

Wednesday, May 27, 2020

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PERSONNEL  
COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF  
EDUCATION, held May 27, 2020, by video and audio  
conference, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:02 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon and Joseph Sokolovic. Board members Albert Benejan and Sybil Allen were present.

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

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the committee's minutes of May 13, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Weldon. A correction was noted. The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was interviews for the position of principal at Fairchild Wheeler-IT, Classical Studies, John Winthrop, Columbus, and Cesar Batalla.

Mr. Weldon said all the candidates indicated in writing they requested to have the interviews conducted in executive session so candidates would not hear the questions asked of prior candidates.

Mr. Weldon moved to go into executive session to interview the candidates. Mr. Sokolovic indicated he would not second the motion because he believed as an elected official in the city that interviews of candidates for high-paying positions who are entrusted with our most precious resource,

our children, should be in public in the interests of transparency. He said things in the city are perceived as being done behind closed doors.

Mr. Weldon said he believed Mr. Sokolovic was putting his ideologies ahead of professional courtesy to the candidates. He asked Rita Valle to confer with the candidates to see if they wished to proceed in public.

The first candidate was Beth Furnari. Ms. Furnari said she has been in the district for twenty years, beginning as an English teacher at Central High. She said she was later a curriculum specialist for Grades 7 to 12. She was later a magnet resource teacher at Fairchild Wheeler involving grant management and implementation, the assistant principal at Fairchild Wheeler, and for the past year the acting principal of the IT School.

In response to a question, Ms. Furnari described the way distance learning has taken place at the school. She noted the difficulties with some children who suffer from social-emotional issues, which will require new strategies going forward, and challenges for students entering the school next year.

In response to a question, Ms. Furnari described how she had dealt with lack of funds to purchase supplies, including grant writing, Donors Choose, and relationships with the School Governance Council.

In response to a question, Ms. Furnari said her biggest challenge as a principal has been the pandemic. She described how parents' schedules have been accommodated for developing parental engagement.

In response to a question, Ms. Furnari said her top priorities would be student achievement, building the culture and community within the school and outside the school, and initiatives around attendance.

In response to a question, Ms. Furnari described events to increase family involvement and said she was responsive to communications from parents.

In response to a question, Ms. Furnari described her approach in handling issues with staff.

In response to a question, Ms. Furnari said effective school leaders are committed, passionate, and a listener.

In response to a question, Ms. Furnari said there are large benefits to having parents as stakeholders in their children's education, including the use of celebrations.

Lindsay Davis was the next candidate. Ms. Davis said she was about to begin her 18th year in the district. She worked at Wilbur Cross School as a special education teacher, Grades K and 1 teacher, and for the past six years as assistant principal at Classical Studies, primarily overseeing pre-K to 2nd grade.

In response to a question, Ms. Davis said distance learning has been a challenge; she described the way parents have been communicated with during the process and how the social-emotional well being of students, families and staff have been monitored.

In response to a question about limited resources, Ms. Davis described how connections with the Carver Foundation and

grant funds were used to keep the extended-day program going.

In response to a question, Ms. Davis said principal was a challenging position and emphasized that having an open mind and being flexible and approachable with staff.

In response to a question, Ms. Davis said her number one priority would be visibility to all stakeholders, along with embedding RULER into the upper grades, and a greater dive into the Grades 3 to 8 data to continue to see student growth.

In response to a question, Ms. Davis described how she has built relationships with community partners and parents.

In response to a question, Ms. Davis said relationships and communication are important to issues that come up with staff members.

In response to a question, Ms. Davis described effective school leaders as dedicated, hardworking, and open-minded.

In response to a question, Ms. Davis said she believed families choose Classical Studies because of a family and partnership approach.

Carla Fontes-Alers was the next candidate. She said she grew up in Bridgeport as a daughter of Portuguese immigrants that struggled hard with English and other challenges. She said she has been in the district for 18 years, serving as a long-term sub; a bilingual, special education, and ESL paraprofessional; ESL teacher; assistant

principal at Marin School; and acting principal at Winthrop School.

In response to a question, Ms. Fontes-Alers said she has worked closely with staff on implementing distance learning and overseen the distribution of Chrome Books and packets for students.

In response to a question, Ms. Fontes-Alers said Donors Choose grants are used, along with a partnership with Sacred Heart University, to combat lack of school resources. She said she also created professional learning communities this year around PBIS, restorative practices, data, and climate.

In response to a question, Ms. Fontes-Alers said the buck stops with principals, including equal access, instructional leadership, providing an academically and socially safe environment, and family engagement. She said finding a balance between work and personal life is a challenge.

In response to a question, Ms. Fontes-Alers said her top three priorities are safety of students, comfortable routines under the changed circumstances, and increasing the integration of SEL into every curriculum.

In response to a question, Ms. Fontes-Alers said her fluency in Portuguese and Spanish helps make families feel comfortable at Winthrop, including at STEM nights, kindness efforts, and welcoming coffees.

In response to a question, Ms. Fontes-Alers said she has an open-door policy for staff, which involves listening and coaching.

In response to a question, Ms. Fontes-Alers said effective school leaders are hardworking, persevere, and are dedicated.

In response to a question, Ms. Fontes-Alers said clear communication with parents and a positive, welcoming climate are important in increasing parent engagement.

The next candidate was Dr. Byron Williams. Dr. Williams said he was from Philadelphia and relocated to Bridgeport years ago and was the founding consultant and principal for Bridgeport Military Academy. He said he later worked as an assistant principal at Wilbur Cross, the principal at Bassick, and the assistant principal at Batalla School.

In response to a question, Dr. Williams said after distance learning we have to learn how to use technology better, including professional development on Teams, and updated safety plans. He said we have to ensure that the students really are learning.

In response to a question, Dr. Williams said he would be open and honest with staff when faced with limited resources, which would help get buy-in.

In response to a question, Dr. Williams said a new principal had to develop staff trust, use consistency and honesty with teachers, and turn to the students in the same way, including social-emotional development.

In response to a question, Dr. Williams said his top priority would be establishing a good relationship with staff, including celebrating successes and parents. He described some Friday night events that were very successful. He said it was important to coordinate everything you're doing so

parents understood how students learn and so students understand how they themselves learn. He described the use of thematic units, which works across various disciplines.

In response to a question, Dr. Williams described how he worked extensively with Spanish-speaking parents at Batalla even though he doesn't speak Spanish. He said if you build rapport with parents they begin to trust you. He added surveys would be used to gather information. He described Power School classes for parents. He said it was critical to return phone calls and hold community meetings at least once a month.

In response to a question, Dr. Williams said when dealing with issues with staff he would have open conversations and include good things you see with that individual. He did he not believe in a I-got-you model, which leads to the loss of staff and faculty. He said working through HR was important. He said he would work hard to make sure teachers don't fail.

In response to a question, Dr. Williams said the three adjectives he would use to describe an effective school leader were flexible, consistent, and fair.

In response to a question, Dr. Williams emphasized the importance of greeting parents and students. He said you never turn your back on a child. He described seeing children who come to school without coats and how he extended himself to them. He said the appearance of the building and its grounds are also very important. He described how renaming hallways in buildings would be effective in helping students.

Dr. Williams said he would enjoy coming to Winthrop. Even though he does not speak Portuguese, he said if he could survive at Batalla four years and do well, he can survive anywhere.

Linda Bagoly was the next candidate. Ms. Bagoly said she was completing her 26th year in Bridgeport. She said she started as a math teacher in 7th and 8th grade, then was a high school math teacher and numeracy coach, math curriculum specialist, and assistant principal at Bassick, Batalla, and Columbus.

In response to a question, Ms. Bagoly described distance learning as uncharted territory. She said Columbus teachers have been learning at an exponential rate and had been holding weekly meetings to address issues, as well participating in professional development.

In response to a question, Ms. Bagoly said it is nothing new to be faced with limited resources or supplies in the district. She said the way to work around that is to create professional learning communities, including an action plan.

In response to a question, Ms. Bagoly said the biggest challenge as an acting principal of Columbus is being patient with change towards growth. She said small steps were needed to become proficient and exemplary before moving to next steps.

In response to a question about priorities, Ms. Bagoly said her first priority is to have staff become better reflective practitioners because it will impact teaching, learning, and understanding. She said her second priority would be to empower different groups of stakeholders, with the professional learning communities concentrating on such



areas as attendance and instructional strategies. She said the PAC at the school was regenerated and a fully elected PAC established.

In response to a question, Ms. Bagoly said she will get to know the families and community through exposure and making herself available. She said she recently did a question-and-answer session on Teams.

In response to a question, Ms. Bagoly said when issues with staff occur she takes all of the evidence and data from all perspectives before making a decision on moving forward.

In response to a question, Ms. Bagoly said the three adjectives she would use to describe an effective school leader are reflective, a problem-solver, and to be fair.

In response to a question, Ms. Bagoly said there will be additional parental engagement events. She described some events that were held, including a Black History event and a food festival. She said there are planned events for student government.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to go into executive session to discuss the merits of the interviews and the candidates.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Weldon and unanimously approved.

Invited to participate were community members and Ms. Altro-Dixon.

The executive session began at 7:03 p.m.

The committee reconvened in public session at 7:25 p.m.

Mr. Weldon moved “*to recommend to the principal candidates for Fairchild Wheeler-IT School, Classical Studies Academy, John Winthrop School, and Columbus School.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Weldon noted there was a finalist for Cesar Batalla School, however, that person withdrew their name for consideration.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod