

Monday, May 9, 2022

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 9, 2022, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 Saint Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown, Joseph Sokolovic, Albert Benejan\*\*, Michael Maccarone\*, and Christine Baptiste-Perez. Sybil Allen and Erika Castillo\* arrived subsequently as noted.

(\*remote participation \*\*remote and in-person participation)

Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

Erika Castillo\* joined the meeting.

### **STUDENTN REPREEENTIATIVE REPORTS:**

Latonia Ferguson of Central High reported on her school. She highlighted teacher appreciation week.

Michael Hemmings for IT School at Fairchild Wheeler said the senior prom would take place on Thursday. He said finals are also coming up, along with a field trip for juniors.

At Mr. Benejan's request, there was a moment of silence for Thomas Asbury, a Harding High 2017 graduate, who passed away. Mr. Benejan said Mr. Berry was his nephew and a nephew of Tammy Boyle.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Carolyn Nah, a Bridgeport resident for fifty years, said she was here to clear her name. She said she was a retired federal employee who worked in contract administration, later worked as a bail-bond person, and has her own company devoted to diversity training. She said she was here to build a bridge because someone told Mr. Sokolovic that she called him a racist. She said she was here to apologize in person, however, what she was claimed to have said is simply not true. She said her reputation means a lot to her. She added she was not trying to get a contract but trying to come before the board to explain that she could provide diversity training if needed.

Dr. Herron K. Gaston, a pastor at United Methodist Church in Bridgeport, said diversity and inclusion was critical. He said Rev. Carolyn Nah was a part of his congregation. He said he could attest that she did not hold discriminatory views, and she cared deeply about the city of Bridgeport and its students. He said he wanted to be a character reference for Ms. Nah, who has been at the helm of leadership of the NAACP.

Ms. Allen arrived at the meeting.

Marge Hiller, a representative of the Central High School Governance Council, said the group is revitalizing the scholarship fund at the school. She said the goal is to raise \$20,000 to replenish the amount of money in the fund, with at least two-thirds of that amount given out this spring. She asked the board members to distribute her flyer and make a contribution.

**APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:**

Ms. Allen moved approval the minutes of the Regular Meeting of April 25, 2022. The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

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

Ms. Brown said the Ad Hoc Districtwide Branding Initiative Committee will meet on May 18th.

Mr. Weldon said Mr. Lombard indicated the Ad Hoc Districtwide Calendar Committee would meet on May 23rd.

Supt. Testani said the city attorney is still reviewing the proposed transportation contract prior to presenting it to the Contracts Committee.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Educational Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee would meet later this month.

Mr. Weldon said the Facilities Committee will meet sometime this month. The facilities usage policies will be addressed, among other items.

Mr. Benejan arrived at the meeting in person.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Finance Committee would meet in the fourth week of May.

Mr. Weldon said the Governance Committee met and discussed the public comment policies and the policy related to field trips.

Supt. Testani said the first round of interviews started for principal of Beardsley School, which will require a future Personnel Committee meeting.

Mr. Benejan said the Students & Families Committee would meet on May 19th. He said the last meeting included a presentation by three principals on how they work with PACs and PTSOs.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the Teaching & Learning Committee met on April 5th and out-of-town or overnight field trips were discussed.

Mr. Sokolovic referred updates on special education and the plane being built at Bassick to the committee.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the committee would meet later this month.

### **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:**

Supt. Testani recognized the Bridgeport Public Education Fund's Inspiration Awards held on Thursday. He said over 200 people attended the event.

The awards for 2021 were Cynthia Crudale, Fairchild Wheeler; Susan DePascale, Beardsley School; Kimberly Doran, High Horizons; Kathleen Fuchs, Beardsley School; Carrie Hasenbein, John Winthrop; Patrick O'Rourke, Bassick High; Carli Rocha-Reaes, Fairchild Wheeler; Georgeann Stewart, Classical Studies. The George Bellinger principal of the year award for 2021 went to Dr. Eric Graf of Central High. The Elizabeth Pfriem Civic Award to Tauck Family Foundation. And the Beard Excellence in Teaching Awards

honored Alexandra Lage, Waltersville School; and Nicole Lynk, Wilbur Cross and Tisdale School.

The 2022 outstanding teacher awards went to Jessica Baldizon, Cesar Batalla; Laura Ellwanger, Read School; Rebecca Feola, Discovery Magnet; Teresa Oliveira, Fairchild Wheeler; Michael Paolucci, Tisdale School; Christina Shanahan, Fairchild Wheeler; Mikeya Stovall, Read School; Jennifer Wehmann, Multicultural Magnet. The George Bellinger principal of the year award went to Brett Gustafson from Curiale School. The Elizabeth Pfriem Civil Award went to Doug Wade of Wade's Dairy, Inc. And the Beard Excellence in Teaching Award went to Cynthia Crudale, Fairchild Wheeler; and Careen Derise, Discovery Magnet.

The superintendent said the Beard Award winners receive a \$25,000 cash award.

Supt. Testani said he provided the board members notice that the district was honored to receive the Distinguished Black Excellence Education Award from the National Coalition of One Hundred Black Women, Inc. of New Haven. There will be a ceremony on June 5th at the Waterview in Monroe. He said this was an impressive and proud honor to be awarded.

Mr. Benejan said he was not happy with a situation when he shows up at an event and people get nervous because he is a board member. He said he does not want that because he is just there as a parent. He said he wanted staff to understand if he is at a school, he is not there to tell anybody what to do. He said we are here to help the staff and students to work like a team.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

The next item was on the district's Debate League field trip to the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the U.S. Senate in Boston, M.A.

Ron Rapice said the trip was planned a few years back before Covid. The students will take part in a Senate module and participate as a senator from either party and a selected state. The trip will include a visit to the JFK Library.

In response to a question, Mr. Rapice said he provided the executed permission slips and student information log to the superintendent's office. Ms. Baptiste-Perez said there was one permission slip in her packet that was not signed by a parent or guardian. Mr. Rapice was provided with the name of the student.

Mr. Benejan moved to approve "*this field trip as presented by Mr. Rapice.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the Bridgeport Military Academy field trip to Boston Museum of Science.

Vanessa Arroyo said the trip is for science cadets to supplement the curriculum. The costs are paid for by the SIG grant. Mr. Weldon said the board was provided further information in the packet.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez moved “*to approve the trip to the Boston Museum of Science for BMA.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on Bridgeport Military Academy’s overnight field trip to Kettletown State Park in Southbury.

Ms. Arroyo said the trip is for the band club, who have received new instruments. There will be a battle of the bands ceremony that they will observe, with the hope of participating next year.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez moved “*to approve the overnight field trip to Kettletown State Park in Southbury for BMA.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved

The next agenda item was on a Bridgeport Military Academy field trip to Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

Ms. Arroyo said the trip is for the AP studio arts students and AP U.S. history students for interdisciplinary study and to expose them to New York City.

In response to a question, Ms. Arroyo sent via e-mail the students’ cellphone numbers to the superintendent that were collected by the organizer of the trip.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez moved “*to approve the BMA field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved

The next agenda item was on the IT School at Fairchild Wheeler field trip to the iFly wind tunnel in Yonkers, N.Y.

Suchith Shantharaj said the 41 students on the trip will be given an opportunity to work with the instructors to do physics experiments inside of a wind tunnel, which is an indoor skydiving facility. He said there are six chaperones.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez thanked Mr. Shantharaj for providing the liability and indemnification agreement.

Ms. Allen moved *“to approve the trip to the iFly wind tunnel in Yonkers, New York.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved

The next agenda item was on a Harding High School field trip to Today’s Students, Tomorrow’s Teachers (TSTT) recognition event in Tarrytown, N.Y.

Supt. Testani said a packet was received today from Central High for students from that school to also attend.

Ms. Allen moved *“to change this item to approval of Harding High School and Central High School field trip.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

Supt. Testani said he would forward the Central High packet to the board members.

Carolann Reid, the TSTT regional program manager in Bridgeport, said the organization was established 25 years ago, with the mission of training and mentoring students from high school to college and place them as teachers. The goal is to increase diversity and address the teacher shortage in the United States. She said there are 41 students participating, with an additional 26 students on a wait list.



Ms. Reid said the trip will take place on May 26th, which will include a brunch and a celebration of teachers. Presenters will include Rep. Claiborne and Allen Houston, the former New York Knicks player.

Supt. Testani said a teacher residency program was created two years ago with Sacred Heart University. He said the partnership being developed with TSTT is the missing link that will enhance the residency program and result in recruiting teachers to the district.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said Central High submitted all the appropriate documentation.

Mr. Benejan moved “to approve the Central and Harding field trip to Today’s *Students, Tomorrow’s Teachers* recognition event.” The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod