

Monday, June 22, 2020

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE  
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held June 22,  
2020, by video and audio conference call, Bridgeport,  
Connecticut.**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Hernan Illingworth, Secretary Bobbi Brown, Albert Benejan, Joseph Sokolovic, Jessica Martinez, Sybil Allen, and Joseph Lombard.

Acting Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Mr. Weldon said a written communication from Ella H. Marsh of the School Volunteer Association was received, although it appears she did not successfully join the public comment section in person. He read Ms. Marsh's comments. Ms. Marsh wrote about the positive experiences she had while serving as a volunteer reader. She urged the board to include the School Volunteer Association in the budget.

**APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:**

Mr. Illingworth moved approval of the board's minutes of June 8, 2020. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and approved by a 7-0 vote.

Voting in favor were members Brown, Sokolovic, Weldon, Illingworth, Allen, Lombard, and Benejan. Ms. Martinez abstained.

**CHAIR REPORT:**

Mr. Weldon said he attended the last few drive-through high school graduations and he was impressed at how much work had gone into them and how smoothly they have run. He said the building-level leaders and Mr. Postolowski, who directed streaming the events, were especially deserving of congratulations..

Ms. Brown, Mr. Benejan, and Mr. Sokolovic added how enjoyable the events were. Ms. Martinez said the event at Central today was beautiful.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:**

Mr. Sokolovic referred the naming of Columbus School to the Facilities Committee. He noted the population of the school was now 84 percent minority. He questioned Columbus's history and whether his name should be on a minority school building.

Mr. Illingworth said there was a different process for name changes, which includes the superintendent forming a committee. Mr. Weldon said it could be looked at by the committee and they could recommend a naming committee be formed. Mr. Illingworth said the superintendent could potentially act sooner. Ms. Martinez suggested community input be gathered.

Mr. Testani said the process includes a naming committee which recommends three choices. He said it could be handled more quickly outside of the committee. He suggested the issue begin with the Columbus School community. He said there could be an anonymous survey of

the community. He indicated he would like to see a 60 to 70 percent response rate.

Mr. Benejan referred a report from the IT Department to the Facilities Committee.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was nothing new to report from the Finance Committee.

Mr. Illingworth said the Governance Committee was awaiting the drafting of some documents and he would schedule a meeting upon receipt.

Mr. Lombard reported on the Teaching & Learning Committee, which included the special education report and approval of a proposed airplane building program at Bassick.

Ms. Brown said she wanted to learn more about African-American studies in the district. She said she wanted to highlight the pride of African-American students or students who come from a different country. Mr. Testani said African-American and Latin American studies are part of the high school curriculum and a state graduation requirement. Mr. Sokolovic said he would look at exploring a more diverse curriculum in the future at the Teaching & Learning Committee, which he described as a long-haul type of thing.

Mr. Weldon suggested holding a special meeting the on African-American and Latin American studies, which were previously presented to the board. He noted the textbooks selected could be reviewed.

Mr. Weldon said the Personnel Committee met twice since the last board meeting. Candidates were interviewed on June 12th for various positions; on June 17th, other

candidates were referred to the superintendent in the interests of time. He said the committee has discussed looking at streamlining personnel policies.

Mr. Benejan said the Students and Families Committee received a report from Mr. Planas on student grades and graduation rates, purchases of school supplies, the parent convention funding that will be rolled into next year, and the parent survey.

Mr. Weldon said the Contracts Committee met on June 12th and referred three items for tonight's agenda.

Mr. Sokolovic reported on the actions of the Ad Hoc Committee on Great City Schools/Males of Color. Dr. Melissa Jenkins spoke on the committee's white paper. She said the presentation represents the work of the committee that is cumulative for about the last six years. She added that the board had received one of the final drafts of the white paper.

Dr. Jenkins said she would present an overview of the white paper. She said the board's adoption of the Council of Great City Schools' pledge occurred on May 30, 2014, and an ad hoc committee was formed. She said Ibram X. Kendi said in *How to be an Anti-Racist* that the word racism is not equivalent to a slur, but descriptive, and racism must be consistently identified, described and dismantled. She said the paper strives to identify the racism, challenges, and the plight of men of color. She said we take up the mantle for all children when we assure that male of color life matters.

Dr. Jenkins said there is a section on systemic challenges for males of color. She noted the data includes both African-American and Hispanic males. She said the data compares

the males of color to nothing other than the standard of excellence created for all children.

Dr. Jenkins said data used was from the SBAC assessment over four years in Grades 3 to 8 for ELA and mathematics. While the data shows small gains for males of color it also reveals that approximately 80 percent are performing below proficiency in ELA and math.

Dr. Jenkins said the SAT data for high school students is flat or perhaps may be considered up and down. As of 2018-19, 22.14 percent of males of color scored at levels meeting or exceeding proficiency in ELA and 7.73 percent met or exceeded proficiency in math.

Dr. Jenkins said the NGSS science assessment was administered last year for the first time; 273(15.92 percent) males of color in Grades 5, 8 and 11 met or exceeded the science standard.

Dr. Jenkins said the percentage of males of color with one or more in-school suspensions, with peak numbers in Grade 9, reveals the need for more support before then. She noted the data on out-of-school suspensions reveals the same need.

Dr. Jenkins said school climate data indicates overall the majority of males of color have a trust for their classroom teacher, but the trend decreases as students move across the grade bands.

Dr. Jenkins said student-teacher trust and emotional regulation indicators were selected because they often have a high correlation with students' grades and performance in school. She said half of the males of color surveyed reported

they have a strong understanding of their emotional regulation. The rates improve in Grades 9 to 12.

Dr. Jenkins said the next section is on the literature around educational challenges and societal issues that present challenges to males of color. She said concepts such as white supremacy, institutional racism, equity, the cases of *Crumpton vs. Chop* and *Sheff vs. O'Neill*, and magnet schools are covered. She said white supremacy is a political or socio-economic system in which white people enjoy a structural advantage over other ethnic groups. She said the *Crumpton vs. Chop* case began in the district in 1979, when there weren't many teachers of color employed. She said the district had to settle the case and teachers of color who were laid off during budget issues were hired back. She said the committee is very passionate that the school system should represent how the children they serve look.

Der. Jenkins said two community forums were held during the time the white paper was being developed. Questions were posed to participants about males of color. Dr. Jenkins said the answers are summarized on a slide. Many respondents mentioned mentoring, after-school activities, more male teachers of color, parent training, addressing systemic racism, and creative instruction.

Dr. Jenkins said the pressing issues facing males of color include early-start care, high-quality child care and preschool, high-stakes testing, high administrator and teacher turnover, suspensions, over identification in special education, adverse childhood experiences, and a pedagogy of self.

Dr. Jenkins said the call to action includes asking the board to considering mentoring and an equity audit to support

males of color. Formal mentoring has the power to equip males of color with the assets needed to navigate the socio-political context of schooling and settings outside of education.

Dr. Jenkins said the equity audit recommendations would include implicit bias training and racial-neutral policies, review of systems and structures such as hiring practices, a teacher summit, an annual forum, and a parent-community summit.

Mr. Illingworth congratulated the committee for their hard work and he thanked Mr. Sokolovic for his leadership. Ms. Brown said the presentation was very well put together and said she believed the community would appreciate it. Ms. Allen said she hoped the board can accomplish everything contained in the report.

Mr. Benejan said Dr. Jenkins always does an amazing, professional job.

Mr. Lombard said he wanted to echo the appreciation for the hard work and said it seems like it came together at the best time.

Mr. Weldon said the process had been frustrating for a long period of time, but we can now see that there has been a phenomenal degree of work that has gone into this and contributions by a lot of different people.

Ms. Martinez said she was excited that the project was completed and she praised those involved.

Mr. Sokolovic said he wanted to especially thank Dr. Jenkins for doing the majority of the work, along with Dr. McPherson

and all the volunteers. He said the white paper was the starting point to going forward in the future. He said the committee needs to evolve into something else to look at all these things through an equity lens. He said these are not going to be easy conversations. He said when he hears about white supremacy he closes up, but we have got to get past those barriers and change ourselves and our city.

Mr. Testani thanked Mr. Sokolovic for seeing the white paper completed and said he agreed this is just the beginning of the work that needs to take place. He said in addition to Dr. Jenkins's many responsibilities, this took up a lot of her time and she took a lot of pride and made sure the end product was of the highest quality. He said she deserved a break from some of the heavy lifting now.

Dr. Jenkins said the white paper still has to be edited to the final version.

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

Mr. Testani said the BMA and Harding graduations have been completed very successfully, and Central Magnet was completed today. He congratulated all the graduates and families. He said the staff put together tremendous events. He said going forward many have suggest a hybrid graduation combining the old forms with things used this year and he would like to get student and staff input on this.

Mr. Testani said the school year ended on June 17th. He said overall he believed the district and the community did an outstanding job in rallying around students and families during the pandemic. He said planning for reopening is going on, but guidance from the governor's office and state Department of Education is still being awaited. He said many



parents and staff are anxious to know what the reopening will look like, but definitive answers are not possible at this time.

Mr. Testani said he was not sure what the distance learning option would look like in the event schools are reopened in the fall. He said Connecticut had the lowest positive test rate in the world, so things are looking good.

Christy Maldonado asked a question of Mr. Testani on options for leaving children on distance learning if parents choose to. Mr. Testani said he was not sure if that option would be available. If it is, paper copies and packets will not be an option.

Ms. Maldonado thanked Mr. Testani for the hard work put in by the teachers during the pandemic. Mr. Testani said the Facebook Live events would continue in the summer to update parents.

Mr. Benejan said the team was doing an amazing job by working together.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

The next agenda item was on an RFP for transition services for students 18 to 21 with disabilities.

Mr. Testani said it was believed the current transition program could be improved. It is housed at the Burroughs Community Center and is staffed. He said the RFP is designed to see what kind of response is received.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to issue an RFP for transition services in an ages 18 to 21 program for individuals with disabilities.”*

The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on a joint board and City of Bridgeport RFP for Medicare supplement and Medicare prescription contracts.

Mr. Testani congratulated Ms. Christine Walsh Mitchell, recently retired payrolls and benefits director, for her service.

Ulysses Rogers, director of payroll and benefits, said historically the RFP has been presented by the city. He said he was seeking board approval for the new RFP. He said the board's administrative costs are 44 percent of the overall cost of the Anthem plan; 49 percent of the prescription plan; and 44 percent of the Beacon prescription plan. The total of all plans has a 47 percent contribution by the board to the costs.

Mr. Rogers said the board only pays for costs directly to attributable to us.

Mr. Lombard moved that *"the Bridgeport Board of Education participate in a joint Bridgeport Board of Education and City of Bridgeport RFP for Medicare supplement and Medicare prescription contract."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on a memorandum of agreement between the board and Tango Flight, Inc., to build a light sport aircraft at Bassick High School. Mr. Testani said he brought the matter to the Teaching and Learning Committee after Dr. Cardona the commissioner of education, presented this opportunity to him.

Mr. Testani said he jumped at the opportunity and thought it would fit nicely with the manufacturing and auto programs at Bassick. He said Mr. Blum, the Bassick teacher, would be perfect to work with the students on this. He said all funding is provided by an outside entity. The proceeds from the sale of the aircraft will fund next year's project.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the proposed contract has been sent to counsel for review. There is no additional liability than that associated with the regular auto shop class. Mr. Weldon said the contract in the packet was a sample that Tango used with a district in Kansas.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said there will be mentors with aviation experience that will also participate, and which will expose the students to potential careers.

Ms. Allen moved *"to enter into a memorandum of agreement with Tango Flight, Incorporated, to build a modern FAA-certified light sport aircraft at Bassick High School as presented by staff."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on vacation day buyouts for Mr. Testani for the year ending June 30, 2020. Mr. Weldon said the item was brought through the Contracts Committee.

Mr. Testani said contractually he has 25 vacation days as part of his contract and was able to use five days during winter break, however, due to the pandemic he has been unable to use any other days. He said he was asking to be compensated for some of the time and he was not asking for all twenty days.

Ms. Allen suggested giving all the days to Mr. Testani. Mr. Testani said he would be able to use three days before the end of the contract.

Mr. Lombard said because of the exceptional situation and Mr. Testani doing so well he should receive compensation for all unused days, which would amount to 17 days. Mr. Weldon said he agreed, noting there was no way Mr. Testani could use his vacation time during this school year. Mr. Benejan said he agreed with Mr. Lombard. Ms. Martinez said she agreed.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said he would be willing to roll five days out of the 17 into next year. Mr. Sokolovic said it would not be like Mr. Testani would be losing the days, but he was counting the dollars and cents. He said there should be a contractual amendment in writing. Mr. Testani noted the acting superintendent contract expires in eight days.

Mr. Weldon suggested the motion amend the contract to allow the buyout. Mr. Sokolovic said he was fine with that.

Mr. Illingworth appeared to have dropped off the call at this point.

Ms. Allen moved *“to amend the acting superintendent’s current contract such that he is compensated for all but three remaining vacation days.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to amend to pay Mr. Testani for the twelve days and him roll over the five days as allowed in his current contract. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen.

Mr. Lombard said he opposed Mr. Sokolovic's amendment because we don't know what the situation will be next year and Mr. Testani will have more vacation time available. He said he wanted to create a clean slate for next year. Mr. Weldon said we could possibly find ourselves in the same position next year.

The amendment failed on a 5 to 2. Voting in favor were members Sokolovic and Allen. Voting in opposition were members Brown, Martinez, Weldon, Benejan and Lombard.

The main motion was approved by a 6-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Allen, Brown, Martinez, Weldon, Benejan and Lombard. Mr. Sokolovic abstained.

There was a discussion of holding future board meetings in public. Mr. Testani said currently groups of 25 people can gather indoors, with 25 percent of the room capacity, however, the numbers increase on July 6th. He added members of the public might have to reserve an available spot ahead of time. He said health precautions would have to be included as well.

Mr. Weldon suggested a special meeting in July be held. Mr. Sokolovic suggested live streaming the meeting as well. Mr. Testani said Geraldine Johnson School would be larger than Aquaculture and help in distancing.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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