

Wednesday, April 25, 2018

MINUTES OF THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE OF THE  
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April 25, 2018, at  
Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:19 p.m. Committee members present were Chair Hernan Illingworth and Jessica Martinez. Board members Joseph Sokolovic and Maria Pereira were present.

Ms. Martinez moved approval of the committee's minutes of February 14, 2018, with one correction. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the hiring procedures policy. Mr. Illingworth said the administration approached him and asked if the committee would look at the matter. He noted there are some slight changes recommended.

Frank Chester, chief talent officer, said the intent was to streamline the process. Candidates for principal will have their initial interview done by the chief talent officer. He said the department is capable of matching up the job descriptions and qualifications that are sought with the candidates.

Mr. Chester said the superintendent would interview candidates for principal and then refer them to the board for an introductory-type interview. He said previously they went to the Personnel Committee and then to the superintendent.

Mr. Illingworth noted there was both a school committee and a School Governance Council that interview candidates. He said the same people are often on both committees. He said to make the process a little shorter, the idea was to have the candidates go to the School Governance Council(SGC). From there, they go directly to the superintendent, and then the committee meets the superintendent's pick.

In response to a question, Mr. Chester said the procedures indicate internal candidates who meet the stated qualifications must have an interview.

Mr. Illingworth said the feedback he heard was that internal candidates could not even get an interview.

Mr. Illingworth said the reason there was no numerical designation on the document was because it is a procedure, not a policy.

Ms. Pereira said the former policy stated the SGC ranks the candidates. Mr. Chester said it should be in the document.

Mr. Illingworth said the way he understands the process the committee will meet the candidate selected by the superintendent. Ms. Pereira said a sentence needed to be added to that effect.

There was a discussion of the wording of the provisions.

Ms. Pereira said the board had been doing this since Dave Hennessey changed the policy. She said clearly the board had done a bad job of picking principals. She added she could only think of one time a recommendation was made to Dr. Johnson and she did not choose our recommendation.

Ms. Pereira said in order to hold the superintendent accountable for results it could not push or select candidates over the objection of the superintendent. She said the board were not educators and she questioned whether the board was in a position to pick instructional leaders.

Ms. Pereira said the board recommended a candidate for math director, however, Dr. Johnson selected Mr. Planas.

Mr. Illingworth said he wanted to feel comfortable that we are hiring the best qualified candidates, not someone who is close to so-and-so. He said this is mostly the case in assistant principals. He noted the committee used to interview assistant principals.

Ms. Pereira said she didn't think the committee should be

interviewing assistant principals. She said last year when she was on the committee it didn't interview a single assistant principal.

Mr. Chester said the only person the board hires is the superintendent. Ms. Pereira said she disagreed; the board needs to hire high level administrators, assistant superintendents, and other directors such as Mr. Chester.

Ms. Pereira asked if the committee was in favor of deleting assistant principals from the hiring process. She said she was fine with the board having nothing to do with principals because we are not educators and we don't know about curriculum, PPTs, IEPs and classroom management.

Mr. Chester said he would make the changes suggested by the committee and highlight the deletions and additions and bring it back to the committee.

Ms. Martinez said she was on board with not interviewing assistant principals.

Ms. Pereira said the principals should interview teachers and decide who to hire. In order for the board to hold people accountable the principals have to be able to choose their own employees.

There was a discussion about the role of the SGCs in hiring. Ms. Pereira said Dr. Johnson has generally followed the School Governance Councils' recommendations, including the principal at Black Rock School.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested adding a parent to the SGCs because he felt it can get kind of cliquish with the principal and two teachers. He said he noted a pattern of people with the same last names being hired. He said these things do not happen by accident. He said he was discussing the process, not the performance of any persons he mentioned.

Ms. Pereira urged the principals be given the ability to pick their teachers so they can be held accountable. She noted any teacher hired must be certified, so Mario Testa can't pick up the phone and

ask someone to hire his friend as a teacher, unlike the Nutrition Center staff, paras, custodians or security guards.

Mr. Chester said he would make changes to the policies as discussed and bring it back to the committee.

Ms. Pereira noted we already have a hard time finding teachers and they should not have come back two or three times for interviews because they could be lost to another school district.

The next agenda item was the timeline on the superintendents' annual evaluation. Ms. Pereira said an evaluation tool and a rubric had already been created.

Mr. Illingworth said it was suggested we develop a timeline. He noted the superintendent's contract indicates her annual evaluation needs to be done two months after the end of the school year. In theory, it should be done by August 30th.

Ms. Pereira said in the past public hearings had been held where the superintendent made a presentation to the board, with the board asking questions.

Mr. Illingworth said he believed that process works. He said he talked with Dr. Johnson about this. Ms. Pereira said there should be at least two meetings.

Mr. Illingworth said following the presentations the board creates its evaluations. Ms Pereira said the evaluations should be written. She said it is critical if the superintendent is rated above or below average that the board member must substantiate the score. She said this had been a problem in the past. She said she spent 36 hours working on Supt. Vallas's evaluation.

Ms. Pereira recommended that since there are eight rubrics, the superintendent's presentation should be done in two sessions, with items 1 to 4 covered in the first session and 5 to 8 in the second session.

The committee determined July 5th and July 12th would be the dates

for the presentations.

Ms. Pereira asked Mr. Illingworth to contact Dr. Johnson and spell out the rubrics to be addressed at each session.

There was a discussion of when the board would complete their evaluation. There was a consensus to set July 26th as the date for evaluations to be turned into the chair, Mr. Weldon.

Ms. Pereira said when Dr. Kelleher was chair there was a curve employed for the scoring. Mr. Illingworth said he preferred a simple average.

Mr. Illingworth said the board would hold its Special Meeting on July 26th for submission of evaluations. Any score of 1, 2 and 4 must be substantiated with specific data and/or examples.

Mr. Chester asked if there was value to having a facilitator at the special meeting. He said such a person might come from a university and be someone skilled in facilitating meetings and group dynamics. Ms. Pereira said the district's partnerships with local universities might create a conflict of interest. Mr. Chester said he would look into it and report back to the committee.

There was a discussion of the categories on each individual rubric of the evaluation. Ms. Pereira said the ratings are only need for the overall categories.

There was a discussion of how the average score would be calculated in each category; comments can be attached to the evaluation by the chair.

It was decided the calculated totals with all explanations will be done by August 2nd.

There was a discussion of delivering the evaluation to the superintendent and whether it should be in public session. Ms. Pereira said the superintendent could choose to hold a public session. She said the board should ask for a legal opinion on whether the board must give notice to the superintendent of the delivery of the

evaluation and whether the superintendent has the right to have it in public session. She noted the superintendent doesn't have a right to demand an executive session.

Ms. Pereira asked if the board would make the evaluation public on the district's website. She said a lot of districts do publish the evaluations, but the board has never done so.

Mr. Chester said in his most recent experience in this area the board came out with priorities and areas of focus that were highlighted.

Ms. Pereira suggested authorizing Mr. Illingworth to contact the city attorney's office for a legal opinion on whether the superintendent had to be notified of the final evaluation session and notifying the superintendent of the right to hold the meeting in public session. She noted, however, the city had frequently been sanctioned for FOIA violations.

The next item was on civil service testing.

Mr. Chester said Mr. McNamara was told two days ago that the testing for custodians would not take place. Ms. Pereira quoted from a letter from Mr. Dunn, the civil service director, that an exam announced in March will allow the board and city to make its appointments over the summer and not disrupt the school year.

Mr. Chester said there will be a meeting on Friday with the superintendent and the civil service director to hear Mr. Dunn's explanations. He said Dr. Johnson questioned why the job description mentioned the requirement to be a high school graduate, with a reference to reading at a 10th grade level. He said he had not been provided with a revised job description.

Ms. Pereira said civil service could not say they're going to follow the law because of funding issues. She said some employees had been provisional for up to ten years. Mr. Chester said Mr. Dunn did not dispute that point.

Mr. Illingworth said we can't enforce the law ourselves. Ms. Pereira

said the next step would be to write a letter to City Council. She questioned how expensive the testing could be.

Mr. Illingworth said if they refuse to hold the test, the board needs to get an attorney involved.

Mr. Chester noted there was a legal opinion given to the board from July 2017 on this subject. Ms. Pereira said the City Council is probably not even aware of this.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Dunn has been in a civil service position for over a decade and has never taken a civil service test.

Ms. Pereira said Dr. Johnson should address a letter to City Council, enclosing our original letter, the legal opinion and Mr. Dunn's response where he said the test would be noticed in March with the test in April, with a copy to the mayor, Mr. Dunn and Shipman & Goodwin.

Gilbert Velez was recognized. He said he was the person who pushed through the head custodian test. He said he pointed out the city's budget in the past included money for Custodian 4 and Custodian I tests. In October 2015 the test took place. He said it took about 18 months to have the test go through the Civil Service Commission.

Ms. Pereira suggested Mr. Chester and Dr. Johnson try to get the issue on the Civil Service Commission's agenda.

Mr. Velez said the prior exam had to be scored with a curve because only 2 out of 31 people who took the test for head custodian achieved a 75 score.

Ms. Pereira said the Civil Service commission has been sued numerous times for not following the city charter. She said the commission members are appointed by the mayor and ratified by the City Council.

Ms. Martinez moved *"to recommend to the full board to authorize a letter written to the Civil Service Commission, copied to the mayor,*

*the City Council and Shipman & Goodwin, that will include the October 31st and the November 9th letters and the legal opinion.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

Ms. Martinez moved “*to recommend to the full board on the final calendar for the superintendent’s evaluation.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the committee on May 3, 2018*