

Tuesday, October 12, 2021

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held October 12, 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 Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown, Chris Taylor, Joseph Sokolovic, and Albert Benejan.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Mr. Benejan moved approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of September 27, 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. Taylor abstained.

Ms. Brown moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of September 27, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic. The motion was approved by a 4-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Brown, Sokolovic, and Benejan. Mr. Taylor abstained.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Ms. Brown said the Ad Hoc Districtwide Rebranding Initiative Committee would meet next week.

Mr. Weldon said the Facilities Committee met last week and received an impressive report from the director of facilities operations, Jorge Garcia, on the efforts to reopen schools.

Mr. Benejan referred a security report from Lt. Grech to the Facilities Committee.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Finance Committee would meet on October 19th.

Mr. Weldon said the Governance Committee met last week and brought forward two items to tonight's agenda.

Mr. Taylor said constituents asked if the board could modify the bylaws to allow the public to speak about anything related to the board at a public meeting. He said the current policy is very restrictive and parents feel they can't speak on what's going on in their school.

Mr. Benejan said the Students & Families Committee would meet on October 21st, 2021.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Teaching & Learning Committee would meet on October 19th.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT/AGENDA:

Supt. Testani noted the air purification system installed in the room where the meeting was taking place. He said all cafeterias have had units installed. The next phase is underway, and 786 classrooms have been completed, with the remaining 11 schools to be completed by the start of next week. Following that, the next phase will cover all offices. The work was covered by ARP/ESSER funds.

The superintendent said there was a Student Success Day last week, with all students working on their plans. He noted October is anti-bullying month, and there will be an event for Unity Day on October 20th.

Supt. Testani said an update to the district's website is forthcoming to make it more user-friendly for parents and students.

The superintendent said there are issues with supply chains and obtaining some items, including food and nutrition. Because of a driver shortage there has been a loss of vendors servicing the district, which complicates planning monthly menus. He apologized to students at Harding High about a food item that appeared on social media last week.

Supt. Testani said there have been some issues at athletic events, as has been in the case in other communities. Efforts to improve and beef up safety and security are being planned. He said there was an unfortunate incident at the Central-Bassick football that was mostly caused by students from other schools. He said there was poor behavior at a soccer game yesterday also.

Mr. Benejan said the Bassick soccer team played very well in games against Kolbe and Central. He said he appreciated the superintendent being in attendance at the game and making sure everything ended well.

Ms. Brown said the district had lost students and seen behavior that put students' lives at risk. She asked the student representatives present if they had suggestions on what could be done to help with the situation.

The superintendent said that was a topic of discussion today with student support staff leadership and building principals. He said he hoped planned events would address some of the behaviors. He said today was a tragic day with a senseless act causing the loss of a life of a student.

Supt. Testani said all the schools are in the process of planning extended day programs, to incorporate arts, music and other opportunities. A districtwide arts and music academy for high school students will be rolled out later in the fall.

Mr. Taylor said he noticed when Supt. Testani speaks the camera zooms in on him, but when Ms. Brown and Mr. Taylor spoke the camera did not zoom in them. He said that seemed a little offensive.

Mr. Weldon suggested the IT person leave the camera in a wide view without zooming in.

NEW BUSINESS:

The next agenda item was on the Fairchild Wheeler Campus Aero/Hydrospace field trip to 2021 SNAME Maritime Convention. Principal Jay Lipp said he has been in discussions with the Society of Naval Architect and Marine Engineers to get the price down to something reasonable. The event is in Providence, Rhode Island, and will cover one day, with ten students. He said he would attend, along with one teacher. He said this is an opportunity for students to network and see the industry.

In response to a question, Mr. Lipp said the students were selected on how well they had done in the naval architect program. He said he believed about 60 percent of the

students going are Bridgeport residents. In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the district would cover the cost of a larger bus.

In response to a question, Mr. Lipp said if the trip is approved it would be a real feather in the students' cap to have this exposure.

Mr. Taylor said Mr. Lipp was a former naval submarine commander, who was more than competent to conduct the field trip safely for his students. In response to a question, Mr. Lipp said he started in education in 2004, after 23 years in the naval submarine field, and is a marine engineer. He noted he has a good relationship with Sikorsky, which creates paid internships for students.

Mr. Benejan moved "*to approve the FWC Aero/HydroSpace field trip to the 2021 STAME maritime convention.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the new student handbook. Supt. Testani said the item came out of the Governance Committee. He said a lot of time and effort was put into updating the handbook. He said there were updates to attendance protocols as the result of state laws; restorative practices are now included; and there is now much more leeway given to administrators concerning suspensions for discipline issues.

In response to a question from a student representative, the superintendent said the student handbook will be more visible on the redesigned district website. He added that the mobile version of the website will be improved. Ms. Brown

suggested students have input into future changes to the student handbook.

One of the student representatives said having the district website as an app would save having to log in each time it is accessed. The superintendent said Phase 2 of the Parent Square app is beginning. He said the website would be updated to a state-of-the-art design.

Mr. Benejan noted the uniform policy was included in the student handbook. The superintendent said he believed coming out of the Covid situation there are other things schools are more concerned with than the uniform policy itself. He said he would love to have a discussion on the uniform policy with student input. He said students seem in favor of a dress code, but not a uniform policy.

One student representative said the uniform policy gave him a lot of stress in middle school.

Mr. Taylor moved "*to adopt this policy.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

The next agenda was item on the first read and discussion of policy regarding live streaming of board and committee meetings. Mr. Weldon said this was needed because of live streaming beginning during Covid and the need for policy going forward.

The policy read: "All regular, special, and committee meetings will be live streamed. However, meetings called with 48 hours or less notice may not be live streamed due to staffing or other logistical difficulties."

Mr. Taylor said his objection was based on someone had discretionary power to take meetings off the website and off YouTube. He said this was not fair and equitable.

Supt. Testani said all meetings would be recorded and posted. Mr. Taylor said when the meetings appeared on the cable TV network the video was not accessible to the district and could not be taken down. He said he wanted to eliminate any doubt about editing to people that live in Bridgeport.

Ms. Brown said a lot of parents do not watch live, but later view the archived video. Mr. Taylor said he agreed with Ms. Brown.

Mr. Weldon said the 48-hour issue was the result of meetings being requested at short notice and unavailability of technical staff.

Mr. Taylor said his concern was an awful lot of emergency and special meetings in Bridgeport that the public is not entitled to speak at. He said he wanted to eliminate skepticism among the public about special meetings. He said in the past four years he has seen the way things are done and the way games are played.

Mr. Taylor said the IT department should be able to handle these situations like teachers do, who come to work in inclement weather.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested if a meeting cannot be live streamed that it be held remotely through the superintendent's staff as we did through Covid. Ms. Brown and Mr. Taylor said they agreed.

Supt. Testani said this would likely only apply to special meetings because committee meetings are not typically called on an emergency basis. In response to a question, he said there are 11 people in the IT department, but not all are the capable of running the live stream.

Mr. Weldon said he would modify the policy to incorporate the suggested changes.

The next agenda item was on a collective bargaining agreement between the board and the Bridgeport Council of Administrators and Supervisors (BCAS).

Attorney Floyd Dugas was present. Mr. Weldon said a summary of the contract was e-mailed to board members. He noted BCAS has approved the agreement.

Atty. Dugas said the contract covers principals, directors, and supervisors, and covers from July 1, 2022, for four years. The terms provide for a two percent general wage increase to the top step of the salary scale. Anyone who is not at the top step advances a step in lieu of the two percent. The total cost was provided in the summary.

Atty. Dugas said health-care insurance costs are currently 27 percent or 29 percent for employees. That amount remains in the same in the first year of the contract, and then each year thereafter it goes up by .5 percent. He said for the public sector this level is on the higher side and not inconsistent with other city contracts.

Atty. Dugas said currently 15 percent of dental insurance is paid by the employee, but this has been changed to the same level for medical costs.

Atty, Dugas said language changes included a request by the superintendent to have a clearer definition of the time in the summer when administrators can be on vacation.

Atty, Dugas said language about bereavement leave has been clarified and the length of leave increased from three days to five days.

In response to a question, Atty. Dugas said the two percent was in the ballpark of where other administrator contracts were settling. He said he believed we are now on parity with other districts in salaries. The superintendent said especially for those in Group 4, the ten-month assistant principals, who currently are not paid much more than a teacher at the highest levels.

Mr. Sokolovic said this is how negotiations are supposed to happen, without just dropping a large number on the board.

Mr. Taylor moved "*to approve.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod