

Monday, October 25, 2021

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held October 25, 2021, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science and Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown, Secretary Joseph Lombard, Joseph Sokolovic, and Albert Benejan.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Weldon requested a moment of silence and extended official condolences for Frank Dexter, a custodian at Batalla School, and second grade teacher Kimberly Wilson from Multicultural Magnet, who both passed away.

Mr. Lombard moved *“to lower the district’s flags to half-staff in memory for the balance of the week until the end of the day on Friday.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

Mr. Benejan said Bassick High School held at an amazing Hispanic Heritage event. He thanked for Mr. Testani for attending.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

JoAnn Kennedy said it was good to see the student representatives back at the table. She said in the past the public has been able to speak freely during public comments, but now the agenda says to stick to agenda

items. She said she believed this needed to be changed to allow the public to speak about their concerns.

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

Mr. Benejan moved to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of October 12, 2021. The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown. The motion was approved by a 4-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Brown, Sokolovic, and Benejan. Mr. Lombard abstained.

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

Ms. Brown said the Ad Hoc Branding Committee's meeting was postponed to the third Wednesday in November.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Finance Committee will meet on Wednesday.

Supt. Testani said the student representatives would like to refer the student uniform policy to the Governance Committee.

Mr. Benejan said the Students & Families Committee met on October 21st, which included a lot of discussion about PACs and PTSOs and action plans. The next meeting will be on November 18th.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Teaching & Learning Committee met and covered two items, one of which is coming up on the agenda. The other item was an item from the superintendent to bring items through the committee for vetting before coming to the full board.

Supt. Testani said current board policies require that any new course development at the high schools needs to be approved through the committee and the full board prior to implementation.

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

Supt. Testani said Read Aloud Day last week was a huge success, with over 300 readers in K to 2 classrooms. He thanked Joyce Goodwin and Carli Rocha-Reaes for their work in organizing the event.

The superintendent said Student Success Day was held on October 6th. Currently, over 3,000 high school students have created their success plans.

Supt. Testani recognized Ron Rapice and Principal Melissa Cordova, along with students from Discovery and Marin Schools, for their participation in a radio debate. He said both teams did a great job.

The superintendent said all classroom and cafeteria air purification systems have been installed. Other common areas are being done and are almost completed. The final phase will cover offices.

Supt. Testani said a letter went out over the weekend on social interactions of students when returning to full in-person learning from a virtual world. He said a cyber threat was made. After a deep investigation by the police, it was determined the same threat was made against schools outside of the state as well. It seemed to originate in Colorado and was traced back to teens in Tennessee, and there is no threat to Bridgeport schools.

The superintendent noted a news piece where dads in Shreveport, Louisiana, have taken on a role to be present in schools at arrival and dismissal times. He said he has had discussion with the mayor's office about soliciting dads in the community to do the same sort of thing.

Mr. Benejan said three SROs are not enough for 37 schools. Supt. Testani said we are now up to four SROs designated to the division, along with a sergeant. He said he is going to meet with the police chief on Wednesday, but unfortunately some of this are the ramifications about a group that was adamant about getting rid of SROs, which was also a nationwide approach and was joined by Senator Murphy. He said he, Lt. Grech, and Sgt Collazo argued and lobbied to make sure the model being used in Bridgeport continued. He said the SROs were working on behalf of our children and teens, and we all should have stood up in support. He noted the police department's ranks have been depleted.

Mr. Benejan said parents want our kids safe. He said he didn't want it said that the board doesn't care about our kids, especially if something bad happens.

Supt. Testani said he has been lobbying for five months for additional support from the SRO division, but it just hasn't happened. He said he would love to see parents lobby the mayor, the police commission, and the City Council. He said police have not been in schools since 2012 and we have the lowest arrest rate of any municipality in the state.

Ms. Brown said her hope was that we could create something with students such as a training session to address the cyber threats to schools that are on social media. She said students need to learn that even sharing

such items on social media sets off alarms with peers and parents.

The superintendent said the item was reported by a Central student to a teacher, who reported it immediately to the administration. He said there were discussions with Capt. Blackwell of the police department to take some proactive actions. The superintendent said this was handled well by the students and less so by the adults.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the grant for SROs ran out and the city picked up the 50 percent the board was supposed to contribute. He said additional grants have been submitted in the area of school safety. He said he did not anticipate at this time an attempt to charge the board for the SROs. Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to see the police department treat school dismissals like it does the events at the Amphitheater for out-of-town people leaving the city.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

The next item was on a curriculum renewal purchase with Actively Learn. Dr. Melissa Jenkins, chief academic officer, presented. The request was to purchase high school English textbooks, with all items being presented subject to available funding.

Dr. Jenkins said in 2018 textbook licenses expired for teachers and students, and they have been without a formal digital resource since then. She said students need a core program to support ELA learning.

Dr. Jenkins said Actively Learn is currently used in middle school ELA courses and social studies, as well as in high

school social studies. She said the ELA teachers across the district reviewed the Actively Learn program and the feedback was positive. She said there are multiple supports for ELL in Actively Learn, including audio translations. There is a wide variety of texts based on race, ethnicity and gender. Students can choose material geared towards their personal interests.

Dr. Jenkins said the recommendation is a four-year access license. The program is completely digital, with no paper products, at the cost of \$396,610, which includes professional development.

Dr. Jenkins said the company has agreed to give an extension at the two-year price. She said the savings on a six-year contract would be \$28,987. She said because digital products change so much the four-year access is being recommended based on previous experience with a math program purchase.

Dr. Jenkins said Springfield, Massachusetts; Stamford; and the Connecticut state vocational high school system have adopted Actively Learn as a product, along with other districts in the country with similar demographics to Bridgeport.

Dr. Jenkins said all high school students have one-to-one devices so the program will support the current technological model. It supports multilingual learners and special education students.

Dr. Jenkins said the IT department indicated the program could be activated within 48 hours and the company will do so without a purchase order.

Mr. Benejan thanked Dr. Jenkins for the information.

In response to a question about transitioning to digital textbooks, Angel Serrano, a student representative, said he found digital texts to be up to date and less boring than printed textbooks. Avery Flechtner, another student representative, said the digital learning is much more portable and makes life easier. Joshua Fraser, a student rep, said he found English more engaging in middle school because of the digital resources. Ruth Cruz, a student representative, said she prefers printed textbooks.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said the high school curriculum renewal has been delayed for fiscal reasons. She said we will be looking at paper graphic novels which young people are interested in according to teachers, as well as vocabulary program that will be paper-based. She said anthologies from the previous program should still be available at the schools except for Fairchild Wheeler.

Ms. Brown noted students learn differently and it is good to hear there is another option.

Mr. Benejan moved “*to approve the contract for curriculum renewal with Actively Learn as reported by Dr. Jenkins.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

Mr. Weldon said student reports have not been part of the agenda for some time. He said they now done at quarterly forums. He said he would let the students do their reports tonight.

Joshua Fraser, a junior at Harding High, reported on his school. Among the items he highlighted were 238 seniors

taking the SAT test; 87 percent of juniors participating in SAT; presentations given by colleges to students; and the PTSO's work with Bridgeport Rescue Mission for Harding families.

Angel Serrano of Bridgeport Military Academy reported on his school. Among the items he highlighted were college visits to the school; a successful bullying prevention month; a partnership with the fire department to strengthen fire science and EMT classes; the upcoming report card conferences; and Civil Air Patrol cadets being promoted.

Layla Wilson, a senior at the Biotech School at Fairchild Wheeler, reported on her school. There was a campus-wide pink out day in solidarity with breast cancer survivors. A fall festival is planned for November 13th. Canned goods have been collected to provide to a local food bank. A pep rally is planned for December.

Avery Flechtner of Fairchild Wheeler said the IT School's National Honor Society pushed efforts to promote anti-bullying, with students wearing orange.

Ruth Cruz of Bassick reported on her school. She said she was the president of National Honor Society in her school and there are plans for fundraisers, including on cancer awareness, for various charities.

Saratue Aregna of Central High said October has been a busy month for the school, including Hispanic Heritage Month; a fundraiser for the National Honor Society; Unity Day for anti-bullying; a breast cancer fundraiser; and a successful dance.



Mr. Benejan thanked the students for their reports. He said he would like to have the students report at the beginning of the next meeting.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the board on November 22, 2021*