

Wednesday, October 17, 2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held October 17, 2018, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m. Present were members Chair Hernan Illingworth and Sybil Allen. Board member Maria Pereira was present.

Supt. Aresta L. Johnson, Ed.D., was in attendance.

Ms. Allen moved to approve the committee's minutes of August 28, 2018. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was the staff turnover report. Ms. Pereira said she was the one who had been pushing for this and was disappointed in what was received. She said the data should have been on a spreadsheet because it is difficult to analyze. Among the defects she highlighted were inconsistent reporting on Fairchild Wheeler and the failure to include data on Edison and Multicultural for 2015-16.

Frank Chester, chief talent officer, said the information was pulled from MUNIS and other sources. He said trying to retrieve the data from the sources we have is a major task.

Ms. Pereira said she was the longest serving board member and had often received turnover reports in committee without a problem. She said the strategic profiles for each school

had to contain turnover information, which should be easily available. She pointed to the lack of totals on the document.

Mr. Chester said he would improve the document.

Ms. Pereira said the data on Columbus Annex cannot be right. She said the 2017-18 data did not include Discovery Magnet, Hall, Hallen, Classical Studies Annex, Johnson, Waltersville, Aquaculture and Bryant.

Ms. Pereira said she was concerned about the numbers at Bridgeport Learning Center, Bridgeport Military Academy, Harding High and the IT School at Fairchild Wheeler.

Ms. Pereira said when Supt. Vallas was here the district was losing about 300 people a year, so if the current data is correct we are doing a much better job with retention. She said the data, the accuracy of which she questioned, seems to indicate the turnover rate was 9.52 percent in 2015-16, slightly lower the next year, and about 7.5 percent in 2017-18.

Mr. Illingworth said in 2016-17 the data indicated Central High had 111 certified staff and only two resigned. He said, despite some of the missing data, it clearly shows that each year the turnover rate is reducing.

Ms. Pereira said she could not look at the data and have faith in it. Mr. Chester said he would go back and get what we need to get.

Mr. Chester said he believed from his forty-plus years of experience how a person is interviewed or initially contacted is one of the strongest determinants of how those people are going to feel about staying with that organization. He said

the staffing levels in the HR department are extremely small for the size of the district.

Ms. Pereira said that was terrible, but every department in the district is understaffed.

Mr. Chester said the department needed improved software capabilities and online resources for applicants. Ms. Pereira suggested reaching out to universities for human resources students who would like to intern in Mr. Chester's office. Mr. Chester said data was needed to make informed decisions.

Mr. Chester noted he was not aware of what happened in 2015-16 and was reliant on the data in the system. Ms. Pereira said the 2017-18 data was lacking also. She asked Mr. Chester to review the data that is brought to the meetings beforehand.

Ms. Allen moved to table the item until the next meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the hiring procedure policy.

Ms. Pereira said Dr. Johnson wanted the policy revised to indicate the board should only interview candidates above the principal level. She said the draft policy revisions were far too complicated because only one sentence needed to be changed.

Dr. Johnson noted it was important to put a limit on the number of candidates to be interviewed by the School Governance Council(SGC). Ms. Pereira said she could not understand why as many as five were necessary. Dr.

Johnson said sometimes there are many applicants and it gives the members of the SGC some options.

Ms. Pereira said she wanted to stress that SGCs should have a say in assistant principals because of the wording of the statute that indicates “high-level administrator.”

Mr. Illingworth said when he first got on the board he did not agree with the board interviewing principals. However, due to the perception that getting hired in Bridgeport is based on who you know he thought it was worthwhile. He said he would now be in favor of not interviewing principals, but he would like to see an explanation of how the principal was hired, perhaps in a brief report. Ms. Pereira said this could be handled by a report delivered to the board in the board packets.

Dr. Johnson said she favored supplying the total number of applicants, the number of qualified applicants, the number interviewed, the number interviewed by the SGC, the choice of the SGC and who was the superintendent’s pick and why. The committee members and Ms. Pereira said they agreed with that being incorporated in the policy.

Mr. Illingworth said in the past principals would call preferred candidates for assistant principal and some qualified people never even got interviews. Ms. Pereira said a principal was appointed with political connections to Supt. Vallas. She added this was ten times worse in non-certified positions.

Ms. Pereira said she was fine with the board not interviewing assistant principals, but by statute SGCs have the right to be part of the process. Mr. Illingworth said he agreed.

Ms. Pereira said the quorum needed for SGC was for every position filled, but not a quorum of the whole body.

Dr. Johnson said she agreed with the provisions that the results of the interviews will be sent to the principal and the assistant superintendent.

Ms. Pereira said the board had never discussed changing the teacher portion of the policies, but there were now lineouts. Mr. Chester said those edits could be disregarded because the focus was on the principal section. Dr. Johnson said that was her preference as well.

Mr. Illingworth suggested the committee look at the teacher section now. Ms. Pereira noted lots of teachers are hired during the summer and the PACs and teachers are not available to interview candidates.

Ms. Pereira asked that every time the board gets drafts that the policy number be referenced on the document.

Mr. Illingworth and Ms. Allen agreed the document would come back to the committee next month before being presented to the full board.

The next item was on exit interviews. Mr. Illingworth said he added the item because the issue came up at a Regular meeting. He said he had experience with exit interviews and they are valuable and could be a tool for the district.

Mr. Chester said he understood there used to be a more detailed exit interview and one of the superintendents made the decision that it was too extensive and they wanted something more brief.

Ms. Pereira said the district easily had over 500 resignations in the last four years and there were only 129 exit interviews available. Mr. Chester said it probably hasn't been diligently managed because a lot of people don't understand the importance of the interviews.

In response to a question, Mr. Chester said typically the recruiting person in the HR office talks to an employee who wishes to resign and asks them if they'd be willing to participate in an exit interview. Ms. Pereira suggested since the interview is online the employee should be sent a link to the document. Mr. Chester said he thought the personal approach was better because the recruiting manager dealt with the teacher at some point.

Mr. Chester said he had been at this a long time and the person in the exit interview does not always offer the true reason for their resignation, which can be explored in a personal interview. He said he would make the resigning employees aware of the link to the online exit interview. Ms. Pereira said this would be something an HR intern could do as well.

Michael Corral of Teach for American was recognized. He said he recently finished up his doctoral studies at UConn. He said doctoral students would like to have access to district data for their studies of teacher turnover. He said he said he was interested in the recruitment of men of color and when he distributed anonymous surveys in Hartford it led to frank responses from teachers.

Dr. Johnson said she received numerous requests from doctoral students across the nation to survey students and staff on everything from A to Z. She described it as survey

overload. She said she has yet to receive feedback from doctoral students who have conducted surveys.

Ms. Pereira said she was thinking in terms of an intern who wanted to pursue a career in human resources. Mr. Chester said he had used HR interns in the past and they are great. He said he pursued this months ago and a candidate has not been identified given the lack of money to pay them.

Dr. Johnson said she was transitioning non-certified staff into HR for hiring purposes. She said the hiring for the nutrition center was not never brought back into HR, but now Tim McNamara has had meetings with the nutrition center to migrate it back over.

Ms. Pereira said she agreed with the move because it has been a problem for a long time. She added it had been a long-term slush fund for political players in the city. Dr. Johnson noted it would add to the workload of HR.

Ms. Pereira suggested the exit interview contain questions about professional development and availability of resources. Mr. Illingworth agreed. Ms. Pereira and Mr. Illingworth said personal should be removed as a category in reasons for leaving.

Mr. Illingworth asked that Mr. Chester report back on the exit interview next month.

Ms. Allen moved the board meet in executive session to discuss the MOU regarding Dr. Melissa Jenkins. Invited to participate were the board members, Mr. Chester and Dr. Johnson. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

The executive session began at 7:30 p.m.

The board reconvened in public session at 7:50 p.m.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the committee on March 20, 2019*