

Tuesday, October 15, 2019

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held October 15, 2019, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Jessica Martinez, Secretary Joseph Sokolovic, Joseph Lombard, Sybil Allen, Maria Pereira, and LaMar Kennedy.

Herminio Planas was present in place of Acting Supt. Michael J. Testani, who was out of town with the Dean of Education at Sacred Heart University to explore a teacher residency program

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Emizael DeJesus, a school security officer, said he needed a brace to work, and was subsequently told to see human resources and management by each department. He said he was told he might have to retire if he could not go back to full duty. He requested assistance from the board.

Mr. Weldon suggested he talk to his union representative. Ms. Pereira said Lt. Grech had no authority over security guards.

Robert Halstead of Sterling Place, Bridgeport, said the Bridgeport Community Land Trust's work on the Harding

garden had been a big success. He said a summer program was needed when the school gardens are overgrown and the students are out of school. He said his former liaison, the director of science, was no longer in that position and he requested help in writing from the board so he could speak to public facilities and others about his status.

Mr. Weldon said he would ask Mr. Testani to reach out to Mr. Halstead. Ms. Pereira said Channel 12 covered the amazing garden at Harding.

Dasha Spell said the board's capital plan needed to be ready in January for submission to the city and its budget had to be submitted to the city in March. She urged the board's committees consistently hold their scheduled meetings. She said there needed to be conversations about these issues.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Ms. Allen moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of August 19, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Kennedy. Corrections were noted.

The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Kennedy moved approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of September 23, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic. A correction was noted.

The motion was approved by a 5-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Sokolovic, Allen, Kennedy and Pereira. Ms. Martinez and Mr. Lombard abstained.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:

Mr. Weldon reported on the Superintendent Search Committee. He said the board interviewed the two firms that made submissions under the RFP: McPherson & Jacobson and Total Employment Solutions. He said the board's general consensus that was one firm was superior.

Ms. Pereira moved that *"we select McPherson & Jacobson to conduct our superintendent search firm [sic] and we allow Tony Pires to negotiate a contract that will come back before this full board to be authorized."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and approved by a 6-0 vote.

Voting in favor were members Pereira, Kennedy, Sokolovic, Weldon, Martinez and Lombard. Ms. Allen abstained.

Ms. Pereira moved to table the Facilities Committee report. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Ms. Martinez said the Finance Committee would meet on October 23rd. She said the meeting was later in the month because of Yom Kippur.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Testani stated on August 19th that he has been speaking to the city about picking up the cost of the Connecticut Avenue lease and nurses. She said the board had not received follow-up information. She added that on August 23rd Mr. Sokolovic referred the issue of nutrition center vehicles to the Finance Committee.

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said he would see if he can schedule a Governance Committee meeting as requested by Ms. Pereira.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Teaching & Learning Committee

would next meet on November 19th.

Ms. Pereira said Sacred Heart presented to the committee when Dr. Johnson was superintendent and indicated it had raised \$2 million to finance the education of Bridgeport students who become teachers in the district for three years.

Mr. Weldon said the district remains without a personnel director and a staff level committee is being assembled to review the resumes that were submitted.

Ms. Pereira said she had requested repeatedly three years of teacher turnover information by subject and by school. She said this should not be hard because it is required to forward such data to the state. Mr. Weldon said he repeatedly asked Mr. Chester for the information. He said he would ask Mr. Testani about it.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Students & Families Committee approved an agenda item forthcoming on the agenda.

Ms. Pereira said the board received a troubling e-mail about an out-of-district situation which increased her previously stated concerns that the district would be unable to achieve savings in special education.

Ms. Pereira referred out-of-district placements to the Teaching & Learning Committee. She said she also asked in the past for a new bullying report, a report on arrests by race, gender and ethnicity by school, and a report on deselections from magnet schools.

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said the student representative elections are being handled at the building level. Ms. Pereira said it has been a disaster since the board

messed with the student representative policies.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Ad Hoc Committee on Great City Schools/Males of Color met and there is a working outline for the white paper. He said he would forward the outline to all board members.

Ms. Pereira said she had been waiting four and a half years for the white paper.

In response to a question, Mr. Sokolovic said the committee had split up the responsibility for looking at the data on expulsions and suspensions. Ms. Pereira said she would like to see policy created because the vast majority of expulsions and suspensions are males of color.

NEW BUSINESS :

The next agenda item was a first read of amended Policies 3320.1R and 3560(b).

Ms. Pereira moved *“to suspend the policy that requires a second read before approving an edit or a new policy, and that the board be allowed to approve Policy number 3320.1R this evening.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic said this was the result of an article in the *Connecticut Post* about no-bid contracts and some questionable practices that took place that predates most of the board and the current nutrition staff. He said the changed provisions indicates no request for a qualified purchase may be submitted to the purchasing in the amount of \$24,999 or more without prior approval of the Board of Education.

Ms. Pereira said the article referred to various foods and the practice of the nutrition department going straight to the purchasing department, circumventing all committees and the board, as a qualified purchase asserting that nobody else could provide the products. Ms. Pereira said the dollar amount chosen was requested by Mr. Testani.

Mr. Weldon said he would not be in support of this because it was not referred to any committee through the full board at a board meeting. He said the Students & Families Committee is not the appropriate committee for this action because it involves business and non-instructional operation policies.

Ms. Pereira said this will address what happened over the summer, which was quite embarrassing for the board.

Mr. Weldon said he believed all the board's purchasing policies should be addressed together. Ms. Pereira said she spearheaded a major revision in 2016 to the bidding process. She noted Mr. Testani supported the changes.

Mr. Weldon said the chief financial officer and the business manager did not participate in the committee meeting.

The motion was approved by a 5-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Allen, Sokolovic, Pereira, Kennedy and Martinez. Mr. Weldon was opposed. Mr. Lombard abstained.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *"to waive the second read of Policy 3560(b), school meal service, and have it take effect immediately upon approval."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic said this came about because of the same

nutrition bid problem. He said the changes include substituting the approval of the board for the supervision of the superintendent and adding totaling more than \$25,000 or more to the “lowest qualified bidder.” Ms. Pereira said previously it just said “lowest bidder.” She said Atty. Mark Anastasi weighed in on this.

In response to a question, Ms. Pereira said the reason for the change is due to language that was in conflict with the bid policy and the change aligns the two policies.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “*to approve changes in R3560(b) as presented.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

Mr. Weldon said he was not in favor because of the manner in which it has been brought to the board. He said he had discomfort with this policy change because the prior food service director was terminated because she followed this policy instead of bringing items to the board for approval. He said the food service director maintained that she followed this policy and operated under the superintendent, and despite that lost her job.

Mr. Weldon said it appears that we are reversing gears now. Mr. Sokolovic asked if Mr. Weldon was trying to get the board sued for more money.

Mr. Weldon said the question is whether we pay for the decisions we make or we cover our tracks. Ms. Pereira said we should not be discussing present litigation, but every bid that was submitted by the director of nutrition to purchasing indicated that the Board of Education will award the bid.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to call the question, which was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

The motion to approve the policy change was approved by a 5-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Allen, Sokolovic, Pereira, Lombard and Martinez. Mr. Weldon was opposed. Mr. Kennedy abstained.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action regarding translation services contracts.

Ana Sousa-Martins, director of bilingual education and world languages, said the matter was discussed at the Teaching & Learning Committee. She said an RFP sought proposals for translation and interpretation services for families. Seven bids were received.

Ms. Sousa-Martins said Linguistica was chosen, however, another company, Shoreline Interpretation, which only provides Spanish services, but that company is highly competent and highly competitive in terms of pricing.

Ms. Sousa-Martins suggested the board consider having two providers; Linguistica providing services other than Spanish and using Shoreline for Spanish. She noted the charges of Shoreline are lower for translation of documents, telephonic translation, and in-person appearances.

In response to a question, Ms. Sousa-Martins said the district only pays for the services when they are used. She said Linguistica's fees for languages other than Spanish are higher.

In response to a question, Ms. Sousa-Martins said the transcripts referred to are students' transcripts of grades.

In response to a question, Ms. Sousa-Martins said she was

requesting authority to negotiate a contract that would come before the board with both companies for one year, with an option for up to two more years.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve entering into a service contract with Linguistica International for all languages other than Spanish and into a service contact with Shoreline Interpretations, LLC, for Spanish translation services for a period of one year, with possible two-year extensions.”* Mr. Weldon said Ms. Sousa-Martins was going to negotiate that and bring it back. Ms. Pereira said the phraseology should be enter into negotiations for a contract.

The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action to install a new playground at Waltersville School. Principal Carmen Ortiz and John Cunningham, science teacher and grant writer, were present.

Ms. Ortiz said the item was presented to the Facilities Committee and approval is being sought for the revised proposal. The goal is to update the playground to accommodate medically fragile children. Two elements of the playground have been changed.

Mr. Cunningham said the new information was just received this afternoon. The swings and the shade component have been removed. The revised proposal drops the price.

Mr. Weldon said the committee was not directing the elements of the playground, but had asked that the school work with the facilities department to ensure the components are consistent with other playgrounds. Ms. Ortiz said Mr.

Wallack was agreeable with the proposal.

Ms. Allen moved “*to authorize the project to install a new project at Waltersville Elementary.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said Mr. Illingworth reported he was unable to make it to the meeting.

Ms. Pereira referred to the Facilities Committee the contract that was negotiated with Beachside; the dental clinic contract at Tisdale School; the Harvey Hubbell site and contaminants; and the after-school program being run by an outside entity at Central High School.

Ms. Pereira noted issues with the company from Fairfield that was used to provide fill to build Harding High. She said the board was assured that contaminated fill was not used at Harding, but now it has been confirmed that the contaminated fill was transported all over the state.

Mr. Weldon said he would contact Mr. Testani and request that he call the state DEEP and express the board’s concern in order to obtain help in investigating the situation. Ms. Pereira suggested including Mr. Hammond and Mr. Wallack on the information and providing the news articles.

In response to a question, Ms. Pereira said the fill is supposed to be clean and be the buffer between contaminated soil and the new construction.

Mr. Sokolovic referred the issue of a youth lacrosse league to the Facilities Committee. He said it appeared on social media that lacrosse was being played at Park City Magnet without permission.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the board on October 28, 2019