

Monday, December 21, 2020

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held December 21, 2020, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown, Secretary Joseph Lombard, Albert Benejan, Joseph Sokolovic, Sosimo Fabian, Chris Taylor, and Sybil Allen.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Ms. Valle-Shastri reported no one had signed up for public comment.

**APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:**

Ms. Allen moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of December 7, 2020. The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

Ms. Allen moved approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 7, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

**CHAIR REPORT:**

Mr. Weldon reported on the assignment of committees. The Facilities Committee will be chaired by Mr. Weldon, with Mr. Benejan and Mr. Sokolovic members; staff liaisons Robert Hammond and Alan Wallack. The Finance Committee will be

chaired by Mr. Sokolovic, with members being Ms. Brown and Dr. Fabian; Marlene Siegel is the staff liaison. The Governance Committee will be chaired by Mr. Weldon, with members Mr. Lombard and Mr. Sokolovic. Supt. Testani is the staff liaison

The Educational Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee will be chaired by Dr. Fabian, with members Ms. Brown and Mr. Sokolovic. The staff liaison is Dr. Carmen McPherson-Varner. The Personnel Committee will be chaired by Dr. Fabian, with members Ms. Allena and Mr. Weldon. Denise Altro-Dixon will be the staff liaison.

The Students & Families Committee will be chaired by Mr. Benejan, with members Ms. Brown and Mr. Sokolovic, and Herminio Planas as the staff liaison. The Teaching & Learning Committee will be chaired by Mr. Sokolovic, with Mr. Lombard and Ms. Allen members, and Supt. Testani as the staff liaison.

The Contracts Committee will be chaired by Mr. Weldon, with members Mr. Sokolovic and Mr. Lombard. Tony Pires is the staff liaison.

The liaisons to the charter school governing councils will be  
Achievement First/Bridgeport Academy: Albert Benejan.  
Bridge Academy: Dr. Victor Black, unless the superintendent wants to switch him out for someone else.  
Capital Prep Harbor School: Jessica Martinez. Great Oaks Charter School: Dr. Selena Morgan, unless the superintendent wants to make a change. New Beginnings Family Academy: Dr. Melissa Jenkins unless the superintendent wants to make a change. Park City Prep: Ana Souza-Martins, unless the superintendent wants to make a change.

The City Council School Building Committee representatives are Mr. Weldon and Mr. Sokolovic. The representative to CES is Mr. Weldon.

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:**

There were no reports or referrals.

### **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT/AGENDA:**

Supt. Testani thanked Mr. Benejan, Lt. Grech, Sgt. Collazo and the rest of the SROs for the work they did on this year's superintendent's toy drive. He thanked Carli Rocha-Reaes as well. Over 300 toys were distributed to kids. He said he would like to expand the event next year.

The superintendent said he concluded December roundtable discussions with high school students last week. He said he was proud of what the children are doing throughout the pandemic. He said he received positive feedback at the roundtables, including the strides students have made in managing their time and becoming more self-disciplined. He said he encouraged students to keep journals about this phase in their lives. He said the students appreciate the efforts of their teachers and administrators.

Supt. Testani said the plan is to return to the hybrid schedule, except in classrooms that have low enrollment, on January 11th. He said COVID-19 cases reported in Bridgeport are trending downwards.

The superintendent said he wanted to commend the way the Bridgeport Public Schools community and the entire

Bridgeport community has come together and supported each other.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said he is still awaiting a survey to parents on the naming of Columbus School. He said the board could consider something in the interim if it feels strongly about it as there is not much of a feeling one way or another by the school community. He said he was open to suggestions, including holding a public meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested starting a renaming committee and making Columbus School one of the choices. He said a lot of people were standing on false memories and traditions. The superintendent there are usually three options that are brought forward for naming. He suggested, since the neighborhood was traditionally Portuguese, the name of Vasco da Gama be include. Mr. Weldon suggested putting the item on the agenda of the first meeting in January.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the parents' roundtable had representatives from 14 schools and there was a good discussion, including the formation of the District PAC again. He said he suggested the District PAC be handled at a separate meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic urged parents who are watching to get involved because the board can't do it all for you.

Dr. Fabian said he wanted to thank the superintendent for the hard work to make sure our kids are well educated.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the switch to all-remote learning was a better transition for in-person students than back in the spring.

In response to a question, the superintendent said the district was already teaching African-American and Latin American studies in high schools. He said a deeper look will take place during the social studies curriculum renewal. He said the state is requiring that districts offer these courses, but it is not a state graduation requirement. He said he could develop some numbers to present to the board. He said there is currently a half of credit graduation requirement in the district for one of three courses. He said he was proposing that district children take two full credits – one in African-American studies and one in Latin American studies because students need both. With the increase of last year's 9th grade to 25 credits to graduate, there is enough room in schedules over four years. He thanked text messages from Dr. McPherson and Dr. Black for clarifying the current situation.

Ms. Brown said this may be an opportunity to look for staff that reflects our students. The superintendent said he was working to bring a speaker who will do a workshop and follow-up with the administration on diversity and equity. He said this would bring a lot of value to the district.

Mr. Sokolovic said the new curriculum requirement would be added to the agenda of the Teaching & Learning Committee to see how it meshes with the district's offerings. He said expanding to the lower grades should also be looked at. Supt Testani said the next step should be to make the courses full one credit courses, up from the current half credit.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

The next agenda items were on possible agreement with Access Educational Services, Inc., to provide services to support Classical Studies Magnet Academy and a possible agreement with the Carver Foundation, Inc., of Norwalk to provide services for Classical Studies.

Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, said the district makes two grants to Classical Studies with the state Priority Extended School Hours Grant, one for each building, for the provision of voluntary afterschool enrichment activities. The grant requires that at least 40 percent of the grant be allocated to community-based organizations. She said there are two proposed contracts - \$30,000 for the Access organization at the Annex and \$110,000 for the Carver Foundation at the main building – that require board approval.

Lindsay Davis, principal of Classical Studies, said the school used to operate an extended day program with an MOU with the teachers, which was not renewed. That program was replaced by community partners. She said the afterschool programs would be virtual – a Lego league at the Annex building, along with academic support. The partnership with the Carver Foundation would use the school's staff to work with small groups of students and provide academic support and enrichment.

Ms. Brown moved *“to approve the agreement with Access Educational Services, Incorporated, to provide services to support Classical Studies Magnet Academy.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

Ms. Allen moved *“to approve the agreement with the Carver Foundation of Norwalk, Incorporated, to provide services to*

*support Classical Studies Magnet Academy.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

Mr. Benejan thanked Supt. Testani for taking care of the situation at Skane School where things were fixed and the donation for the toys that were given out at Cesar Batalla

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod