

Monday, June 1, 2020

MINUTES OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE OF THE
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held June 1,
2020, by video and audio conference, Bridgeport,
Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:15 p.m.

Committee members present were Chair Hernan Illingworth and Jessica Martinez. Board members Joseph Sokolovic, Albert Benejan, and Sybil Allen were present. Committee member John Weldon joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

Acting Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Ms. Martinez moved approval of the minutes of the meeting of March 2, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and approved by a 1-0 vote. Voting in favor was Mr. Illingworth. Ms. Martinez abstained.

The next agenda item was on the board's Series 1000 policies.

Atty. Floyd Dugas of Berchem & Moses was present.

Atty. Dugas said he had reviewed the 1000 Series and most of his suggested changes are purely technical in nature such updating statutes that don't exist any longer. He said the only real requirement the board has under the law is to have a provision on community engagement and the board has one of the more robust community engagement policies he has ever seen.

Mr. Illingworth suggested reconvening in seven to ten days to look at the technical changes made by Atty. Dugas and to send the policies to the full board.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested future policies be reviewed by the committee first before sending them to Atty. Dugas, rather than have him review them twice. Mr. Illingworth said he agreed. Mr. Testani said he would recommend Atty. Dugas continue to look simultaneously to see if we were out of compliance with any laws.

Mr. Testani noted a committee has worked very hard to update the student handbook, formerly the Code of Conduct, which should also be reviewed by the committee and Atty. Dugas.

Mr. Weldon joined the meeting.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action on a technology device fee.

Mr. Testani said the district is receiving donations and making purchases of technology device and it is important to have a plan for maintenance, replenishment, and repair moving forward so down the road we are not in the same predicament we are today. He noted many districts impose charges for musical instruments and participation in sports.

Mr. Testani said after discussions with Mr. Postolowski he is suggesting a nominal technology usage fee that would allow us to maintain our devices. He said he believes \$25 for a year is fair.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said this is similar to

what is done with musical instruments loaned to students for a year.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the amount of devices would total about 20,000 devices for K-12. He said cost of the devices are \$300 and up. He said in the past the district had lost up to 20 percent of devices in a year, which is not affordable. The plan is to remain self-insured with the fees, rather than have to deal with a third party.

Mr. Weldon recommended against one fee per family rather than per child in order to make things more equitable. He suggested the funds collected be kept in an interest-bearing escrow account.

Ms. Martinez said things would not be equitable for families with four or five children. She said something affordable was needed. She said parents have told her during the distance learning that they don't have enough devices at home. She said the Caribe baseball program had a discounts for siblings.

Mr. Illingworth suggested looking at a sliding scale. Mr. Testani said if a family receives four devices for \$100 they are getting \$1200 to \$1600 worth of devices. He said trying to decide who gets a discount and work it out logistically is a nightmare. He said when he supervised summer school one fee was instituted and no one had trouble paying what they needed to.

Ms. Martinez said she agreed with whatever Mr. Testani said would work.

Jeff Postolowski, director of IT, said the biggest problem is damage, not theft or loss, and the nominal fee helps with

damage to keyboards and screens. He asked if the committee was looking at imposing the \$25 fee in the event of damage. He said he believed when people have skin in the game you see a substantially lower break rate on the devices. He said districts all over the country are facing the same issues.

Mr. Postolowski said a technology fee may allow the expansion of the ability to provide wireless service inside of devices.

Mr. Testani said many of the districts statewide that have one-to-one devices are that way because many families provide devices for their children. He said in Bridgeport some families may opt out if they have their own devices.

Mr. Benejan said we had to be mindful of the income of the families. He said he personally helped with obtaining packets for a lot of families who have multiple children, including one with eight children.

Mr. Weldon said he would support a procedure to accommodate hardships that was not overly complicated.

Mr. Testani said one option is to distribute functional, older devices to families who have trouble paying the fee. He said schools could be given discretion for families that are in dire need and that the amount be taken out of the per-pupil funding that each school gets from the district.

Ms. Martinez noted the struggles of board members to work with the nine devices they received.

Mr. Testani said there could be fundraisers at the school-level through PACs to sponsor families that are in need.

Atty. Dugas commended the effort because technology is so critical these days and we don't know what the world will look like going forward. He said he had heard some great ideas for dealing with the extreme hardship cases. He said it could probably be done under the student activity accounts. He said he would worry about some schools being less organized in fundraising resulting in a loss of access to students.

Mr. Postolowski said spending money with a proper plan is the key here.

Mr. Testani said if the responsibility was on building leadership they would be motivated to seek out grant opportunities and other ways to maintain their devices.

Mr. Postolowski said the schools with substantially higher damage rates would have to take into consideration how they are handling technology. He said this is a continued problem we struggle with.

Mr. Illingworth said he believed this was definitely needed, and the plan should be that whatever monies are not used to replace damaged devices will be invested in buying new devices. He said he wanted the community to understand that we are not doing what he did in the past with Chrome Books, which often stayed unused in carts in classrooms.

Mr. Illingworth said children will have the opportunity to take home brand-new devices.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said he could have something drafted in about ten days for the committee's review.

Mr. Testani added that even \$500,000 would not replace 15 percent of the district's fleet of devices, so the idea is to put a plan in place to ensure we can maintain the proper technology for the kids of Bridgeport for generations to come.

Mr. Weldon moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Martinez seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod