

Monday, February 1, 2021

MINUTES OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held February 1, 2021, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m.

Committee members present were Chair John Weldon, Joe Sokolovic, and Joseph Lombard. Board member Albert Benejan were present.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Weldon moved approval of the minutes of the meeting of October 5, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and approved by a 1-0 vote. Voting in favor was Mr. Weldon. Mr. Sokolovic and Mr. Lombard abstained.

The next agenda item was on remote board member participation at board and committee meetings.

Mr. Lombard, who referred the item to the committee, said the remote meetings had enabled board meetings to attend meetings they might have otherwise missed. He said he would like to see the board continue to have remote participation even when the meetings are held in person.

Mr. Weldon said the board attorney's told him there was nothing in the statutes that would prohibit remote participation, although appropriate parameters should be put in place, particularly in making the meeting location open to the public.

Mr. Sokolovic said his interaction with the public plays an

important role in his decision-making. He said if board members participated remotely they would not have this contact. He said if remote participation was approved it should be used sparingly.

Mr. Weldon said he remembered times when it was difficult to get a quorum of members for in-person meetings. He said limits could be placed on remote participation and the need for advance notice.

Mr. Weldon said he believed the chair of the committee should have to be the room where the meetings were being held, even if there was remote participation for others.

Mr. Lombard noted he had a personal interest in this because his job requires travel.

Mr. Sokolovic said in creating policy he was thinking of future board members who take our place. He said people need to be present to put in the work. He said with residency issues in Bridgeport a member could participate in all meetings remotely.

Mr. Lombard said limits should be put on remote participation. Mr. Sokolovic suggested criteria such as permission from the chair to prevent abuse.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would agree to limit a member to remote participation to a certain number of times a year. Mr. Lombard said perhaps the chair could grant additional times. He added this would allow parents with sick children or similar reasons to stay home to participate.

Mr. Weldon said perhaps six remote participation occurrences in the ten months the board meets might be

reasonable, but at a bare minimum the chair should be in attendance live at the meeting. Mr. Lombard and Mr. Sokolovic suggested a separate cap for committee meetings. Mr. Sokolovic suggested no limits on special meetings because they are often called with short notice.

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said he would suggest the remote participation be limited to an audio call because video with live streaming makes things very complicated for the IT department.

Supt. Testani said given the right equipment and planning, a hybrid board meeting could be made to work. He said Aquaculture may not be the best venue for that. Mr. Weldon said he believed Mr. Postolowski had initiated a project for Aquaculture to make that possible.

The superintendent said live streaming would likely be needed for the foreseeable future because members of the public will be hesitant for a while to come out to board meetings.

Mr. Weldon said he would draft a policy based on the discussion and bring it back at the next meeting.

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said the attendance records of board members are contained in the minutes but they are not compiled other than that.

The next agenda item was on inclusion of non-voting members on standing board committees. Mr. Weldon said the board's attorney indicated there was nothing to preclude this. Mr. Weldon said his own opinion is that it should be at the discretion of the committee chair.

Mr. Weldon said for the purposes of FOI even board members who are not committee members are considered a member of the public. If a non-member was recognized to speak, the chair has to recognize all other non-members, including members of the public.

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said interviews could be used to screen non-voting members.

Mr. Sokolovic said he agreed with Mr. Weldon's suggestion about committee chairs. He added that he likes to hear from the public in committee meetings, but it could get unwieldy. He suggested using another name besides committee member.

Mr. Weldon said there was a potential problem when district employees are sounding off at board or committee meetings because they have the union as a mechanism to communicate their wishes.

Supt. Testani suggested the board think about how many people would be quasi-committee members. He said he believed a lot of people would want to participate for various reasons. He added it might be limited to when in-person meetings resume. He also suggested it start in one or two committees at first.

Mr. Weldon said he was undecided on this. He said the matter came up while interviewing candidates to replace Mr. Illingworth on the board. He added that perhaps there is another way to engage the public.

Mr. Lombard said he believed the chair should have the ability to discontinue the service of such community participants. He said the proposal could limit community

input because letting the public speak could contribute more voices than just a representative who is part of the committee.

Mr. Weldon said it sounded like there wasn't a whole lot of interest in pushing this forward.

Mr. Sokolovic said at some of his committee meetings he chaired allowing public participation worked very well. He asked if remote public participation could be considered for committee meetings. Mr. Weldon said that could be considered for a bylaw change.

Mr. Benejan said he also allowed public participation in committee meetings he chaired and agreed with Mr. Sokolovic's suggestion.

Mr. Weldon said he would include an agenda item at the next meeting about a bylaw change. He said the procedure used at regular meetings could be used as a starting point.

The next agenda item was on a student handbook. Supt. Testani said there were some finishing touches made to the revisions on student attendance, with the final version to be presented subsequently. He said formatting has been changed and discipline has been revised to be less prescriptive on offenses to eliminate tying the hands of administrators in line with restorative practices. He noted the terminology has gotten away from code of conduct or code of discipline to student handbook.

In response to a question, the superintendent said he would get the document to the board a couple of weeks in advance of the next committee meeting. He said he was looking to have this in place for the next school year.

Mr. Weldon noted he did not put Mr. Sokolovic's item on magnet school policies on the agenda due to the other items. Supt. Testani said the principals would like to give their feedback on the policies.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Lombard seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the committee on March 1, 2021*