

Monday, December 6, 2021

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held December 6, 2021, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science and Technology Educational Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown, Secretary Joseph Lombard, Joseph Sokolovic, Albert Benejan, Sybil Allen, Michael Maccarone, Christine Baptiste-Perez, and Erika Castillo.

Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

Student representatives Avery Flechtner of Fairchild Wheeler/IT, Ruth Cruz of Bassick High, Latonia Ferguson of Central High, and Aleena Khan of Fairchild Wheeler/Aero were present.

The next agenda item was recognition of the end of the 2017-21 term of the board. Mr. Weldon recognized Sosimo Fabian, Chris Taylor, Jessica Martinez, and Hernan Illingworth. Dr. Fabian was present.

Mr. Weldon presented a plaque to Dr. Fabian from the board in appreciation for his dedication.

Dr. Fabian said it was learning experience to serve on the board. He said he was proud of Bridgeport and proud to educate our children here. He welcomed the new board.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

JoAnn Kennedy said she hoped the new board would change things. She said as the board should do the right thing and she admonished the board and the superintendent to do the right thing for the children. She said she hoped to hear from the student representatives tonight.

Dasha Spell, a Bridgeport parent, said her daughter was a student-athlete in middle school. She objected to questions to her that had nothing to do with basketball, including her income, whether she would make donations, and her employment. She said as a licensed therapist she had been addressing issues related to active shooting and bomb threats in Norwalk, Hamden, and New Haven. She said the district did not have a plan for this.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Mr. Benejan moved to approve the minutes of the November 22, 2021, Regular Meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and approved by an 8-0 vote.

Voting in favor were members Weldon, Lombard, Allen, Brown, Sokolovic, Castillo, Baptiste-Perez, and Benejan. Mr. Maccarone abstained.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:

Ms. Brown reported on the Ad Hoc Districtwide Branding Initiative Committee. Students are submitting suggestions for logos.

Mr. Sokolovic referred security protocols to the Facilities Committee. He said the board could be informed in

executive session about protocols surrounding the things mentioned in public comment.

Ms. Flechtner said her school had not scheduled a single drill so far this year and she requested this be looked at. She added that she did not feel she could go to a counselor about these issues. Ms. Brown said the board has discussed social media etiquette and creating a safe space for students to report such incidents.

Mr. Weldon acknowledged the presence of Jessica Martinez. He presented her with a plaque from the board in recognition for her service as a member of the board from 2017 to 2021.

Ms. Martinez said she has served Bridgeport all of her life and she would remain dedicated to the change we need. She noted her son was a senior at Bassick and she urged everyone link together and put the children first.

Mr. Benejan said the next meeting of the Students & Families Committee will take place on December 16th.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Supt. Testani said over 300 two-day family meal kits were given out prior to Thanksgiving, along with 300 fleece blankets, almost 400 coats, 50 school supply kits, and 50 Shop Rite gift cards to families that were identified by school social workers.

The superintendent said on December 22nd toys from the current toy drive will be distributed.

Supt. Testani said Billy Blanks Jr held six live events in the district's high schools to kick off a promotion on wellness.

He said the events were exciting and the students really enjoyed themselves. There is a free online platform of activities that students signed up for.

The superintendent said the Lockett Foundation is providing virtual twelve-week courses for juniors, with 80 students registered. The district is working with the foundation and the Westchester Knicks, which is playing this season in Bridgeport, to host a game night or day at Webster Bank Arena for Bridgeport schools.

Supt. Testani said there was a trade fair at Central High last week, with representatives from union trades, with 120 high school students hearing presentations.

The superintendent said Bridgeport Caribe Youth Leaders completed their Success 2.0 first session. Students presented action plans.

Supt. Testani said the MAX mentoring program has kicked off in the high schools. The home visiting program, approved by the board, in conjunction with RYASAP has started. He noted the public attendance billboards visible on Route 8 and I-95 to promote good attendance.

The superintendent said there are upcoming events on FAFSA in-person at the Sheehan Center and virtually.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Benejan moved “*to move Item A to the bottom of the agenda.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda items were discussion and possible approval of subaward agreements between Bridgeport Public Schools and Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership for Barnum Elementary School and Bassick High School.

Nadira Clarke, director of grants, said the board received the draft documents for Barnum and Bassick. She said the schools received School improvement Grants and submitted proposals to the state. The services qualify under improving climate and culture.

Ms. Clarke said both contracts are essentially for the same thing, wraparound services. She said board approval was requested for approval of \$190,184 for a subcontract for Bassick and \$149,215 for Barnum with RYASAP.

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said the contracts had not been vetted by the Contracts Committee. He said a similar agreement was approved a few meetings ago and it was a time-sensitive matter.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke said the provision on binding arbitration was not discussed with the city attorney. Mr. Sokolovic suggested that be looked at in future contracts due to the potential for legal costs.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke said the approved start date was July 7, 2021, and it has been delayed due to the state review of the proposal. She said notice of award has just been received.

The superintendent said this is routine with the state that monies are delayed in awarding, but services are expected to begin. He said the district should have received this notice

prior to July 1st. He said because RYASAP has similar contracts doing similar work at other schools the principals thought it would be important to meet the needs at their schools.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke said the notice of approval from the state was received in the middle of November.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez moved *“to table this to next month for further consideration.”* Mr. Sokolovic seconded the motion.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke said a delay will cause some issues with reporting. She said the state is expecting, despite the delayed notice of award, the project is going to go for several months to 6/30/22. She said there would be issues with explaining the delay to the state.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez urged the approval be delayed for a month. The superintendent said historically the districts ask for more funding and the state believes we should use the money awarded immediately.

Christine Booth, principal of Barnum School, said she understood the need for more information. She said having two additional fulltime staff members for conflict resolution allows her to increase the amount of time students are in the classroom. She said this creates urgency because we are in the fourth month of school.

Dr. Joseph Raiola, principal of Bassick High, said the pandemic has done a lot to students, and the wraparound services will provide four additional staff members. Students will receive additional social work and restorative work. He

said the staff members will help alleviate current work regarding climate done by other staff members.

Shaena Taylor of Barnum School said she loves her job, her kids and Bridgeport. She said the additional resources could really be used at Barnum School. She said teachers in the building were relieved to hear this program would be available.

Ms. Brown said she applauded the efforts being put forth for the kids. She asked that going forward there be more care with the process. Mr. Weldon noted this occurred right before Thanksgiving and there was not time for a committee meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was comfortable moving forward with the contracts.

The motion to table the matter failed by a unanimous vote.

Supt. Testani said if previous similar contracts were not entered into and there was no urgency it would not be before the full board tonight. He said similar agreements were approved for Harding and Marin.

Marc Donald, executive director of RYASAP, said conversations about program began before the pandemic. He said the program is based on independently raised funds by RYASAP. He said the urgency of the project became greater due to the pandemic. He said we're prepared to begin as soon as the contract is signed.

Mr. Benejan moved "*to approve the agreement related to Barnum Elementary School.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

Mr. Benejan moved “*to approve the agreement related to Bassick High School.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible approval to advance pre-K student G.R. to kindergarten, which qualified for executive session as a confidential student matter.

Ms., Brown moved “*to go into executive session for the subject item.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

Invited to participate were the members of the board, the superintendent, and Dyrene Newton, principal of Hallen School.

The executive session began at 7:21 p.m.

The board reconvened in public session at 7:37 p.m.

Ms. Allen moved “*to advance student G.R. in accordance with the discussion in executive session.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

DRAFT