on Race.

Ms. Monteiro said mentoring has been pushed by other districts for males of color. She said the committee was

working on this. She said one proposal is to have an event bringing together all the city's mentoring programs at the end of the year.

Ms. Baraka said the aim is to ask the young men what they need to be successful and then create the supports for them. She thanked the men for attending this meeting because there had not been a lot of men involved in the committee's work.

Mr. Walden said having Mr. Sokolovic on the committee was important because it kept a board representative on the committee after Ms. Baraka left the board.

Ms. Baraka moved to approve the committee's minutes of December 11, 2018. The motion was seconded by Ms. Monteiro. A correction was noted. The motion was unanimously approved.

Dr. Jenkins said she spoke to Mr. King and Dr. McPherson about programming at Bassick and Central.

The next agenda item was on community forums.

Ms. Baraka said the date for the forum had been approved. Dr. Jenkins said she will make the request to hold it at Harding.

Mr. Walden said the first forum had an excellent turnout, with a good mix of participation from fraternities, community organizations, youth focus organizations, parents and educators. He said students from Harding High gave first-hand accounts. Ms. Monteiro said there were breakout sessions. Mr. Walden said Dr. Ed Joyner, a member of the New Haven Board of Education, was the keynote speaker.

Ms. Monteiro said questions were posed to the boys and members about barriers to success and what they feel would help them. Information gathered was used in the survey administered to boys in the schools. She said the committee had gathered significant data and the next step was a white paper encompassing the data

Ms. Monteiro said the date of the forum would be May 16th, and educators would be one target population.

Ms. Monteiro said breakout sessions at the next forum would include rooms on the teen father program, the Harding college prep program, the middle school program and Central's and Bassick's programs, with an additional emphasis on mentoring. She said the forum would also have a keynote speaker as well as comments by Dr. Johnson.

Ms. Monteiro said the goal is to let the schools and the educators know what the committee is doing to get more support and buy-in.

Mr. Walden said because the first forum was so successful the committee had a tough follow-up.

The next agenda item was on the committee's white paper. Dr. Jenkins suggested a review of the minutes of the committee's previous meetings to use as a baseline for getting started on the white paper. She noted mentoring had not been a major part of the conversations until recently.

Dr. Jenkins said she would take the lead on gathering more survey data by passing out permission slips in English classes. She said in order to recommend mentoring in the

white paper somebody has to read the research. She noted she does not have background on mentoring research.

Dr. Jenkins said if all the minutes are read by the committee's meeting on January 22nd there could be a conversation to cull the core components.

Ms. Baraka noted Ms. Noel previously wrote a white paper. She said the committee had not been successful in getting funding for the white paper, although perhaps funding could be found through the district's foundation. Dr. Jenkins said the committee would probably have to write the paper itself, which would lead credibility to the committee's work. She noted some Board of Education members said the committee had been in existence for four years and had not produced a white paper. She said to get something produced in six months work had to begin soon. She added the white paper could be enhanced subsequently if a funder was later identified.

Mr. Alicea noted the committee's work was really given a shot in the arm with the forum; prior to that there was a lack of support. He noted he was the only parent who remained active in the committee.

Dr. McPherson said capturing what happened in the committee earlier creates a story for moving forward.

Ms. Shah discussed a males of color initiative at Smoky Hill High School in Colorado that created a comprehensive program where she has a contact. Ms. Monteiro said Ms. Noel had contacts in Boston.

Ms. Baraka and Mr. Walden said they would help with the process of going through the minutes. Mr. Ramos said he

would take a small chunk. Ms. Baraka said Dr. Jenkins would assign everybody some of the minutes to review regarding the white paper.

The next item was on males of color mentoring programs. Ms. Baraka noted each school was allocated some money for programming.

Mr. King said there is an initiative for literacy at Bassick. Mr. Brockenberry said Reading Plus was an intervention that is used. Mr. King said there is a major effort to encourage students to read. He said he started book club as a supplement to the Perspectives on Race course and history and civic courses. The group is currently reading *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone.

Mr. King said mentoring programs are needed for students who are interested in sports. He said he believed athletes function as leaders.

Mr. Brockenberry said there is mentoring through MAX program at Bassick primarily for seniors and students in their fourth year of high school. It is aimed at future planning and post-secondary careers. He said over the years he had seen young students hungry for mentors.

There was a PowerPoint presentation on the work of the committee and the community forum held. Mr. Walden noted Mr. Ramos's fraternity had major participation in the event. He discussed the pledge and a timeline of the committee's milestones. He said it was vital to have the students weigh in on what is going on in their lives and the challenges they face. He said the committee was unsuccessful in a grant application to Nellie Mae Foundation. He said the committee

then held the forum and gathered survey data from students in the district from Grades 8 to 12.

Mr. Walden discussed the questions that were presented to the young men in the forum breakout sessions. He said recurring themes were more male teachers of color, keeping expectations high, a parent training program, parents feeling welcome in the schools, training for parents to help with homework, systemic racism and unequal punishments, suspensions and expulsions and restorative practices. He discussed the mentorship approach. He said he stayed in touch with young men he mentored in the past as a long-term sub at Central via Facebook.

Mr. Walden also noted challenges such as high administrator and teacher turnover, recruitment and retention, too many substitute teachers, the school-to-prison pipeline and unfair disciplinary practices. He noted the case of *Crumpton vs. Chop*, a desegregation case in Bridgeport in the 1970s.

Mr. Walden said other issues identified were over-identification for special education, the messaging problem of being smart not viewed as cool, and indifference to academic and social-emotional needs of males of color

Mr. Walden said themes from parent outreach include the need for parent volunteers, community policing, more officers of color, and community support through apprenticeship and other opportunities.

Dr. Kearney said she is the state chair for education for the NAACP and serves on state level committees on minority teacher recruitment and discipline parity. She said she

would like to explore having the committee submit recommendations to the state.

Ms. Shah said she heard there was a working committee to revise the school safety bill vetoed by the governor last year. She said she heard the committee is addressing the punitive practices contained in the bill.

Dr. Kearney said there was a strong push for a new education commissioner. She said added that this Friday in Hartford at the Legislative Office Building there will be an event requesting African-American history be made a graduation requirement for all public school children. She said there will be events this year commemorating the African-Americans being part of this country for 400 years and she would share information about this in the future.

Dr. McPherson said at Central High there has been work with senior students who are in danger of not graduating. Build-On is doing mentoring at the school. She said she planned to reach out to Street Safe for participation. She described it as the beginning stages of the effort at Central.

Mr. King asked Dr. McPherson to send him names of teachers looking to collaborate so the reading project could be extended to Central. He noted he would be also reaching out to Harding.

Dr. McPherson said Mr. Brockenberry and herself would be leading a book study in about two weeks on the book *Leading with Cultural Intelligence* by David Livermore.

Ms. Baraka noted JoAnn Kennedy, who was present, had run a book club in Bassick for several years. Ms. Kennedy said if students are given books they will read.

Dr. McPherson noted it was adults who make disciplinary decisions and it would be important to make them aware of disparities.

Dr. Jenkins said the budget allocations for the effort were approximately \$1200 per high school. She said there needed to be written descriptions of the programs for payments of the expenses incurred by the schools. She asked that all the budgets be submitted by February 5th.

Dr. Jenkins said Dr. Johnson did want one event to be held across the high schools, so collaboration is good. She noted the money had to be spent sooner rather than later.

Ms. Shah said she would check with her organization to see if it can chip in with food for the forum.

Dr. Jenkins said she believed the funding may be coming from Title IV grant.

Mr. Ramos reported on mentoring at Harding. Students who are participating are the same ones who created a video on the student survey initiative of the committee and attended the forum. Every other Thursday, there are two programs. One is a college prep program (with fraternity members participating). He said the base of students are Harding wrestling and football teams, but also includes other students, with about 16 regular attendees.

Mr. Ramos said there is also a Presidential Development program, which is a social-emotional program. Members of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity participate and help about 21 students. He said the funding for purchasing food is key.

Ms. Monteiro said the Buddy Jordan Foundation and the board put some money into a middle school program. It will be group mentoring, held one Saturday a month. The goal is to have twenty mentors for about fifty to sixty kids. The format will be a group discussion in small groups over a meal, with a share-out at the end. It is hoped to start the program on February 2nd or 9th, depending on the superintendent's availability.

Ms. Monteiro said mentors were still needed and urged anyone interested to volunteer. She said training would be held about a couple of weeks ahead of the start of the program.

Mr. Brown said middle school basketball takes place on Saturday mornings. Ms. Kennedy and Mr. Alicea said the games are very well attended.

There was a discussion of alternate times to hold the mentoring program given the basketball league. Ms. Baraka asked Mr. Brown to help the committee speak to the other coaches about the mentoring program. Mr. Brown suggested the program be held on Saturday afternoons.

Ms. Baraka said Dr. Johnson replied to her e-mail indicating Ms. Gribbon of the school volunteer office would like to meet with a coordinator of the mentoring program in regards to background checks for the mentors. Ms. Monteiro offered to attend the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was recently appointed chair of the committee due to the tenuous nature of the committee's relationship with the board. He said initially asked if Dr. Jenkins could remain chair with himself as a liaison. He said he viewed his role as a facilitator of the committee and did

not want to get in the way or have the board do anything to stop the work of the committee.

Dr. Jenkins suggested the committee create program artifacts such as videos, the white paper or a newsletter for presentation in June. She said she was feeling the committee's status was vulnerable. She said student testimony would be another option.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was happy with the format of Ms. Baraka feeding him agenda items.

Ms. Monteiro said documenting the mentoring program could be another item for presentation to the board.

Dr. Jenkins noted this was the first time the committee ever had a budget, so the expenditures had to be documented to answer questions about what the money was spent for.

In response to a question, Mr. Alicea and Mr. Sokolovic said the reasoning by board members to dismantle the committee was based on the failure to produce anything in their eyes.

Mr. Walden noted the committee was all volunteers who are doing the best they can. He said if the dismantlement of the committee was successful, the board would have nothing similar in place. Mr. Sokolovic said she would fight tooth and nail any attempt to dismantle the committee.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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