

Monday, June 7, 2021

MINUTES OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held June 7, 2021, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:15 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. Sokolovic moved approval of the minutes of the meeting of March 1, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

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

Mr. Weldon said he updated the document based on the last meeting, particularly a board chair or committee chair being able to participate remotely, but not being able to chair the meeting.

Mr. Lombard moved “*to move that item to the full board to be considered at this evening’s meeting at 6:30.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on a revised district magnet policy.

Supt. Testani said all the principals had contributed and done a lot of hard work into the revised policy, with Francine

Carbone, principal of High Horizons Magnet, taking the lead.

Ms. Carbone said this was a labor of love and something the principals are very passionate about. She said all the principals contributed countless hours.

Ms. Carbone first discussed the magnet entrance and performance expectations policy. She noted the policies do not apply to Interdistrict Discovery Magnet, which must follow other guidelines, and only to intradistrict magnet schools.

Ms. Carbone noted the proposal is to apply performance expectations to Grades 1 to 8 as opposed to Grades 4 and 8 under current policy. She described a series of interventions for students who are in danger of not meeting the expectations. A parent commitment component has been added.

Ms. Carbone said when she was at Classical Studies there was a 40-hour parent commitment policy. The policy was spread to other magnet schools with a reduced number of hours. The proposal is to require twenty hours for the entire year to make it feasible. Up to five people in the family can complete the hours. Events such as report card conferences, open house, and parental events would qualify.

In response to a question, Ms. Carbone said parents who fail to meet the commitment would receive notifications about opportunities to participate, including making phone calls and sending e-mails while at home.

In response to a question, Ms. Carbone said hardship claims would be handled on a case-by-case basis by administrators. She said that could be added to the policy.

Ms. Carbone said the policy allows for students to be reassigned from the magnet school at a time deemed appropriate if the interventions do not bring the student up to the standards. She noted these policies only apply to the magnet population at Geraldine Claytor, not to the whole student body in that school.

In response to a question, Stephen Douglas, principal of Geraldine Claytor, said he is informed each year about how many magnet slots are available and it historically has been students of all grade levels. He said a lot of the magnet schools are in the TAG program, but attend the same classes as neighborhood students.

In response to a question, Mr. Douglas said Claytor magnet students who apply go to Central High; those that do not go to Bassick. Mr. Sokolovic said he believed Claytor magnet students should follow the policies of other magnet students. Supt. Testani said the Central Magnet acceptance requirements could be revised to handle that issue. He said it was a point well made. Mr. Douglas said he would like to see such a change.

Ms. Carbone described the magnet acceptance procedures, including public lotteries. Pre-K students in a magnet school are not guaranteed acceptance into the magnet program. Parents of currently enrolled and accepted students must meet the parent commitment requirements in order to register an incoming sibling.

Ms. Carbone said the most significant changes were made for Grade 1 to 8 students. She said a final grade of C or better in core academic subjects is required for admission, along with a conduct effort of grade 1 or 2. She said the

policy would have to be amended if the report cards change in the future for any reason. There are also attendance requirements; a signed parent commitment; a teacher recommendation form; and student interviews and grade-level appropriate writing prompts. Standardized tests are not considered because the other criteria are better indicators.

Ms. Carbone described interventions to be used through the SRBI process prior to reassignment. She noted the updated SRBI process is currently under construction in the district.

Ms. Carbone described the reassignment process. Students who are reassigned after the second marking period will no longer have to be kept at the magnet school. She said each principal had an example of why leaving the student in the magnet school is not in the student's best interests. She noted the appeal process has been retained.

Mr. Benejan congratulated the principals and said they did an amazing job.

In response to a question, Ms. Carbone said Dr. Victor Black and Carli Rocha-Reaes reviewed the final proposal, as well as Supt. Testani.

Mr. Sokolovic said the last time this policy was revised it took almost two years.

In response to a question, Ms. Carbone said the lack of criteria for the youngest kids was probably one of the most debilitating things that happened to the magnet schools because there were students coming in who were far behind. She said the magnet schools do not have interventionists and support staff in a lot of cases. Mr. Sokolovic said this was a concern from the beginning of the previous policy.

Mr. Lombard moved *“to refer this to the full board for its consideration and approval.”*

Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to see the items mentioned to be included for completion’s sake beforehand. Ms. Carbone said she could get the documents to the board members through Ms. Valle-Shastri.

Mr. Weldon said the item could go to the full board in two weeks.

Mr. Sokolovic seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Ms. Carbone then discussed the magnet school sibling policy. She said a definition of siblings was added. The policy only applies to students who get into Claytor via the lottery, not neighborhood students at that school. The prior lack of criteria for entering during pre-K to Grade 3 has been eliminated. Pre-K students have been eliminated from the sibling policy because they are not part of the magnet program, but just housed in magnet buildings.

Ms. Carbone said the principals agreed it was not fair to give kindergarten students a criteria to get in for lottery admission or sibling admission. She described the ability to ask for proof of legal residency in Bridgeport.

Ms. Carbone said all entrance requirements for siblings in Grades 1 to 8 must be met, not the previous Grade 4 to 8 criteria. She said we wanted to makes sure the sibling component supported and mirrored the entrance component.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said control

transfers are not allowed when there is a lack of a room in a given grade at a school. He said unfortunately siblings who do not meet the magnet standard should not take the seat of a child that could potentially thrive at the school.

Mr. Lombard moved “*to move this to the full board for its consideration and approval.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on board policy related to board-staff communication.

Mr. Weldon said Mr. Benejan referred the item to the committee. Mr. Benejan said the board needs to communicate with the staff more to support them. He said we need to listen to their concerns. He said he would like to bring simple things like the concerns of a teacher to the board. He said he knows there are policies and protocols in place.

Mr. Benejan said the staff does an amazing job and sometimes they would like to speak to board members. He said he knows how far he can go with staff members.

Mr. Benejan said he respects the policy we have, but we need to let the staff know that the board members are here to listen to them.

Supt. Testani said he understands Mr. Benejan’s perspective. He said this is a slippery slope based on individual needs. He said the vast majority of district employees belong to collective bargaining units and when there’s violations of a contract those are brought to the union. He said if a contract violation is not involved, it’s just a person’s feelings or beliefs.

The superintendent noted right now the BCAS is currently negotiating a contract, so this would be the time to implement those changes. He said, for example, if a principal has an issue they should work it out with the administration. It would not be right for the principal to call a board member about an issue.

Supt Testani said this was seen in virtual meetings where certain board members have been approached by bargaining unit folks because they don't have an avenue through the contract. He said this puts a difficult strain on the board-superintendent relationship. He said there have been incidents on snow days where certain individuals that are contractually obligated to show up to work and he has been burned by allowing all employees to stay home, while vacation time is used to take off when schools are in session which creates difficulties for school leadership.

The superintendent said issues have to be handled through the collective bargaining process. He said there is open dialogue with the BCAS and the BEA. He said the noncertified unions have to go through the city's labor relations department due to their contracts. He noted no grievances have been heard at the board level in the last 14 months because things are worked out amicably.

Supt. Testani said he believed a lot of the things Mr. Benejan is speaking to comes from the fact that we don't have direct negotiations as a board with noncertified staff in NAGE and AFSCME. He noted there are complications because some members of those unions are city employees and report to the mayor.

The superintendent said he believed things are great right

now, with the board functioning in a very productive manner. He said unfortunately that could change in one election cycle.

Mr. Benejan said he understood Mr. Testani's point of view, but we need to think about the present and the future. He said he did not want the staff members to feel they are being ignored or scared to speak to board members. He said the staff are very smart and know how far they can go with board members. He said he has been involved with the district for twenty years and knows what's going on in the district. He said he did not want the staff to feel afraid to talk.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod