

Monday, November 23, 2020

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held November 23, 2020, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:57 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown, Secretary Joseph Lombard, Jessica Martinez, Albert Benejan, Joseph Sokolovic, Chris Taylor, and Sybil Allen. Dr. Sosimo Fabian was subsequently selected to serve on the board and joined the meeting.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Ms. Rita Valle-Shastri reported no one had signed up to speak.

**APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:**

Ms. Allen moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of November 17, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and approved by a 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Brown, Sokolovic, Lombard, Benejan, Martinez, and Allen. Mr. Taylor abstained.

Ms. Brown moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of November 19, 2020. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and approved by a 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Brown, Sokolovic, Lombard, Benejan, Martinez, and Allen. Mr. Taylor abstained.

Ms. Allen moved approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of November 9, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and approved by a 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Brown, Sokolovic, Lombard, Benejan, Martinez, and Allen. Mr. Taylor abstained.

### **CHAIR REPORT:**

The first item was nominations to fill the current board vacancy.

Mr. Sokolovic nominated Dr. Sosimo Fabian for the position.

Mr. Benejan nominated Jose Lopez for the position.

Mr. Weldon asked Ms. Valle-Shastri to send an e-mail to each member to receive their vote. The members without access to e-mail tonight were instructed to vote orally.

Ms. Allen voted orally for Dr. Fabian. Ms. Martinez voted orally for Dr. Fabian. She added every applicant was an amazing candidate and urged them to run for a board vacancy. Mr. Taylor voted orally for Dr. Fabian.

E-mail votes for Dr. Fabian were Mr. Lombard, Mr. Sokolovic, Mr. Weldon, and Ms. Brown. Mr. Benejan voted for Mr. Lopez.

Dr. Fabian was elected to the vacant board position.

Mr. Taylor left the meeting.

Mr. Weldon administered the oath of office to Dr. Fabian. He said he would file an affidavit with the city clerk's office stating he did that.

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

Mr. Sokolovic said the Educational Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee met on November 16th. Future discussion items were discussed, which will be all-encompassing because equity issues are embedded in almost everything. The student-to-staff ratio was discussed in terms of demographics; disproportionality was found because 74 percent of teachers are Caucasian; 12 percent of staff is African-American. The Hispanic student body is 51 percent of the district and 11 percent of the staff. He said the committee would be looking into hiring practices and what needs to be done in the future.

Supt. Testani said there was a concerted effort in the last two summers under his administration to hire a more representative administrative workforce. He said a lot of work statewide has to be done statewide to grow Hispanic leaders. He noted the pipeline to administration is through the teaching ranks. He said Bridgeport was the first district in the state to have a teacher residency program, which is a collaboration with Sacred Heart University. He said the district is working with the Leadership Academy out of New York in the area of equity and diversity.

Mr. Sokolovic said he wanted to caution the board to not compare the district to how we're doing against the state, but to set the bar even higher.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Finance Committee met on November 18th. There is increased financial pressure on the nutrition department due to the shutdown. Legislative and financial priorities were also discussed; areas where advocacy is needed on the state and federal levels. He said most of the issues apply to all districts, so there should be no problem getting a coalition together for advocacy.

Mr. Lombard referred studying continuing the online participation of board members in meetings remotely even when in-person meetings resume to the Governance Committee.

Ms. Brown referred to the Governance Committee a look at a proposal to allow members of the public to participate in board committees.

Mr. Benejan said the Students & Families Committee met on November 19th. Discussion included District PAC bylaws; action plans by PACs and PTSOs and the expenditure of parent engagement funds; the parent convention; a bullying report which indicated a lack of bullying; and the comments of Mr. Planas on the ability of parents to contact executive directors if principals do not address their concerns.

Ms. Martinez suggested the board find a way that parents and students can participate in the Students & Families Committee, perhaps in an advisory capacity. Mr. Weldon said one way to do it would be to permit up to three members of the public to be non-voting members of each committee, with the committee chair choosing the representatives.

Ms. Martinez suggested revisiting the idea of adding student voices to each committee.

Supt. Testani said he has a monthly roundtable with high school students to gather information, listening to their concerns and what they like about their schools. He said parent roundtables will continue. He suggested a nonvoting ad hoc committee of the board be considered.

Mr. Sokolovic said the board had mechanisms for participation by students through student representatives. He suggested they be reactivated.

Mr. Benejan said he would be glad to welcome students and parents at the Students & Families Committee.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Teaching & Learning Committee met on November 17th. There was a special education update, along with a review of social-emotional learning and a great presentation by Mr. Young.

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

The superintendent congratulated and welcomed Dr. Fabian. He said legislative priorities were submitted through the mayor's office; last year there were three meetings with the legislative delegation. He said the state Department of Education is well aware of the district's effort to be fully in-person since the first day of school. He said he believed the district was improving every day in the new educational delivery methods.

Supt. Testani said the district has been invited to be part of the state advisory committee on chronic absenteeism due to its work in this area. He said the district made the largest gains statewide in chronic absenteeism with English Language Learners.

The superintendent said the district was fully remote beginning today. Teachers can work remotely from home today and tomorrow before transitioning into remote teaching from their classrooms. He said the standards for remote learning will be higher than in the spring. He said principals get a report on teachers' usage of Teams and they are looking at that closely.

Supt. Testani said planning is going on for phasing in in-person instruction back in January.

In response to a question about rising numbers of COVID in the district, the superintendent said the district is obligated to report any positive cases among students or staff. He said if cases continue to rise, it will be attributable to community spread, not school spread, which has been the case through the health department's contact tracing.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the district had worked very hard to overcome challenges with devices and connectivity. He said in the spring a great number of paper packets had to be prepared, which is no longer the case. He said almost 700 families had received Wi-Fi service through Altice and hotspots have been given out to families that did not qualify for Altice's program. He said there is work with donors to provide Wi-Fi access at the Greene's housing project and up near Trumbull Gardens. He said parents have expressed concerns about child care when they have to work, so the first chance to bring kids back to school would retrieve stress on parents.

Mr. Sokolovic said a few months ago he initiated an agenda item to rename Columbus School. The superintendent said the survey of the parents will go out next week and a survey

of the staff was done. He said staff response was 19 to 17 against changing the name. The parent survey was delayed because the school had to go remote before the rest of the district.

Mr. Sokolovic said the board could step up and suspend the policy, if need be, and rename it as a placeholder. He said the tradition is based on learning who the man used to be and not as the man is today. He said the name brings shame to our schools.

Ms. Martinez said she believed parents should be surveyed about their feelings and the challenges they are facing.

Supt. Testani said last Saturday's drive-through community event was extremely well attended. Community partners provided resources for parents and students; some brand-new winter coats were distributed. He thanked Ms. Rocha-Reaes for her work on the event.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said asphalt plants have closed for the season. He said Mr. Nadrizny, director of public facilities, indicated he would look at temporary repairs.

Mr. Weldon said there was a discussion around developing a work plan for the board for the coming year and performance metrics for the superintendent. There was a discussion among the board of the scheduling of workshops in this area. Mr. Weldon suggested Saturday morning sessions. Mr. Lombard said more time was needed for goal-setting and less for the superintendent's evaluation.

Mr. Weldon suggested a series of two-hour sessions on upcoming Saturdays. He said he thought board members had expressed an interest in establishing its goals. Supt.

Testani said the district's goals and objectives is looked at year to year. He said the 900-page document that sits on a shelf is not what typically works in school districts. He said he could provide templates for boards of education and their goals.

Ms. Martinez said she believed the board decided long ago to establish goals, which would also help the superintendent. She said she wanted to make her year on the board count. Mr. Weldon suggested we look at what the board wants to have accomplished over the next year.

Mr. Lombard and Ms. Brown suggested incorporating some of the ideas presented by candidates for the board tonight in their interviews.

Ms. Martinez suggested the board consider an in-person meeting. The superintendent said the state restrictions on gatherings would not apply to this situation. He said the Central High library would be large enough. Mr. Lombard said he would have to participate remotely. Mr. Sokolovic said he would like the remote option as well. Ms. Martinez suggested perhaps the first meeting be done in-person.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the board on December 7, 2020*



