

Tuesday, May 28, 2019

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 28, 2019, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Secretary Joseph Sokolovic, Hernan Illingworth, Sybil Allen, LaMar Kennedy, Maria Pereira, and Joseph Lombard.

Mr. Weldon asked for a moment of silence for the passing of Dr. Johnson's father, community activist Laurayne Farrar-James, and Al Berarducci, retired school security director.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Dr. Michael Watson said he was appearing as a voice of five administrators at Fairchild Wheeler to ask the board to reconsider the decision to eliminate two administrative positions at Fairchild Wheeler. He said the schools have contributed revenue to the costs of educating Bridgeport students since 2013. He said the successes of the school are the result of the five administrators present tonight. He said because students choose to come to the school it needs to be better than every high school, public and private, to attract students from everywhere. He said if the state rescinded the interdistrict magnet status the amount the city would have to pay to the state would far exceed the cost of two administrative positions.

Marge Hiller said she had spoken all year about the importance of reinstating the School Volunteer Association(SVA) into the budget. She said it was unbelievable to the 800 volunteers and others that there are still millions of dollars that need to be cut from the already decimated budget. She said the SVA board members and the volunteers have raised enough money to continue to work of the SVA for one more year. She said it was highly unlikely this amount of money can be raised again. She said all of us will continue to lobby local and state legislators for equitable funding.

Patricia Roberts said she was here to address the elimination of the vice principals at Fairchild Wheeler. She said collectively the team of experts at Fairchild Wheeler created a vibrant environment as demonstrated by the statistics of SAT scores, graduation rates and college acceptance rates. She said on average Fairchild Wheeler earns \$6,000 per student from state grants and out-of-district students. She said we've been told there is not a detailed expenditure report per school and the chief financial officer won't respond to e-mails. She said she had told by a board member that the suburban parents don't even exist to her.

Maria Aljoburi said she was an interdistrict out-of-town parent who was fighting for all students in Fairchild Wheeler because the school is working with a 98 percent graduation rate and an 85 percent college admission rate. She objected to saying our voices don't matter when we have 30 percent out-of-district students in the school. She said the school elevates property values, gives people hope and provides the students with a future and a way to get to college. She said the principals should be able to manage their own funds like other magnet schools in the country.

Ondrea Moore, a parent of a Fairchild Wheeler student, said it would be devastating to eliminate the assistant principals, particularly because the principals constantly enforce attendance rules, help teachers and have conversations with students. She said she was concerned who would be in charge of the school if the three principals were out sick or unavailable. She said her child previously attended Bassick, but is doing much better at Fairchild Wheeler.

Janinne Berlin, mother of an Aerospace School student, said the petition to preserve Fairchild Wheeler as it is has 1,100 signatures. She said the board announced an intention to let community members know beforehand when a cut was going to be acted on, yet a special meeting was held one week later with cuts voted that were not posted on the agenda. She said the Fairchild Wheeler campus makes Bridgeport a profit according to the state Department of Education. She said New Haven and Hartford are not meeting recruiting goals for their magnet schools and they are paying for those deficits with loss of state funding.

Deborah Carr, a Fairfield resident whose daughter attends Fairchild Wheeler, said her daughter chose to go to the school despite the perfectly good schools in Fairfield. She said her daughter appreciates the challenging STEM environment and the diversity in the school. She said as a PTSO treasurer said she has worked with amazing parents from Bridgeport and surrounding towns. She asked that resources not be taken away from Fairchild Wheeler. She said Bridgeport was in danger of losing magnet status for the schools. She said the students from surrounding communities have good schools to go to, but Bridgeport students and the whole community will be hurt.

Jiovanna Hernandez said Ms. Furnari, the assistant principal, has been a mentor to her and someone she looks up to. She said her position is crucial and if the assistant principals were eliminated it would hurt students like herself.

Nicole Degusti, a senior at Fairchild Wheeler, said the guidance, expertise and hard work of the administrators are the reason the students are doing so well at Fairchild Wheeler. She said the removal of the assistant principals will have a negative effect on the whole campus. She said destroying interdistrict enrollment hurts and damages a promising school for all students.

Xiomara Hernandez said removing the position of Mr. Henry, the assistant principal, will impact the school negatively. She said Mr. Henry was valuable in the past in helping her fill out a 504 form.

Mary Platano said she was a resident of Bridgeport who has tutored students that attend Fairchild Wheeler. She said she previously taught at Kolbe Cathedral and it was unfathomable to her that the board would consider cutting the positions, particularly because the Fairchild Wheeler does not even have department heads. She said the administrators are doing more than what they are being paid, noting their success and drive. She said her taxes were being well spent at the school and Fairchild Wheeler was the one thing she was proud of in Bridgeport.

Shinair Francis, a New York City public school teacher, said she moved to Bridgeport from the Bronx about five years ago. She said everyone has not had the same positive experience at Fairchild Wheeler that other parents mentioned. She said she was the guardian of her younger brothers who attended the school and she found Dr. Watson

to be fair, despite disagreements with him. She said she did not have the same experience with Ms. Furnari. She said she believed cuts had been made to every school in Bridgeport and the cuts should be equitable for all students.

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

Ms. Allen moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of May 9, 2019. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and approved by a 6-0 vote.

Voting in favor were members Pereira, Sokolovic, Weldon, Illingworth, Allen and Kennedy. Mr. Lombard abstained.

Ms. Pereira moved to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of May 13, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

### **CHAIR REPORT:**

Ms. Pereira asked that the board as a group send a fruit basket to the home of Dr. Johnson because there was confusion that resulted in a floral arrangement not being sent.

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

Mr. Illingworth said the next Facilities Committee meeting was scheduled for June 3rd, but it may be changed due to a conflict.

Ms. Pereira urged Mr. Illingworth to move forward with the agenda item to create a safety plan for Bassick moving to the East Side. She said even though there was a lot going on with the issue she suggested the planning continue.

Ms. Pereira said she met with the point persons who have the best community gardens in the schools. She said they do not want a policy created for gardens, but asked that the board support and promote gardening clubs.

Ms. Pereira requested a follow-up on the Parent Center.

Mr. Weldon noted the Finance Committee chair was not present.

Ms. Pereira said the board still had 30 days to find \$7.5 million in cuts. She said we have already made \$40 million in cuts in three years and \$51 million in four years because we have not received money from the mayor, the City Council and the state. She said increased funding for magnet schools being discussed at the state level would only be about \$11 million for the whole state.

Mr. Weldon said the Governance Committee meeting was preempted by the special meeting on the budget. Ms. Pereira said Mr. Weldon had held two meetings in 18 months. She said it was critical that the bus transportation policies be updated.

Mr. Sokolovic reported on the Teaching & Learning Committee meeting of May 22nd. He said the College Board SAT quotes were discussed and will be presented at the next regular board meeting. He said there was also a presentation to create an in-house program to bring back some special education students into the district and provide them with a less restricted environment.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Harding High ABCD early learning center contract extension, which will include a new summer

program, was discussed and will be presented on the next regular agenda.

Mr. Sokolovic said reverse suspensions were also discussed and the committee is split and not ready to move forward with a pilot program at this time. He said it would be on the agenda of the June meeting.

Mr. Weldon said the Personnel Committee would meet over the coming week to interview for the position of director of Central Magnet.

Ms. Pereira said her request to see teacher turnover data needs to be addressed and she was stunned to hear it is not available yet. She said Fairchild Wheeler has had significant teacher turnover. She said the positions are difficult to fill because they are STEM positions. She said the hiring policies have not been touched since October 2018.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Students & Families Committee met on May 16th. An update was received from Ms. Janet Brown-Clayton and Mr. Benejan about the Parent Convention, which will be held tomorrow. He said expenditures on parental engagement by school was also discussed. He said this year the majority of school PACs have spent over 95 percent of their parent engagement funds. He said he expected this to become next year's starting point and become the norm.

Mr. Sokolovic said the committee approved unchanged boilerplate language to healthy food exemptions and commodity bids.

Mr. Sokolovic reported on the Ad Hoc Committee Great Cities School/Males of Color. He said the committee met on

May 14th and the community forum was discussed. The forum has been postponed to June 6th at Batalla School. He said the forum was postponed due to issues with promotion and the speaker.

Ms. Pereira asked that a special finance meeting not be scheduled on that night.

Ms. Pereira said she wanted to remind the committee chairs that per the board's goals and objectives all end-of-year reports from committees and how it tied into a strategic pillar were due at the first regular meeting in June.

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

John DiDonato, chief of specialized education reform, who was filling in for Dr. Johnson said he had nothing to report.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

John Gerrity, nutrition director, and Nicola Hall, assistant director, were present on agenda items related to nutrition.

Mr. Gerrity recommended the board vote to allow exemptions to the healthy food certification for after-school events.

In response to a question, Mr. Gerrity said the minutes of the approval have to be provided to the state.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *"to have the nutrition department sign the healthy food certification exemption for beverages to allow for the exemptions for beverages to be served."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and approved by 7-0 vote



Voting in favor were members Pereira, Sokolovic, Kennedy, Weldon, Allen and Lombard. Mr. Illingworth abstained.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve to have the nutrition department sign an exemption to the healthy food certification application to allow for exemptions for food items to be served at after-school events.”*

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

The next agenda item was issuing solicitation for USDA commodity food processing bids for the 2019-20 school year.

Ms. Pereira noted Mr. Gerrity said at the committee that pollock is being added to the bids. In response to a question, Mr. Gerrity said there some additional items on different categories that we may not have had last year. He said there were no changes in the boilerplate specifications.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve that we go out to bid for the commodities as presented by the nutrition department.”*

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

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the board on August 26, 2019*