

Wednesday, May 15, 2018

MINUTES OF THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 15, 2018, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut..

The meeting was called to order at 6:41 p.m.

Committee members present were Chair John Weldon and LaMar Kennedy. Board members Joseph Sokolovic and Maria Pereira were present. Committee member Jessica Martinez arrived subsequently as noted.

Supt. Dr. Aresta L. Johnson was present.

Mr. Weldon moved to approve the minutes of the meetings of November 14 and November 16, 2018; February 27, April 9, and April 29, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Kennedy and unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira said there were errors in the minutes.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action on Teach for America(TFA).

Mr. Weldon said Tyler Miller contacted him and told him Dr. Johnson was not inclined to renew the contact with TFA. He said Mr. Miller asked for an opportunity to address the board. Mr. Weldon said he directed him to the Personnel Committee.

Mr. Miller and Michael Corral from TFA were present. Mr. Miller noted he sent documents to the board, including a proposed contract.

Mr. Miller described Teach for America. He said the mission is to work with high-need school districts to lead students to dramatic gains. He said TFA recruits from around the country, including Bridgeport. He highlighted a TFA teacher from Bridgeport who is teaching at Bassick High.

Ms. Martinez arrived at the meeting.

Mr. Miller said TFA had provided about 204 teachers to the district since 2007. He said in 2019 TFA would be expanding into another shortage area, bilingual elementary, and is on track to provide special education certification in fall 2020. He said across the region fifty percent of our teachers identify as people of color and one-third come from low income backgrounds.

Mr. Miller described the training provided to TFA teachers. He said since he has been leading the Bridgeport team there have been zero losses of teachers. He said Dr. Johnson highlighted retention as a major concern of the district.

Mr. Miller said there were 45,000 TFA applications nationally with about 14 percent admitted, or about 3,000. He said TFA looks for strong academics, demonstrated leadership, perseverance, highly organized individuals, and interpersonal skills.

Mr. Miller described the five to six weeks of intensive training held in Philadelphia. The candidates teach summer school in Philadelphia and Camden public schools. He said typically they will get their educator certifications in their second year, so they will be able to teach as long as they want.

Mr. Miller said TFA teachers also participate in teacher

leadership development with seven observation cycles over two years.

Mr. Miller said a document is included with responses by Connecticut principals. He said 80 percent of principals highlight content knowledge; 76 percent say the TFA teachers are a fit for the school.

Mr. Corral said one hesitation with TFA is the quality of teachers because they're not going through the traditional teacher preparation process. He said he did not believe TFA teachers are amazing magic bullets, but they are as good as other teachers based on student growth. He described test results from Texas that demonstrate this.

Mr. Corral said his teaching experience sparked an interest in diversity and alternate routes to certification. He said TFA brings a diverse pool of candidates and gives professionals of color a chance to get into education.

Mr. Miller described data obtained from Tripod, a nationally administered survey that students use to rate their teachers. He described other diagnostic assessments used.

Ms. Pereira said under the current contract TFA was not allowed to do surveys without the board's permission or a waiver from each parent. Dr. Johnson said she did not authorize the surveys.

Ms. Martinez said she was very pleased with TFA and the long-term relationship. She said she was very happy with their teachers, particularly in her son's experience. She said the TFA teachers are young and innovative.

Ms. Pereira said TFA went around the superintendent to Mr.

Weldon. Mr. Weldon said Mr. Miller is being heard at the committee level.

Dr. Johnson said she was in complete disagreement with the proposed contract. She said she finds it insulting to parents and students. She described Henrietta Lacks, a patient at Johns Hopkins, whose cancer cells were used without her permission and without compensation. She said this highlighted provisions in the proposed contract that would require a teacher who is not placed to be paid \$180 a day to cover their living expenses. She said this was not in the previous contract.

Dr. Johnson said she didn't know why everyone wasn't insulted by the hiring process, which reduces the window for the board to act on this to ten days. She said the contract calls for paying TFA teachers in a substitute capacity at the same rate as a full teacher.

Dr. Johnson said provisions about reduction in force that protect the board are omitted in the proposed contract. She objected to provisions about data-sharing not including de-identification. She objected to the contract indicating TFA will be an official of Bridgeport Public Schools.

Dr. Johnson asked if the board was insulted that they brought this to pay someone \$180 a day to sit at home when we have staff in our schools that do not make that amount for coming to work every day. She said this was outrageous.

Dr. Johnson said Lissette Colon of the HR department had done a great job in 2017-18 when 47 percent certified staff hired were minority candidates.

Dr. Johnson said the contract called for increased payments

to TFA in excess of numbers suggested by Ms. Siegel and at the same time the board itself did not receive a raise in funding. Ms. Pereira said it was an 8.8 percent increase.

Dr. Johnson said she would like the board to think about how to keep the funds in-house, close the budget gap, continue to hire certified minority candidates, and provide our own staff with robust professional development.

Dr. Johnson said there should be pre-assessment data to compare against the post-assessment data.

Dr. Johnson strongly recommended the contract be reviewed by Berchem & Moses should the board wish to proceed. She said the board's committee minutes of May 25, 2016, and June 13, 2016, indicate it was spelled out that the provisions that are now in the current contract should not be in the contract. She said the most disturbing aspect is TFA's access to student data and sharing that with third parties.

Mr. Weldon said it was presented to him as if the existing contract would be used. He asked why the terms and conditions of the contract had been changed.

Mr. Miller said he was advised by his operational team and his national operation to alter the contract. He said changes to the proposed contract were doable to whatever the board sees fit.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said TFA teachers participated in the district's professional development as well as their own. She said the district does not permit video recording of students.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said TFA

approached her in the fall of 2018 about renewing the present contract.

Ms. Pereira said the current contract indicates any surveys administered have to be approved by the superintendent and the school principal as well as meeting other regulations and obtaining affirmative written parental consent. She said TFA violated the contract.

Mr. Corral said surveys are administered to students to understand how they feel supported in the classroom. Mr. Kennedy said parental consent was required for surveys.

Ms. Pereira said the contract was being violated by the presence of six teachers in the district in non-shortage areas. Dr. Johnson said English teachers are a shortage area, but the placements in Grades 3 to 5 are not allowed under the current contract. She said human resources placed the three teachers.

Ms. Pereira said there were votes on the board in 2016 to block TFA. She said Max Medina came to the meeting on behalf of TFA. She said some board members voted for the contract because there was no long-term plan to fill shortage areas.

Ms. Pereira said the contract will cost \$273,856 over three years, which is in essence paying a placement fee for teachers. She objected to the proposed 8.8 percent increase in fees. She said the money would be better spent by Ms. Colon in her department to focus on shortage areas and minority recruitment. She added fifty percent of TFA teachers quit after two years and eighty percent are gone by the third year. She said many of their teachers are not certified and never will be certified. She said surveys show

teachers do not become effective until three to five years into their careers.

In response to a question, Ms. Colon said she could do even better with shortage areas and minority recruitment with an influx of funds. Dr. Johnson said there was a plan in place in the HR department.

Ms. Martinez said there were serious turnover problems for our staff as well. She said data was needed in this area.

Ms. Pereira said many college campuses had blocked TFA from their universities and many local school boards nationally had terminated their contracts with TFA.

Mr. Weldon said he had the newspaper articles in question and said he was incensed that Ms. Pereira took it upon herself to selectively pull up negative news articles and have the staff print them out for her.

Ms. Pereira said she did not have access to a computer and went in to get information. Mr. Weldon said Ms. Pereira used district resources for her own propaganda. Ms. Pereira said they were national news articles, not propaganda. She said Mr. Weldon did like them because they're factual. Mr. Weldon said he did not like them because they're biased.

Mr. Weldon said he was getting a distinct impression that there are people in the room that have a personal bias against an organization and are trying to block them from being here. He said he had a problem if TFA tried to come back with something different than the existing contract.

Mr. Sokolovic said regardless of what biases exist the leader of our educational program has suggested we not renew the

contract. He said we are in a \$10 million deficit and the TFA and the teachers will cost \$3,600 in the first year to fill the same seats that other teachers fill.

In response to a question, Ms. Colon said Mr. Chester generated the requested items from HR to the board. Ms. Pereira said she believed the table in the document was inaccurate. Ms. Colon said she had been very successful with TFA in filling shortage areas. She noted physics and chemistry are extremely difficult to fill and TFA had been her savior when it came to opening the door in the fall.

In response to a question, Mr. Miller said teachers go on resident educator's certification at the beginning of the year and then they work towards resident certification through the state Department of Education. Ms Colon said the certification is a two-year permit to teach.

Mr. Kennedy said he was trying to get a sense of why the \$3,600 would be paid to TFA.

In response to a question, Ms. Colon said in the contract HR is allowed to hire up to 25 TFA teachers, but it has usually been 9 to 15 per year. She said all of TFA teachers have gone into shortage areas with the exception of three elementary teachers. She said one of the elementary teachers was hired after school started and also had experience.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she would consider an agreement with TFA if they would renegotiate the fees and use a different contract.

Ms. Martinez and Mr. Weldon said the board cannot afford the rates in the contract.



Dr. Johnson said we have be mindful to support the system and our students to make sure it happens from both ends. She said the fee schedule was very concerning and she was willing to negotiate those rates. She added some of the language seemed like a sleight of hand to slip provisions back into the contract.

Mr. Miller said he appreciated that and he would be willing to negotiate the fees and the provisions of the contract. Mr. Weldon suggested the proposed agreement be tossed out and that discussions start off with the current agreement. He said the deviance from the prior agreement seemed to be the bone of contention.

Mr. Miller said TFA's interest in data is to see if our teachers are having an impact on our students. Mr. Weldon said the superintendent wanted the privacy of students' identities locked tight.

Mr. Miller said TFA is held to the same obligations of FERPA that the district is.

Ms. Colon said in 2017 twelve TFA teachers were hired and they are all still with us; in 2018, thirteen were hired and they are all still with us. Ms. Pereira noted the contract started in 2016, so third-year data should be available.

Dr. Johnson said the data seemed to indicate in 2015-16 there were 21 year-one TFAs and then it went down to 15 in year two.

There was a discussion of how to interpret the numbers in the table.

In response to a question, Mr. Miller said TFA had incomplete data on retention because it is based on alumni surveys.

Mr. Corral said the third-party data storage refers to Google Cloud or Salesforce but TFA is held to the obligations of FERPA.

Ms. Pereira said TFA clearly violated the provisions of the contract about surveys.

Dr. Johnson said Ms. Siegel told her the escalated costs in the proposed contract were not agreed to.

Mr. Weldon said a contract renewal should have the existing contract as a jumping-off point, not a completely new document.

Ms. Pereira asked who on our side violated the contract by hiring elementary teachers. She asked Dr. Johnson look into that. Mr. Weldon said we are the contracting entity so it is up to us to make sure the contractor doesn't do something inappropriate.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested language that TFA will not be paid for elementary placements. He said this would create an incentive not to engage in such placements.

Ms. Colon said she believed we're all new to this. She said she took on more responsibilities this year and the superintendent and the TFA representations were also new.

Mr. Weldon suggested that any negotiations begin from the existing contract in an attempt to find something that Dr. Johnson feels is fair in terms and conditions and the fee

structure.

In response to a question, Ms. Colon noted funds for HR had been reduced. Ms. Pereira asked Dr. Johnson to provide the HR plan that had been developed. Dr. Johnson said it was a good plan but depended on fiscal resources.

Mr. Miller said he was absolutely willing to negotiate a contract. Mr. Weldon said it may include no escalation in fees because the district is strapped.

Dr. Johnson said it was brought forward in 2016 for a five-year contract and the board compromised on a three-year contract.

Mr. Miller said the money is less important than being able to work with the kids of Bridgeport and continuing the relationship.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action on the MOU for high school athletic directors.

Dr. Johnson said the current MOU ends at the end of June 2019. She said she understood the directors would be looking for the offer that was on the table on release time and a possible stipend to take on the district-wide athletic duties. She said three additional gym teachers would have to be found.

Dr. Johnson said before the elimination of the district-wide athletic director the three high school athletic directors taught four classes and had the remainder of the time for non-instructional time at the building level. When the district-wide athletic director was eliminated, the extra responsibilities were picked up and the MOU was entered into.

Mr. Kennedy said he did not see how their responsibilities increased. Dr. Johnson said the duties included covering games, gate receipts and scheduling games. She said their duties do not include the middle schools.

Mr. Kennedy said based on his experience building athletic directors make schedules and go to meetings. He said he had some trepidation about the athletic directors requesting full release when they only have four teaching periods. He said the increased pay is quite a bit more than an athletic director he personally knows in a comparable district. He said they went \$5,800 to \$15,000.

Mr. Weldon said for at the rate being requested a citywide athletic director could be hired.

Dr. Johnson said the conversation was just to bring it to the attention of the board. She said one of the athletic directors resigned his position.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she would not recommend retaining the athletic directors with no teaching responsibilities.

Dr. Johnson said it was more about the increased job responsibilities. Ms. Pereira said they seemed to be saying they would not do the job without the increase. Mr. Kennedy said we can get somebody cheaper.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said the contract would determine if the person performing the duties needed to be certified. Ms. Pereira said the BEA contract indicates their members have first choice. Mr. Kennedy said he believed there were a number of teachers who would like to

be an athletic director and have three periods off.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she didn't know what would happen if she took the matter back for negotiation. She added they have supporters among colleagues.

Mr. Kennedy asked to be provided with their previous duties and their additional duties. Dr. Johnson said that was available in an e-mail.

Dr. Johnson said the athletic directors said at first they were not going to take on the responsibilities of the citywide director. She said based on legal advice she directed them to take on the responsibilities until the MOU was done.

Dr. Johnson said negotiations with the BEA are beginning again on a new contract for the fall of 2020. She said when the MOU for the athletic directors was signed the union was clear that it would not carry into the next year.

Ms. Pereira suggested offering one more class of release time. Mr. Weldon said he believed it was worthwhile to go back to the BEA union about the issue. Mr. Kennedy said he believed an assistant principal could handle scheduling. Mr. Weldon said the district could consider paying someone to be the districtwide athletic director even part-time.

Ms. Pereira said the board is required under state statute to notify the City Council that we are entering negotiations with the BEA because they have a right to make recommendations.

The next agenda item was on Dr. Jenkins's MOU. Dr.

Johnson said it will expire on June 30, 2019. She added the early childhood and the literacy director position were separate jobs in the past. The positions were merged and Dr. Jenkins received an additional \$8,000.

Dr. Johnson indicated Dr. Jenkins does not wish to continue the arrangement. She noted Dr. Jenkins has some professional and family commitments that will require more of her time going forward.

Dr. Johnson said next steps will be decided after discussions with the BCAS union. She said the joint position may not necessarily materialize. She said she would keep the board updated.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she would recommend Dr. Johnson keep the pre-K/early childhood as opposed to literacy. She said there are some administrators in the district who have the 092 and the English certification. Mr. Weldon noted Dr. Jenkins had dual certification.

Dr. Johnson said Dr. Jenkins had done a phenomenal job in early childhood and would like to see her kept in that capacity.

Ms. Pereira said the board may have to add in another \$100,000 position as literacy director. Mr. Weldon said perhaps the situation could be handled with a stipend again.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said no one currently at 45 Lyon Terrace comes to mind that would be a candidate to take on the position of literacy director. Mr. Sokolovic noted the literacy director is a core role.

Ms. Colon said Dr. Jenkins is very capable, but someone

cannot be assigned to a position without the support and the resources.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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