

BOARD OF EDUCATION

City Hall - 45 Lyon Terrace
Bridgeport, Connecticut 06604

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD cont.

MICHAEL J. TESTANI
Superintendent of Schools

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

JOHN R. WELDON
Chairman

BOBBI BROWN
Vice-Chairman

JOSEPH J. LOMBARD
Secretary



"Changing Futures and Achieving Excellence Together"

SYBIL ALLEN

ALBERT BENEJAN

JESSICA MARTINEZ

JOSEPH SOKOLOVIC

CHRIS TAYLOR

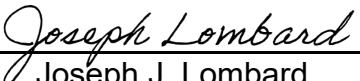
VACANCY

Bridgeport, Connecticut

November 20, 2020

Board Members:

A Regular Meeting of the Board of Education will be held on Monday, November 23, 2020, at 6:30 p.m. via a Microsoft Teams Live Broadcast event. Public viewing access to the meeting will be made available through <https://www.bridgeportedu.net/stream>.



Joseph J. Lombard
Board of Education Secretary

**BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION
AGENDA OF REGULAR PUBLIC MEETING**

**Monday, November 23, 2020 – 6:30 P.M.
Microsoft Teams Live Broadcast Event
Bridgeport, CT**

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Pledge of Allegiance**
- 3. Roll Call**
- 4. Public Comment (Agenda Items Only)**
- 5. Approval of Board Minutes**
 - a) 11/17/20 Special Meeting
 - b) 11/19/20 Special Meeting
 - c) 11/9/20 Regular Meeting
- 6. Chairman's Report**
 - a) Nomination of Individual(s) to Fill Board Vacancy
 - b) Election of Individual to Fill Board Vacancy
- 7. Committee Reports/Referrals**
 - a) Educational Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
 - b) Facilities
 - c) Finance
 - d) Governance
 - e) Personnel
 - f) Students and Families
 - g) Teaching and Learning
- 8. Superintendent's Report**
 - a) General Report
 - b) COVID-19 Update
- 9. Old Business** – None to be Transacted
- 10. New Business**– None to be Transacted
- 11. Adjourn**

Monday, November 9, 2020

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held November 9, 2020, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown, Secretary Joseph Lombard, Jessica Martinez, Albert Benejan, Joseph Sokolovic, and Sybil Allen.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Ms. Rita Valle reported no one had signed up to speak.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Mr. Lombard moved approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of October 26, 2020. The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

Ms. Brown moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of October 28, 2020. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

Ms. Allen moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of October 30, 2020. The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:

Mr. Sokolovic said the Educational Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee would meet on November 16th.

Mr. Weldon said the chair of the Facilities Committee was no longer on the board.

Mr. Benejan noted he had pending questions to the superintendent regarding facilities. Supt. Testani said he could answer Mr. Benejan's questions either after the meeting tonight or tomorrow.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Finance Committee would meet on November 18th.

Mr. Weldon indicated committees would be reassigned in December. He asked if there was a volunteer to chair the committees previously chaired by Mr. Illingworth. Mr. Sokolovic said if a pressing issue emerged, it could probably be handled in another committee.

Mr. Weldon said he was a member of the Governance and Facilities Committee, so he could chair them. Mr. Lombard and Mr. Sokolovic said they were willing to serve on the committees. Mr. Weldon appointed Mr. Lombard to Governance and Mr. Sokolovic to Facilities. Ms. Allen volunteered to take Mr. Illingworth's slot on the Personnel Committee.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested the board begin the process of evaluating the superintendent. Mr. Weldon said he would send out a poll of board members for a suggested date. Mr. Sokolovic and Mr. Weldon suggested the process be done by the full board, not the Personnel Committee.

Mr. Benejan said the Students & Families Committee would meet on November 19th.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Teaching & Learning Committee would meet on November 17th.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT/AGENDA:

Supt. Testani said the district will conduct a community resources drive-through on November 21st to help support students and families. Community partners, including Bridgeport Caribe Youth League, Southwest Community Health, Wakeman Boys & Girls Club, and others, would participate. The event will be held outdoors at Central High School. He said Carli Rocha-Reaes is taking the lead on coordinating this and he invited board members to participate.

The superintendent said the K-8 hybrid schedule began today. Except for pre-K the entire district is running on the hybrid model. He said from conferring with colleagues in similar-sized districts it seems to be a manageable way to go without disrupting students. He said the decision was made in collaboration with the health department. He noted the recent increase in community spread and he thanked the board for its support for the hybrid model.

Supt. Testani said he has reached out for pricing on diversity and equity training, and he would update the board soon.

The superintendent said the Department of Public Health has released guidance on winter sports. He said he believed the CIAC's previous handling of fall sports was a disaster. Moderate risk sports such as basketball will require mitigation strategies such as masks. He said he spoke today

with Dr. Black, the three high school principals and the three athletic directors, and there are major concerns about playing basketball with masks. He noted social distancing was not possible when playing basketball. He said the consensus of the discussion was that we did not want to put ourselves in a position where the season is canceled anyway because one positive case would put the entire program in quarantine for two weeks. The superintendent said there would be a hold on all winter sports. He added that wrestling and competitive cheer are the high-risk category.

Supt. Testani said there was a lot of pushback about canceling football, but ultimately health officials prevailed in their recommendation. He said he anticipated pushback from basketball kids and families. He said he has made an offer to be part of the CIAC decisions going forward. He said he was not willing to sacrifice health and safety when Bridgeport was a red city in COVID cases.

The superintendent said from November 5th to November 8th there were 289 new cases in Bridgeport; 17 of which came from 14 schools and 3 daycare sites. Only 8 of the school cases were public school students. He said he felt confident in the district's mitigation strategies. He noted officials are urging public gatherings be limited. He said he did not believe the governor would order all schools go to remote learning. He said the hybrid model gives our most vulnerable population access to in-person learning four days a week.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said he believed skill-building basketball activities would inevitably lead to pickup games. He added the local health department is against any indoor basketball.

In response to a question, the superintendent said the CIAC has not yet made a decision on basketball and it may possibly move forward with playing. However, the state Department of Public Health said masks must be worn while basketball is played.

Mr. Benejan said he believed from the beginning that schools should not be opened. He noted there were 82 student and 26 staff member cases on the district dashboard. He questioned why the schools are still open. The superintendent said the district would not receive any less money if the district goes fully remote, nor would employees be paid less. He said the district says open because kids need in-person learning, especially primary grade and special education students. He said the health experts had done a lot of contact tracing and transmission of the virus is not happening in schools, but in family events, social events, and youth sports that are not sanctioned by school districts.

Supt. Testani said New Haven has been completely remote from the beginning of school and the virus transmission rate is no better than in Bridgeport.

Mr. Sokolovic said closing schools saves an astronomical amount of money due to savings on transportation, heating costs, electricity, and even personnel, so the claim that keeping schools open saves money is the exact opposite of reality.

The superintendent said the governor ordered the districts' payroll be maintained in the spring, but now we are not under any order to pay employees their full salary and benefits if they are not contributing to remote instruction. He

said being open is a service to the community because many employees live in the community.

Mr. Benejan said most of the staff are very scared; he estimated the number at 80 percent. He said money is very important, but not as much as a family member, staff member or student dying.

NEW BUSINESS:

The next agenda item was on the Over Under Initiative.

Supt. Testani said this came out of the Facilities committee meeting. He said the organization, headed by Kyle Martino, a former pro MLS soccer player, approached the district about a project to install underground soccer goals on basketball courts, which can be easily moved up or down to transform the court. He said the cost of such a project would be about \$20,000. He said locations at Blackham School and Cesar Batalla were discussed, and the group committed to do both locations by the March timeframe. There will be a major kickoff event at that time, which may include NBA player Steve Nash. The eventual goal is to do 13 installations in the city at no cost to the city and the district.

Mr. Weldon recommended any written agreement and insurance requirements be reviewed by the board's counsel.

Ms. Allen moved *"to approve the arrangement with the Over Under Initiative as it's been described by the superintendent for the installation of between two and thirteen locations for goalposts."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the 2020-21 Alliance Building Grant application.

Alan Wallack said the district received the opportunity to apply for a \$2 million Alliance Building Grant. He said in the past ten years there have been three or four successful approvals of these, totaling up to \$8 million, which funds things not funded in the city's capital budget or the district's budget.

Mr. Wallack said the \$2 million approved this year will be used for new boilers in three schools and new front-end equipment for other schools. The remainder will be used for IT phones and communication systems for schools. He said the grant was written in conjunction with the IT department. He said he was asking for retroactive approval by the board of the application.

Mr. Weldon described it as basically free money because there was no match required.

In response to a question, Mr. Wallack said some of the equipment replaced by the grant will be able to be used in other schools. He said the technology put into new schools ten years ago is no longer current technology. He said the equipment being acquired has been recommended by Mr. Postolowski.

In response to a question, Mr. Wallack said the equipment put into Bassick High under the grant could be used in another school when the old Bassick is closed.

In response to a question, Mr. Wallack said air-conditioning of IT closets will take place in new construction.

Ms. Allen moved *"to approve the 2020-21 Alliance Building Grant application."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was a review of board and superintendent performance during COVID-19. Mr. Weldon said it qualified for executive session. He said the superintendent wanted to have a roundtable about things he has done well and things that could have been done better, including a discussion of how the board has operated over the past eight or nine months.

Ms. Allen moved *"to go into executive session for that purpose, with the only people being present being board members and the superintendent."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

The executive session began at 7:26 p.m.

The board reconvened in public session at 9:14 p.m.

Ms. Martinez was not present.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Tuesday, November 17, 2020

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held November 17, 2020, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown, Secretary Joseph Lombard, Albert Benejan, Joseph Sokolovic, Chris Taylor, and Sybil Allen.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Ms. Allen moved *“to recess the public meeting and move into executive session for the purpose of discussing the matter of Luz Tedesco vs. the Board of Education, with those being present being the Board of Education, the superintendent. Attorney Joseph Mirotti, staff member Ulysses Rogers from the payroll & benefits office.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor and unanimously approved.

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

The board reconvened in public session at 7:21 p.m.

Ms. Allen moved *“to approve the settlement of the matter of Luz Tedesco vs. the Board of Education in accordance with the recommendation of counsel discussed in the executive session.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor and approved by a 5-0 vote.

Voting in favor were members Weldon, Sokolovic, Taylor, Lombard, and Allen. Mr. Benejan and Ms. Brown abstained.

The next agenda item was a report by the superintendent on district operations related to COVID-19.

Supt. Testani said he wanted to discuss the decision to suspend in-person instruction temporarily and move to full remote at the end of this week. He said it was a difficult decision to make, but after conversation with the department of public health and state officials the decision was made because of the spike of cases in Bridgeport, which is being hit harder than other Connecticut communities.

The superintendent said in some buildings the impact of the virus has been minimal. The hybrid schedule at the high school has allowed very little disruption to their schedules. Full in-person instruction for elementary education was previously available for those parents who so chose.

Supt. Testani said the intention is to reopen the schools sometime in January. He said moving to fully remote will create hardships for some families. He said he has discussed with the executive team a phase-in of reopening at some point in January. A tentative reopening date will be announced in December. Most likely, pre-K, and special education, and high school students would come back first in a hybrid model(except for pre-K), with K-8 students returning about a week later in a hybrid model.

The superintendent said lots of commentary has been made on the decisions, but not all commentary is respectful, with some of it being rude. He said folks who have no regard for the other families that do follow the district's webpage and social media pages have been blocked. He said everyone has a right to their opinion, but everyone's decisions should be respected. He said the e-mail sent yesterday about

closure was not intended to blame teachers. He said he had seen screenshots of people calling for mass callouts, although fortunately that was not experienced.

Supt. Testani said he had spent over three hours answering questions from BEA members and was invited to the BEA office four times for roundtable discussions. He said no one was being blamed, but said he did apologize to the teachers who took offense.

The superintendent said a lot of contact tracing had been done of positive cases of staff members and it has uncovered that staff members have said they were in contact with colleagues who tested positive. He said adults need to be responsible and stay six feet apart and be wearing a mask. He said this is not always feasible when dealing with students, but it is feasible when dealing with other staff members.

Supt. Testani said he acknowledged that it is a very emotional and stressful time. He said he socializes with a small group of family and friends, and everyone has the right to do so, but it should be done responsibly and not in large groups. He said a recent staff member who tested positive said she had a party at her home with several teachers and families in close contact, which impacted the operation of a school.

Mr. Weldon said he interpreted the superintendent's letter as saying the closure is being made because of things that occur outside of school buildings. Supt. Testani said it was the overwhelming consensus of health officials that COVID-19 coronavirus is not being spread through schools and they are the safest places to be. He said the spread is because of outside sporting events and outside social events.

Mr. Sokolovic said we all need to be mindful in our communications because the great majority of staff and parents are going above and beyond the call of duty in the pandemic. He described the awesome 7th grade staff at Park City Magnet, which has worked as a cohesive unit. He said there is light at the end of the tunnel and we can get through this all together.

Mr. Taylor asked the board to observe a moment of silence for Sheriff Dennis Scinto, a pillar in the community who was loved, who passed away today.

Mr. Taylor said he supported Supt. Testani and believed he has done a fabulous job, even though he was being brutalized on social media. He said although he did not support opening schools in August, he respected the vote and kept his mouth shut.

Mr. Taylor said he agreed with the decision to close, but he would not support a layoff any Board of Education employee because it is our job to take care of them.

The superintendent said we need to maintain a sense of normalcy for our families and he discussed the importance of clerical staff, paraprofessionals, custodial staff, and food and nutrition staff, along with teachers and administrators. He said this is why staff will be required to report to buildings after Thanksgiving, which he said was a good way to operate remote school instruction. He said people are not going to be left out during the cold.

Supt. Testani said he sends a positive message at the end of every week to the entire school community.

Mr. Taylor said he was glad to hear there would be no layoffs.

Mr. Weldon noted there was no vote on the agenda; the meeting was just an update and opportunity for board members to ask questions.

Mr. Taylor left the meeting.

Mr. Benejan said the superintendent had been doing an amazing job from Day One. He said Supt. Testani had resolved things that would take others years and months to resolve because they were scared to fix it. He noted he did not agree with reopening the schools this year, but he respected the decision of the board. He said everybody is stressed about the situation. He said he appreciated the e-mails that Mr. Testani sends to the board, including on the weekends.

Mr. Weldon said two and a half months ago we were trying to get students back to school, if they were willing to go, to get them back to a sense of normalcy and receive in-person learning. He said things were being monitored and fortunately we were able to give people advance notice of the changes that were being made. Some districts just shut down their schools the night before, creating a hardship for parents.

Mr. Weldon said the decisions being made are not easy, but so far the right calls are being made.

Ms. Allen said the superintendent has done a wonderful job.

Mr. Weldon thanked all the teachers, administrators, and staff members who have been going through a difficult time and acknowledged their hard work.

Supt. Testani thanked the board for their support and said he tries to make decisions based on the best interests of everyone, including staff and 20,000 students and their families. He said it was human nature for people to look at things from their own personal perspective only. He said the pandemic was a historic time and students are facing something they will never have to face again.

Ms. Brown moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Thursday, November 19, 2020

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held November 19, 2020, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown, Secretary Joseph Lombard, Albert Benejan, Joseph Sokolovic, Jessica Martinez, and Sybil Allen.

The sole agenda item was discussion and possible short list of candidates to be interviewed for the vacancy created by Hernan Illingworth.

Mr. Weldon said the board had received 13 applications and resumes of candidates for the board position. He said discussion relating to their applications may occur in executive session, unless the applicant would require the board to discuss the application in an open meeting. He said all applicants were notified of this.

The full list of candidates were Ileana Cotto, Ra'Shaun Custis, Sosimo Fabian, JoAnn Kennedy, Christine King, Jose Lopez, Tyler Mack, Tavonna McKenzie, Chantel Mendez, Tressa Pankovitis, Ketia Similien, Dasha Spell and Cynthia Torres. Candidates Lopez, Pankovitis and Spell have chosen the option of requiring the board to discuss their applications publicly.

Mr. Weldon said there were many more applications to fill the vacancy than in the past because prior openings were for those of minority parties. He said the board could

interview all the candidates or create a short list of those candidates to be interviewed.

Ms. Allen, Mr. Benejan, and Ms. Brown, said they did not have a preference on the way to proceed. Mr. Lombard, Mr. Sokolovic, and Ms. Martinez said they wanted to interview all the candidates.

Mr. Weldon said the candidates were notified they should be available for an interview on November 23rd. He suggested the interviews be held from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. on that day, and that candidates be interviewed in a forum format, like that used by the League of Women Voters for political candidates. He said the board should come up with four questions to ask each of the thirteen. He said board members should e-mail proposed questions to Ms. Valle, which will be compiled and distributed to all board members.

Board members indicated their agreement with the proposal.

Mr. Weldon said according to the board's bylaws the vote to select a candidate has to take place during a Regular Meeting, which will follow that evening at 6:30 p.m.

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said Mr. Lombard could still participate in the vote even if he could not participate in all the interviews due to work.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

DRAFT

**BRIDGEPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS STAFF MOVEMENTS
As of NOVEMBER 20, 2020**

I. PROBATIONARY HIRES

	NAME	SCHOOL	POSITION	EFFECTIVE
1.	LAURA CAMPAGNA	CLASSICAL	SPED	11/30/2020
2.	AMANDA DAVIS	BATALLA	GUIDANCE COUNSELOR	12/07/2020
3.	AMY DEWBERRY	DISCOVERY	SPED	12/01/2020
4.	DAVID DIMBO	WALTERSVILLE	SPED	11/23/2020

II. RETIREMENTS

	NAME	SCHOOL	POSITION	YEARS of SERVICE	EFFECTIVE
	LUZ BUTLER	CITY HALL	BILINGUAL	30	01/01/2021

III. SEPARATIONS

	NAME	SCHOOL	POSITION	EFFECTIVE	REASON
1.	CHRISTINE FERRUCCI	CENTRAL	SPED	11/13/2020	PERSONAL
2.	MICHAEL SENESE	BATALLA	SOAR	12/04/2020	PERSONAL