

Monday, February 11, 2019 [Corrected]

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held February 11, 2019, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:47 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Jessica Martinez, Secretary Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, Maria Pereira, Dennis Bradley and Ben Walker. Chris Taylor arrived subsequently as noted.

### **RECOGNITIONS:**

Dr. Johnson introduced Caique Machado of John Winthrop School who played "Amazing Grace" on the clarinet. Caique said he started playing in 4th grade and is now in 7th grade.

Dr. Johnson introduced Mia Silba, the winner of the Metro-North poster contest in the pre-K to 3 division. She is a student at Park City Magnet. Mia praised her teacher. Dr. Johnson said the poster would be on the district's website.

Alicia Robinson, director of performing and visual arts, described the Valentines for Veterans project. She said on February 1st a ceremony was held at Curiale School in memory of Senior Airman Lawrence Manlapit III. She said Lawrence, who passed away in a car accident, was the son of a board employee, Dorine Norko. She said Ms. Pereira reached out to her to put together a committee to make the

celebration.

Ms. Robinson said the Valentines for Veterans was an initiative of Congressman Jim Himes, and included student performances, representatives from the American Legion Post 140 and Homes for the Brave. Ms. Robinson introduced the members of Post 140 present and officials from Homes for the Brave. She also thanked Principal Brett Gustafson, Teacher Michele Jimenez, and Principal Diane Soares. Dr. Johnson gave out certificates of appreciation to those involved and noted Lawrence attended Curiale School.

Mr. Taylor arrived at the meeting.

Ms. Pereira said there are proposed new board bylaws to eliminate recognitions during board meetings and replace them with a quarterly two-hour period.

Mr. Weldon said Spanish translation services were available.

### **STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:**

Zahria Nesmith of Bridgeport Military Academy reported on her school. Among the items she highlighted were the color guard's participation in Valentines for Veterans on February 1st, the first science fair held at the school, students who participated in a STEM event with the University of Bridgeport, and 159 acceptances for admission to the school next year.

Jennifer Martinez, a senior at Aero/Hydrospace Engineering School at Fairchild Wheeler, reported on the school's competition in the citywide science fair, tours of the school offered by students, CPR/First Aid courses available on Saturdays for students and adults, and the upcoming

multicultural fair.

Anthony Miller, a senior at the Zoological Science and Biotech School at Fairchild Wheeler, highlighted two science projects which placed at the district's science fair.

Damarys Seda of Harding High highlighted a ceremony for the Quarter 2 honor roll, applications by seniors to Housatonic Community College, events planned for Black History Month, the girls' basketball team's senior night, the boys' basketball team's upcoming game against Bassick and the wrestling team's qualification for the Class M state tournament.

Caye-Jree Rhone of Central High reported on her school. She highlighted the Housatonic Community College application day, the successful anti-bullying convention, and SAT prep for 11th graders.

Jennefer Torres, a Central High senior, highlighted Black History Month events and a blood drive at the school.

Ms. Pereira asked the students if it was important to come to the board and report on what's going on in their schools. She said six board members are proposing new bylaws that would not allow the students to come to meetings and address us. Ms. Martinez and Mr. Weldon said that was not true. Ms. Martinez said Ms. Pereira was a divisive, evil community member. Ms. Pereira said Ms. Martinez was out of line. Mr. Weldon said everyone was out of line.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Maria Pereira thanked those who have protested the efforts by members Weldon, Allen, Illingworth, Allen and Taylor to

terminate the community conversations with Dr. Johnson's support, which was done in violation of the Freedom of Information Act and Robert's Rules of Order. She said four out of the five City Council members who attended the events wrote that they did not feel bashed and urged the board to reinstate them. She said the community conversations were cancelled because Mayor Ganim and the City Council members are up for reelection this year. She said the board had noticed a meeting to rewrite the entire 9000 board series and to give themselves, especially Mr. Weldon, as much as power as you can imagine.

Tiffany Mellers said she headed an anti-bullying effort last year, which included an event at Mayor Ganim's office. She said Classical Studies did an anti-bullying presentation at a community forum for the community. She urged the board to not cancel the community forums.

Helen Olga Losak spoke in favor of continuing the community forums. She said as an educator, the more involved parents are in their children's education the better they will do, and forums help keep parents involved in education.

JoAnn Kennedy said the community forums should continue. She said it was not right to deny the public the right to speak as occurred when Mr. Bradley was chair of the board and held special meetings. She quoted scripture urging people to reason together. She added when people are unreasonable you can't reason with them. She said she had better attendance at meetings than the majority of the board members.

Minerva Antigua Gutierrez, parent of a son at Marin School, said she was opposed to cancelling the community forums.

She said there had always been more than a hundred parents at these events, along with faculty and students. She said it was very important for parents to be able to raise their voices for better funding for schools.

Abigail Tosado, a Harding High student, said it was sad that we face cuts year after year. She said it was discouraging to find that there will no longer be community conversations. She said she feared budget cuts will force more students to walk to school.

Yorelys Cardenas, parent of a daughter at Marin School, said she was opposed to the cancellation of the community forums. She said the budgets assigned for the schools every year were very worrisome. She said students in Bridgeport deserve a better education and her voice could not be taken away.

Crystal Aguirre of the Make the Road Connecticut said she wanted her younger siblings to have a brighter future. She said students had seen music and arts classes not getting funding. She said she was telling the board to continue the conversations to get more funding for our schools.

Jorge Cruz, a member of the Democratic Town Committee for the 131st District and the South End NRZ, said he was present because he was sad to hear the forums had been cancelled. He said he was looking forward to the forum at Batalla School. He said he was respectfully asking the board to reconsider and restore the forums.

Carmen Lopez said the New England Patriots won their sixth Super Bowl recently, but she could not stop thinking about the advertisement from the *Washington Post* celebrating a free press and the free flow of information. She said viewers

were left with a profound message: Democracy dies in darkness. She said in Bridgeport the Freedom of Information Act and the open meetings law is flagrantly violated by the City Council, and now the board is adding its voice to the chorus of darkness by a misguided and transparent attempt to avoid political embarrassment for Mayor Ganim and his rubberstamp City Council.

Sauda Efia Baraka said parents were powerful. She said the Great Cities School Males of Color program had been underway since 2014. She said the effort had been a struggle, but headway is being made with a superintendent that supports the effort. She said two forums have been held, and the next forum is being planned now. She said efforts at mentoring are currently underway in the schools. She asked the board to allow the work to continue for the boys of color.

Albert Benejan, PTSO president at Bassick High, said as a parent he supported all his parents. He said half of his family was African-American, but he was tired of talk about Latinos. He urged the board chair to stop board members from discriminating against people and writing nasty stuff at Latinos such as Ms. Pereira.

Ms. Pereira said she had never write anything disparaging about Hispanic people.

Patrice Roberts, a PTSO president at Fairchild Wheeler, said part of her job was to try to bring the community's parents and families together. She said the energy in this room is very negative at every meeting she attends, which she described as disgusting. She said as a parent she does everything to teach her child how to behave and to talk with intelligence and calmness even when there is conflict. She

said she likes to hear the student reports at the board meetings.

Maria Pires, a Bridgeport resident and taxpayer, said she was parent of three young women educated in the Bridgeport school system. She thanked the great teachers, staff and previous boards for all their hard work. She urged the community forums be reinstated. She objected to board members attacking teachers, employees and women, including Ms. Pereira. She demanded Mr. Taylor resign.

Mr. Bradley said this would be his last general board meeting. He said it has been a tremendous experience serving with all the members, and he appreciated the time and energy spent by his fellow board members. He said he felt ready to serve in the legislature after his experience in serving on the board. He said tolerance was key and urged the young people present to consider public service.

Mr. Bradley said he had framed certificates to hand out to his fellow board members and Dr. Johnson. He said he and Ms. Pereira had often not seen eye to eye, and said if he had offended her he asked for her forgiveness. He said he wanted the best for Bridgeport and would work in Hartford to combat underfunding of education. Ms. Pereira said she would decline to take the certificate because she found Mr. Bradley to be insincere and unauthentic.

Mr. Sokolovic thanked Mr. Bradley, congratulated him on his victory, and said he hoped he does good things in Hartford for the district. He said Mr. Bradley's resignation starts the thirty-day clock on the board replacing him. He urged the process be started as soon as Mr. Bradley's resignation is official.

Ms. Pereira moved “*to add to the agenda discussion and possible action to reinstate the community conversations prior to the approval of board minutes.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker.

Ms. Pereira said the community was clearly in favor of the community conversations, including in comments on social media. She said the board’s job was to do what it’s in the best interests of students and the staff. She said Council member Maria Valle reached out to her about the cancellation.

Mr. Illingworth said he heard from the community members they wanted the board to listen to the community at the events, not the other way around. He asked, when do we stop dividing our city. He said we’re about to ask for \$15 million by insulting and bashing, which is not the way to act.

Mr. Illingworth said the community forums should be restructured to hear from the community.

Ms. Martinez said she was a graduate of Central High and her son would be attending the school as well. She said children were her passion. She said she goes to Hartford and attends state Board of Education meetings. She said the community conversations are not the only place the voice of parents matter. She said she believed in unity and not division. She said board members are not sharing the same message in the community forums. She said it was about respecting those in leadership and in power that we need to provide us more money.

Mr. Sokolovic said we did hear from parents in the four community forums. He said board members only spoke for about ten to twelve minutes total in the four meetings. He

said the meetings were also intended to give parents information, and people's voting records and the size of budgets are knowledge for parents. He said he believed the community forums were cancelled because the public was learning too much and getting too educated. He said the most dangerous thing to the status quo is an educated voter.

The vote on the motion was 5 to 4 in favor, however, failing to achieve a two-thirds majority. Voting in favor were members Walker, Illingworth, Allen, Pereira and Sokolovic. Voting in opposition were members Taylor, Weldon, Martinez, Bradley.

Mr. Bradley left the meeting

#### **APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:**

Ms. Pereira moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of January 16, 2019, with edits. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker.

The motion was approved by a 6-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Walker, Pereira, Sokolovic, Weldon, Martinez, and Illingworth. Mr. Taylor and Ms. Allen abstained.

Mr. Walker moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of January 23, 2019. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Walker, Pereira, Sokolovic, Weldon, Martinez, Illingworth and Allen. Mr. Taylor abstained.

Mr. Walker moved to approve the minutes of the Regular

Meeting of January 28, 2019. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

The motion was approved by a 6-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Pereira, Sokolovic, Weldon, Martinez, Illingworth and Allen. Mr. Taylor and Mr. Walker abstained.

Ms. Pereira moved “*to postpone Item 13-A under New Business*” She said the board has no authority over that item. She said by state statute the state Board of Education and the legislature has the authority. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and approved by a 6-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Illingworth, Sokolovic, Pereira, Walker and Martinez. Mr. Taylor was opposed. Ms. Allen abstained.

### **CHAIR REPORT:**

Mr. Weldon said there would be a meeting with the Bridgeport legislative delegation on February 16th, from 12:00 to 1:00, in the Margaret Morton Government Center. He said a meeting notice would be posted.

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said Dr. Johnson would send someone else to present at the meeting because she will be in transit. Ms. Pereira asked that easy-to-understand financial materials be provided to the delegation.

Dr. Johnson said she was just made aware of Saturday’s meeting. She said the talking points posted on the website would be provided, as well as the positions that have been cut and the composition of the \$16 million budget request. Ms. Pereira urged a document showing the cuts that have been made historically be provided.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:**

Mr. Illingworth reported on the Facilities Committee. He said the committee met on February 4th. There was discussion of goals for the committee and the addition of a security update at every meeting going forward.

Mr. Illingworth said the committee approved the educational specification for the roof at Marin School.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve the educational specifications for the roof at the Marin School as presented by the facilities department.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira said the board really needs to do something for Classical Studies. She said bullying needed to be reviewed in the Facilities Committee on a quarterly basis. She said she would like to receive an update from Mr. Halstead on community gardens. Mr. Illingworth said the items would be addressed.

Mr. Sokolovic referred to the Facilities Committee a look at the expulsion and suspension data by race and gender, broken down by school. He said the data had been provided in the past.

Ms. Martinez reported on the Finance Committee. She said the last meeting was cancelled due to lack of a quorum and the next meeting would be this Wednesday.

Mr. Walker asked if Ms. Martinez had included the MREF increase of \$1 million, which affects our budget request, on the agenda. He noted the board’s budget had suffered a \$36

million decrease in the last three years and urged there be a robust discussion of the matter so board members would be more informed.

Ms. Martinez said Ms. Siegel provided a detailed explanation two meetings ago on the budget, but she did not address MREF. Dr. Johnson said the issue would be discussed at the next Finance Committee meeting.

Mr. Taylor said it was sad that the room emptied out before the budget was being discussed. He said he never hears suggestions of how to solve the budget problems, just criticisms. He said everyone wanted more money, but he never hears anyone asking for an audit to see where the money goes.

Ms. Pereira said she made a referral to the Finance Committee on December 7th about the SROs; she requested an update.

Ms. Pereira said it was too late to readjust the board's budget request because it was put into MUNIS by the deadline. Dr. Johnson said there would be a meeting with Mr. Flatto and Mr. Nkwo before the end of February. She said she did not think anything was in MUNIS yet, but she would double check with Marlene Siegel.

Mr. Weldon said the Governance Committee would meet on February 24th.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Weldon appointed himself chair of the Governance Committee in December 2017 and had only held two meetings, yet out of the blue on Tuesday he sent the board 29 brand-new proposed policies and the removal of 31 current policies. She asked Mr. Weldon to explain how

that was possible and whether the board's attorney worked with him on it. Mr. Weldon said he would not do that now. Ms. Pereira said democracy is in the dark.

Mr. Sokolovic referred the 9000 series bylaws to the Governance Committee, to be done piece by piece, rather than rushed in a whole. He said when the board rushes it makes mistakes that we have to undo time and time again.

Mr. Walker said the Teaching & Learning Committee met on January 15th. The special education department reported there are no new referrals and the district is totally in compliance currently. He said there was a presentation by the Carver Foundation regarding an after-show program servicing 149 students, which is provided free to the district.

Mr. Walker said there was an discussion on the ABCD enrollment hierarchy, which will continue at Thursday's meeting.

Mr. Walker said the RFP for mandated instruction for expelled instruction was also looked at, and Attorney Anastasi is working on the RFP in the area of criminal background checks and has sent Mr. Walker a draft.

Mr. Walker said there was a discussion of Mr. Bradley's suggestion of mandated college prep classes and college application for all high school students as a graduation requirement. He said the district is financially strapped and needs to find a way to hire more guidance counselors. He said there are college and career readiness courses at Central and Harding High Schools, and Bassick will soon offer the same course. The course includes SAT preparation and Naviance software. He said there are opportunities to have college application fees deferred or paid by other

institutions.

Mr. Walker urged members of the public to attend the next committee meeting and Wednesday's Special Meeting where he suggested we might see the murder of democracy by the chair. Mr. Weldon asked Mr. Walker to stop.

Mr. Sokolovic referred an update on science programming by Ms. Bhushan to the committee.

Ms. Pereira said the attorney working on the expelled students RFP is in Florida and unable to come to the board meetings. She said Atty. Lou Tedesco from the state has been sending state statutes regarding criminal background checks and state Board of Education policies and criteria for the hiring of those convicted of crimes. She said she will forward this information to Atty. Anastasi and Mr. Walker.

Mr. Weldon said the Personnel Committee would meet on February 20th.

Ms. Pereira said there had been referrals at the committee for some time, including data on three years' worth of certified teacher turnover by school. Mr. Weldon said he had spoken to Mr. Chester about organizing the data to make it easily understandable.

Ms. Pereira said the hiring policies had been referred sometime ago and had not been worked on in months. Mr. Weldon said he has discussed that with Mr. Chester as well

Mr. Sokolovic said the Students & Families Committee will meet on February 21st.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Ad Hoc Committee to Review and

Revise Policies 5166.1 and 5166.2 met on January 31st. The Berchem Moses opinion on bag searches was discussed, which quoted a non-binding ruling out of Arkansas. He said the committee decided it needed more input from the police department, security, administration, teachers, students and further legal advice.

Mr. Sokolovic moved that the board request and authorize an attorney from Berchem Moses with knowledge of the 4th Amendment constitutional law to appear at the next committee meeting, and be prepared by reading our current policies about search and seizure and metal detectors that are currently in effect and prepare for questions for and against student searches. Mr. Weldon said it sounded like what was sought was more a dialogue than a legal opinion.

Ms. Pereira said the committee approved asking Berchem Moses to come prepared with some revised policies and speak with the committee about the constitutional issues.

Mr. Taylor left the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic said the question remains as to whether we want to try to keep the searches going or restrict them further. Ms. Pereira said this was bigger than a board policy because it involved the United States Constitution. She added that she believed constitutional rights of students have been violated by illegal searches and seizures.

Mr. Illingworth said he understood the purpose was to ask the attorney about his written opinion, which he thought was somewhat vague.

Ms. Pereira said the attorney wrote that the board should let him know if the committee wanted a formal legal opinion,

which he said he was inclined to do. She said on a matter this critical the attorney should do so.

Ms. Pereira moved that *“the board authorize an attorney from Berchem Moses with an expertise in constitutional law to attend our next Security Policy Ad Hoc Committee with a legal opinion regarding the United States constitutional illegal search and seizures.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would reach out to the security department and the police department to listen to the attorney at a meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic moved that *“the committee be empowered by the board to seek additional legal advice in regards to these policies with the unanimous three to zero vote, without consulting the board, just to expedite matters and keep it moving.”* Mr. Weldon said he understood the motion to allow the committee to bypass the board to unanimously vote on the expense of the attorney.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and approved by a 6-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Allen, Weldon, Sokolovic, Walker and Martinez. Ms. Pereira abstained.

### **SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORTS/AGENDA:**

Dr. Johnson said she conferred with Ms. Siegel via e-mail regarding the \$1 million item in MREF and that amount is included in the board’s budget request in MUNIS.

Dr. Johnson said there had been discussion in Connecticut about regionalization of smaller school districts.

Dr. Johnson provided an update on magnet school tuition. She said as of February 5, 2019, \$315,000 had been received out of \$1.4 million outstanding for the 2018-19 school year. She said Stratford, Shelton, Trumbull and Monroe are amongst the districts that have not paid.

Dr. Johnson said Roosevelt School is among the ten national finalists for the middle school Kindness Challenge, out of over 24,000 schools. She said the school had received \$1,000 and with an additional \$4,000 possible at the national level.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said the school districts that had not paid magnet school tuition since the law passed for 2017-18 were Trumbull, Monroe, and Shelton, Stratford. She said as of April 2018, Monroe owed \$78,000; Shelton \$315,000; Stratford \$534,000; and Trumbull \$210,000. She said the district was not paying towns for tuition that have not paid Bridgeport. She said Trumbull owed the district \$201,000 for 2018-19.

Ms. Pereira said for 2017-18 there was over a million dollars outstanding. Dr. Johnson said attorneys are working to resolve the matter.

Ms. Pereira said she noticed in the report that ten more special education students went into out-of-district placements, which is very expensive for the board. She asked Mr. Walker to talk about the issue with Mr. DiDonato at the Teaching & Learning Committee. Ms. Pereira said there are 408 special education students out of district.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she visited the detention center early in the fall, but classes were cancelled

that day. She said Mr. DiDonato had visited many times, but she would cycle back and visit again.

Dr. Johnson said Michael Zirkel was present to discuss the 2019 capital plan. She said she put the five-year capital plan in the board's packet and had asked Mr. Illingworth to look at it in the Facilities Committee.

Mr. Zirkel said input was solicited from all school principals and the building operations department. The projects are ranked in priority order.

Ms. Pereira said under board policy the capital plan had to be submitted to the city by January 30th. Ms. Pereira asked why the Jewett Avenue property is listed on the plan for 2019 despite the City Council's failure to act. Mr. Zirkel said Classical Studies was still in need of a building. Ms. Pereira said the capital plan did not match the five-year plan.

Ms. Pereira said it was surprising that some of the new schools, such as Batalla and Barnum, Waltersville, require lots of work.

Mr. Zirkel said the five-year maintenance plan breaks down projects by school; the elevators were lumped together for the capital plan for the City Council's purposes.

Ms. Pereira asked why Aquaculture's work was spread over five different years.

Mr. Zirkel said he could not speak to the deadline for submission. In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said the matter did not come out of committee. Mr. Illingworth said the Facilities Committee did not meet in November and December.

Dr. Johnson said items on the one-year plan are found in the five-year plan also. Mr. Zirkel said he was not aware if the city had requested submission of the one-year plan even though the deadline had passed.

Dr. Johnson said she was requesting approval of the one-year plan.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “*to approve the capital plan for fiscal year 2019.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

The motion was approved by a 6-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Illingworth, Martinez, Allen, Walker and Sokolovic. Ms. Pereira abstained. She said it didn’t look right to her.

Dr. Johnson said she was requesting a two-year extension of the Delta-T contract. She said the one-year contract would expire in May. She said previously there were questions about the survey of principals. She said she reached out to principals and there was a one hundred percent return rate on the survey, and the results are similar to what they were two weeks ago.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “*to approve the Delta-T contract, a two-year extension.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she followed-up the Delta-T survey with an e-mail to principals expressing the importance of participating. She said she read through all the survey responses and there were no glaring issues that surfaced.

The motion was approved by a 6-0 vote. Voting in favor were

members Weldon, Illingworth, Martinez, Pereira, Sokolovic and Allen. Mr. Walker abstained.

The next item was on the school calendar for 2019-20. Dr. Johnson said the calendar was shared with the BEA and BCAS. She said there were no significant changes from the current year.

Ms. Pereira moved “*to approve the school calendar for 2019-20.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

Ms. Martinez moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen. The motion was approved by a 4-3 vote. Voting in favor were members Allen, Weldon, Illingworth and Martinez. Ms. Pereira, Mr. Walker and Mr. Sokolovic were opposed.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the board on March 11, 2019*