

Wednesday, May 13, 2020

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 13, 2020, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 4:36 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon and Joseph Sokolovic.

Denise Altro-Dixon, executive director of human resources, was present.

Mr. Weldon moved to approve the committee's minutes of January 29, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and approved by a 1-0 vote. Mr. Weldon voted in favor; Mr. Sokolovic abstained.

The agenda called for the interview of four candidates: Dr. Victor Black for executive director of secondary education and magnet; Herminio Planas and Dr. Selena Morgan, for the two executive director of elementary education positions; and Dr. Melisa Jenkins for the executive director of early childhood.

Mr. Weldon said typically these interviews are held in private, however, each candidate has the right to require that the interview be held in public. He said the four candidates have indicated in writing to the HR director that they are not requiring their interviews be held in public.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed the public had the right to see the interviews, particularly because there was only one

candidate for each position, the financial environment the district is in and given the perception that things are done behind closed doors in Bridgeport. He said this was no reflection on the candidates whom he had enormous respect for.

Mr. Weldon said even if he were to make a motion to go into executive session it would fail.

Ms. Rita Valle reported the candidates agreed to hold the interviews in public.

Dr. Black was the first candidate interviewed. In response to inquiries, Dr. Black said he is currently the acting executive director of secondary education and magnet. He identified a potential weakness in balancing between work time and family time, such as the \$20 million federal grant currently being pursued which is hundreds of pages long.

Dr. Black said his greatest strength is working collaboratively with teams and colleagues. He said he believed Bridgeport was a challenging district and work and focus was needed to achieve the goals set for the students. He said he has been an instructional coach, teacher, assistant principal, and principal. He said his primary role in his position is working with school leaders and he emphasizes administrators being in classroom to see what is going on.

Dr. Black described how he would establish positive relationships between himself and school leaders. He said the next step will be to set goals and keep communication open. He noted he likes to be out in schools, where his office is located.

Dr. Black said he has provided professional development to the entire administrative team around the instructional core. He said he learned quite a bit about professional development through a grant that was in use at the Fairchild Wheeler campus. He said his dissertation was around transformational leadership. He said collaboration is key to building leadership capacity so others see the value in what you're doing; goals are not effective unless there is a team structure in place.

In response to a question, Dr. Black said he believed the differences in magnet schools creates a certain variance in operation. He said he wanted to see quality systems in every school that supports every child, including a multitiered system of supports. He described ways in which students could be engaged with content in areas of interest at their level of engagement.

Mr. Weldon said the role of the committee is to make a recommendation to the superintendent and the superintendent has the ultimate decision of who to place in the position.

The next interview was one of Herminio Planas.

Mr. Planas said he believed he was an extremely hard worker and at times he puts important things aside like his family. He noted he grew up in Bridgeport and did not want to go anywhere else.

Mr. Planas said his greatest strength is that he's a thinker, likes to think out of the box, and loves to research and make plans. He described the recent process to choose a new math textbook.

Mr. Planas said every single experience in Bridgeport has prepared him for his role. He said he began as a paraprofessional in the district as a college student. He described his work as an assistant principal where suspensions were greatly reduced.

Mr. Planas said working with school leaders was extremely important, and he tries to be in schools as much as possible and out of the office. He said he viewed his role as seeing principals are keeping their eyes on the prize of providing the very best education, utilizing data, and creating and using plans. He said he is constantly looking for grants that are available for the district.

Mr. Planas described how he establishes positive relationships with building administrators. He said the first thing is to develop trust. He said he often conducts celebrations with administrators, which also gives others ideas for possible strategies.

Mr. Planas said he had been supporting teaching and learning all his life. He said he loves to look at data. He described professional development being planned through the grant with the Lone Pine Foundation, which will include math expert Greg Tang. He said whenever there is change there has to be a plan and a goal communicated, and there has to be delegation to the correct players to implement the plan and management of those to whom things have been delegated.

The next interview was of Dr. Selena Morgan, the acting executive director for elementary education.

Dr. Morgan said she did not believe someone in her position should have any weaknesses because it is possible to

research and find out what to do. She said her blind spot may be high schools because she has never worked at the high school level.

Dr. Morgan said she believed her one of her greatest strengths was the ability to build relationships with parents. She often receives calls from parents and meets them frequently when she is in school buildings. She described education as a service business.

Dr. Morgan said her fourteen years in Bridgeport prepared her for the role. She noted her work in New York City, which is much larger, was quite different from Bridgeport.

Dr. Morgan said she believed her role was to build leadership capacity, so administrators can help teachers, who then help students. She viewed her role as an indirect influence on student achievement. She said this year she built capacity in science.

Dr. Morgan said there are always people you don't see eye to eye with and it doesn't work if you're always butting heads with them. Mutual respect is built by transparency. She said she is very honest with people.

Dr. Morgan said she supports content by going through professional development for math and reading, and she gives a professional development in science. She described a recent launch of a science curriculum guide for Grade 5.

Dr. Morgan said there were big changes coming to schools after the pandemic. She said the most important thing is to have everyone at the table, including parents, teachers, students and community organizations, and everything will have to be entertained.

The next interview was of Dr. Melissa Jenkins, the current acting executive director of early childhood.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said her weakness is around balance. She said she has been supporting six pre-K to 6 schools, as well as literacy from pre-K to 12, and supervising early childhood, each of which is very important. She said she looks for commonalities across the jobs such as attendance, student learning, instruction, and parent engagement.

Dr. Jenkins said she considered her greatest strength is being an ongoing learner. Even in the midst of the crisis she said she has learning how to enhance distance learning.

Dr. Jenkins said she believed all roles are important, but the greatest to her experience has been being a teacher in Bridgeport, where she learned to work with the community, the parents, and the many needs of the children, which led to her obtaining a second master's degree in English as a second language. She added that she learned to give back as a teacher.

Dr. Jenkins said she viewed her role as supporting school leaders in developing self-efficacy and providing differentiated support. She described what she has done in preparation for Central High undergoing the NEASC process.

Dr. Jenkins said she had done a pretty good job in establishing positive relationships with the pre-K to 6 principals. She said she created transparency around expectations. She described the follow-up that she practiced

with parents and her methods of establishing positive relationships and interacting with principals.

Dr. Jenkins said currently she is planning the early reading program for summer school, developing assessments, and searching for culturally relevant resources and resources that cut across science and math, along with professional development and packets for parents.

Dr. Jenkins said the most effective strategies in leading change are engaging all stakeholders, including students, and she described specific examples.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed strongly in educational equity and correcting for subconscious biases. Mr. Weldon said he believed it was important that the leadership in the district be able to work together as a collaborative team and not operate in silos.

Mr. Weldon said the four candidates were the only candidates brought internally for interviews. Mr. Weldon moved that *“these four candidates be referred to the superintendent for his own review and interview and for his ultimate decision to place them in the roles he sees fit.”* He said he felt they were all capable of the work they’re doing and if the superintendent decided to keep them where they are he would be comfortable with that.

Mr. Sokolovic seconded the motion.

Mr. Weldon said he did not believe a score sheet was necessary because there was no competition for the positions.

The motion was unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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