

Monday, October 5, 2020

MINUTES OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held October 5, 2020, by video call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:44 p.m.

Committee members present were Chair Hernan Illingworth and John Weldon. Board member Joe Sokolovic was present

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Weldon moved approval of the minutes of the meeting of September 3, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the control transfer policy, Policy 5116(a). Mr. Illingworth said the conversation began at the last committee meeting.

Supt. Testani said he e-mailed an edited draft earlier today to the committee.

The superintendent said he consulted with other districts about their policies in this area. Other districts often require the parent to demonstrate a need for a transfer.

Supt. Testani said what has historically happened here is that parents apply for control transfers with specific schools in mind, and this leads to the withdrawal of the request if they are not able to transfer to one of the schools they were hoping for.

The superintendent said there is over-enrollment in certain schools and certain grades that has caused the control transfer applicants to be bumped out. He suggested language that permits children to finish the school year even if they have moved. The proposed policy, as currently, would not require district transportation to the school the student transfers into. The intent is to be able to finish 6th grade in the K-6 schools, 8th grade in the K-8 schools, and 12th grade in high schools.

Supt. Testani said the big issue here concerns siblings. When the first child is allowed to transfer, then siblings' requests are automatically granted. He said this causes a whole host of issues, including when grades in schools are over-enrolled.

The superintendent said the district is in the process of acquiring redistricting software. When redistricting takes place, in conjunction with an adjusted policy, things can be controlled much better.

Supt. Testani said the district was being very careful this area due to the COVID in not approving control transfers. He said over the years the district had been very liberal in granting transfers. He said parents have to understand the residency takes precedence.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the changes are designed to give the in-district students the first right to the seat in a classroom.

Mr. Illingworth said this has been brewing and has to be addressed. He said he understood why parents would want to request control transfers and the need to address the

situation with siblings. He said there were so many transfers requests to the new Harding that there was no more room in the school.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said he has not spoken to the magnet principals about the sibling policies yet, but they have voiced other concerns about the magnet policy and some relaxed entry requirements in recent policy changes.

Mr. Sokolovic and Mr. Illingworth said they would like the committee to look at that issue.

In response to a question, the superintendent he was ready to move the new policy to the full board.

Mr. Weldon said he believed the use of control transfers should be minimal. He said he could appreciate the superintendent having a designee handling the administration of the requests, but he suggested it specifically state the requests go to the superintendent for the final set of eyes and the final approval. Supt. Testani said he agreed and could add that provision.

Mr. Illingworth said other board policies included an appeal to the full board. He suggested that be included in the control transfer policy. Supt. Testani said he believed there was a difference between a control transfer and a control transfer to a specific school. For example, a control transfer will be granted if a child is being harassed or feels danger, but that does not mean the transfer can only go to a specific school.

The superintendent said the board might be pretty busy if it had to hear appeals. Mr. Weldon said he was concerned because those who are denied will often appeal and there

are incidents where parents try to work board members and pit them against each other. He said he considered this to be a day-to-day operations thing, not policy. Parents would have the option of litigation if they are being treated unfairly. He said he doubted the board would overturn the decision of a superintendent.

Mr. Sokolovic said such a policy could cause a future superintendent to rubberstamp every control transfer.

Mr. Weldon moved that *“it be moved to the full board with the edit that I recommended prior regarding Mr. Testani’s being the final signature on any of these.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth.

Mr. Sokolovic said the matter could be controversial, so he suggested the first and second readings not be waived. Mr. Illingworth said he agreed.

The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Weldon moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod