

Monday, January 28, 2019

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held January 28, 2019, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Secretary Joseph Sokolovic, Chris Taylor, Sybil Allen, Maria Pereira, and Hernan Illingworth. Dennis Bradley arrived subsequently as noted.

Supt. Aresta Johnson, Ed.D., was present.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:

Alicia Brockenberry of Bassick High reported on her school. Among the items she highlighted were the recently completed midterm exams, the PTSO's recent celebration, presentations on black history by the Males of Color mentoring group, and organizing for the prom.

Abud Hennawi of Central High reported on his school. Among the items he highlighted were the start of Quarter 3 after the completion of midterms, the new courses in African-American history, Latino Studies or Perspectives on Race, SAT prep for juniors, and the Males of Color initiative

Jennifer Martinez of the Aero/Hydrospace School at Fairchild Wheeler reported on her school. Among the items she

highlighted were the merit award received by the school from Magnet Schools of America and the after-school SAT courses for students,

Ethan Wei Aoki of the Aero/Hydrospace School reported on a CPR course at the school as a fundraiser for the PTSO, which is open to public, the recent finals for Semester 1, and applications for internships at Sikorsky.

Anthony Miller of the Biotech and Zoological Science School at Fairchild Wheeler reported on his school. He highlighted an award the school received from Magnet Schools of America and final exams.

Queston Parker, a junior at the IT School at Fairchild Wheeler, reported on his school. He highlighted the school's recognition by the Magnet Schools of America, the start of the new semester today, and the sale of prom tickets.

Alana Merritt of Harding High reported on her school. She highlighted the community forum at the school on restorative practices, work to improve attendance, and the work of buildON in the school.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. Weldon said an Spanish interpreter was available.

Dasha Spell, PAC president at Classical Studies Magnet Academy, urged the student representatives and their families to come out and speak on behalf of education during the upcoming budget deliberations of the city. She suggested the students get involved in the shadowing program offered by the City Council. She urged the board support an effort to bus people up to the legislature in

Hartford

Albert Benejan, PTSO president at Bassick High, wished a happy birthday to Mr. Sokolovic. He said a BB gun was discovered at Central High today in a bag. He said the board needed to create a policy for security. He objected to the assistant director of nutrition making \$78,500 when the money is needed for students. He asked the board to note that a lot of students have to walk to school in the cold weather we are experiencing. He also objected to Mr. Weldon interrupting him when he was giving out an award at the last meeting.

Bernadette Baldino, a board member of the School Volunteer Association, said she had been associated with the organization for over thirty years. She urged the board to restore the funds in the budget for the continuation of the services provided by the School Volunteer Association. She added there were corporate partnerships that also contribute to the effort.

Mr. Bradley arrived at the meeting. He said he may have to leave the meeting early because his church was involved in a zoning hearing.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Ms. Pereira moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of January 7, 2019, with an edit. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic. The motion was approved by a 5-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Weldon, Allen, Sokolovic and Pereira. Mr. Bradley and Mr. Taylor abstained.

Ms. Pereira moved to approve the minutes of the Regular

Meeting of January 10, 2019, with corrections. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic. Corrections were noted. The motion was approved by a 6-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Weldon, Allen, Sokolovic, Bradley and Pereira. Mr. Taylor abstained.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of December 17, 2018. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and approved by a 5-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Weldon, Allen, Sokolovic and Pereira. Mr. Bradley and Mr. Taylor abstained.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 17, 2018, with an edit. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and approved by a 5-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Weldon, Allen, Sokolovic and Pereira. Mr. Bradley and Mr. Taylor abstained.

CHAIR REPORT:

Mr. Weldon said he reached out to Representative Santiago about a Saturday meeting with the legislative delegation.

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said he discussed with Ms. Allen whether she wanted to be the chair of the Personnel Committee, however, in the end Ms. Allen did not want to do so.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:

Mr. Illingworth said the Facilities Committee will meet next Monday. Ms. Pereira noted that at the Special Meeting Mr. Ricci agreed to complete the eight bullets on the Fairchild Wheeler punch list by April. Mr. Illingworth said he put the item on the agenda for the next committee meeting.

Ms. Pereira said she referred the issue of the payment for the SROs after a decision by the arbitrator to the Finance Committee on December 10th.

Mr. Weldon said the next Governance Committee meeting would be on February 26th.

Mr. Bradley left the meeting.

Ms. Pereira referred to the Teaching & Learning Committee a report on the number of district special education students currently not attending any school.

Mr. Weldon said the Personnel Committee would meet on February 20th. He said he met with Mr. Chester and discussed some outstanding reports. Ms. Pereira said one was the certified staff turnover data by school. She said changes to the hiring policy had been in limbo for a while.

Mr. Taylor referred to the committee an examination as to why Ed Morrow, a security officer, was suspended for three weeks without pay. He said he'd like to know what caused it and how to rectify it. He said it was unjust.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *"to add to the agenda discussion and possible action on the Bridgeport Public Schools Great City Schools/Males of Color Ad Hoc Committee in collaboration with the Buddy Jordan Foundation hosting the male mentorship program."* Ms. Pereira seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic reported on the Students & Families Committee. He said the December 20, 2018, meeting included Timothy Cooper's presentation on the March for

Education Committee. Mr. Cooper requested space in a school, but the committee said granting such a request would set a bad precedent. He said the conversation evolved to the district giving some support to the annual march, possibly in the form of band participation.

Mr. Sokolovic said Assistant Superintendent Janet Brown-Clayton reported that 85 percent of her school cohort had spent or encumbered 50 percent of available funds for parent engagement. Dr. Otuwa said the biggest issue in her cohort was Batalla, where the president has resigned. He said it was decided that there should be a standardized reporting format.

Mr. Sokolovic said Mr. Esposito presented on the soy and sun butter bids. Bids are reopened and both vendors are made aware of the posting.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was a discussion about trying to get Classical Studies under one roof. He said all roads seem to lead inevitably back to the Catholic Center.

Mr. Sokolovic said the committee also met on January 14th, 2019. The school climate survey presented by Ms. Ramanauskas was discussed. One area of concern was the low numbers reported by Grade 5 students regarding peer relationships and a sense of belonging. Ms. Ramanauskas said social-emotional learning is used to improve school climate, with BCAC being the lead agency on the social-emotional learning initiative.

Mr. Sokolovic said reinventing a District PAC was also discussed. He said it was his hope going forward that we do not allow adult problems to prevent solving problems for children. He said the District PAC should be reinvented as

an all-inclusive, non-discriminatory entity. A meeting of school PAC presidents will be called to work on new bylaws while the committee works on a new parent engagement policy.

Mr. Sokolovic asked Dr. Johnson to speak on his other item.

Dr. Johnson said the mentor training for the Males of Color Committee is scheduled to begin on the first Saturday in February. She requested approval of the program. She added the committee was planning its second community forum on May 16th.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said the students who are participating in the program have been recruited by the committee liaisons at each comprehensive high school. Students have also been recruited from the middle schools. She said the mentors will have a background check similar to those who participate with the School Volunteer Association.

In response to a question. Dr. Johnson said Title IV funds are being used to support to the program.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve the Bridgeport Public Schools, Great Cities Schools/Males of Color Committee, the Brother’s Table meetings taking place at Cesar Batalla on Saturdays and the community forum on May 16th, from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORTS/AGENDA:

The next agenda item was on a contract extension with Delta-T. Dr. Johnson said the request was for a two-year

extension. She said the previous contract with Delta-T was a one-year contract.

In response to a question, Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, said Delta-T conducted surveys of the schools in the current year and in 2017-18. She said 25 schools utilized Delta-T. The surveys are for a particular individual and the documents cover the responses to each question. Ms. Pereira noted only seven schools bothered to answer the survey. Ms. Siegel said she asked Delta-T to conduct the surveys so the board would have performance-assessment information.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said the response rate to the survey was concerning. She said she would go back and have a conversation with the principals about the importance of the survey. Ms. Siegel recommended that be implemented going forward since there were sufficient responses to indicate that Delta-T is meeting or exceeding our expectations.

Ms. Siegel said she meets with Delta-T twice a year for a midyear and end-of-year assessment. She said the company responds immediately if issues with personnel are reported.

Ms. Pereira said she was not upset with Delta-T, but with the principals, who have a great opportunity to weigh in on whether the contract is providing the services or not.

Ms. Pereira moved *“to extend the Delta-T subs contract from May 18, 2019, to May 17, 2021.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said before she asked Delta-T to do the survey there were no surveys in place. Mr.

Sokolovic said his concern was the possibility that Delta-T would bury bad information. Ms. Siegel said she believed they were responding with integrity.

Mr. Taylor said he disagreed with holding the principals responsible because there is a lack of communication in the Board of Education. He said he supported the principals fully and he questioned whether the surveys made it to every principals. He urged Dr. Johnson's office take the initiative to make sure the principals, who are overworked and stressed, receive the survey.

Ms. Pereira said the board was severely understaffed and there was not an employee who was not overworked. Ms. Pereira said Mr. Taylor was out of order for interrupting her. She said the survey is actually a plus because it was not required in the contract.

Ms. Pereira said she had not heard of any problems with Delta-T and noted an incident with the prior substitute company where an employee sexually molested a child.

Ms. Siegel said the district had been working with Delta-T since 2014. Ms. Pereira suggested going forward that the survey responses go to the assistant superintendents as well.

Mr. Taylor said Delta-T conducting the survey was like leaving the fox in charge of the henhouse. He said Ms. Pereira jumped the gun by condemning the principals when we don't know if they received the surveys. He said the principals would not ignore an e-mail from Dr. Johnson if the surveys were handled through her office.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said it would be a

burden on the superintendent's office to redo a survey that is tied to individuals.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *"to postpone to the next regular meeting just to verify that all the principals actually got the survey."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor.

Dr. Johnson said approval of the contract extension was being requested. She suggested the survey be handled separately from the contract extension.

Mr. Taylor said all he sees is another excuse as to why the board can't move forward and start doing something a little bit different. He asked why wouldn't you just want to make sure they received the survey. He said he was not attacking Delta-T.

In response to a question, John DiDonato, chief of specialized instruction reform, said the personnel were paraprofessionals and he concurred with Ms. Siegel's comment that any time there's been an issue Delta-T responded appropriately.

Mr. Taylor said the survey was offered as evidence, but the board does not know if all our own staff received the surveys. He said it sounded like the deck is stacked.

Mr. Sokolovic noted that 16 schools had not been heard from in the survey.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson agreed to the suggestion that her office could conduct follow-up inquiries to assuage members that the deck is not being stacked by the February 11th meeting.

Ms. Pereira questioned how many principals would remember an employee who worked in their schools in 2017-18. Ms. Siegel said it could only be done for 2018-19. Ms. Pereira said there were three schools in 2018-19 that completed all their surveys. She questioned why we would think those schools received all the surveys, but other schools did not.

Mr. Sokolovic urged the matter be postponed until February 11th.

Ms. Pereira's motion was defeated by a 5-1 vote. Voting in opposition were members Weldon, Illingworth, Sokolovic, Allen and Taylor. Ms. Pereira was in favor.

Mr. Taylor said he would be content with whatever Dr. Johnson put in her e-mail inquiry to the principals.

Mr. Weldon restated Mr. Sokolovic's motion as he understood it: to postpone the item to the February 11th Regular Meeting while the superintendent's office reaches out to those principals who did not respond to the survey advising them to do so or to at least acknowledge that they received it.

Ms. Pereira said she questioned this priority because the superintendent took severe staff cuts and was managing a \$270 million operation and almost three thousand employees.

The motion was approved by a 5-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Taylor, Allen, Illingworth, Weldon and Sokolovic. Ms. Pereira was opposed.

Ms. Siegel spoke on the CPI (Crisis Prevention Institute) fee-

based training model. She said it was presented to the Finance Committee in December. It is a design for charging a fee to external organizations such as Delta-T to send individuals to the Bridgeport Learning Center, which conducts training. She said the fee shown in the document was meant to be competitive with other organizations. In 2018-19, the two-day course will be \$152 and \$95 for one day; subsequent years have higher fees. She said the intent is recoup the cost of the materials and staff time.

Mr. Sokolovic moved that “*we approve the CPI fee-based training model as presented by Ms. Siegel.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth.

In response to a question, Mr. DiDonato said it was a program that assists individuals in deescalating.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next item was on the budget plan for food and nutrition services for 2019-20. Dr. Johnson requested approval.

John Gerritty of the nutrition department said Mr. Esposito was not available today.

Ms. Siegel said food and nutrition services are fully funded by state and federal funds. There are no operating funds applied to the nutrition services. She said the projected revenue was conservative. If revenue increases, expenditures increase.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said an apparent reduction in revenue in the budget plan was accounted for by transferring the revenue to other lines. She said she believed the same applied to the figures on the federal

breakfast program. She said the trend did indicate a reduction in the federal reimbursement rate.

Ms. Siegel said she discovered and corrected an over projection for revenue in 2018-19. She said the incorrect projection was put in by the former nutrition director. She said there may have been plausible explanations for the projection.

Ms. Pereira asked if the unused vacation and sick time carried over by nutrition center employees are paid at their current rate of pay or the rate at the time they carried the time over. Ms. Siegel said she would have to check, but her guess was that it was done at the current rate. Ms. Pereira said that should be addressed in negotiations with the unions. Ms. Pereira asked Ms. Siegel to look into the matter and report back.

Mr. Gerritty said he was a member of the BCAS union and he described the changes made to sick time payouts over the years.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said she charges those costs that she is allowed to charge to the nutrition budget, which are termed indirect costs. She said the indirect costs rate, which is set by the state, has been declining over the last few years. She explained how the indirect costs are calculated.

Ms. Pereira moved *“to approve the food and nutrition services 2019-20 budget plan.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

The motion was approved by a 5-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Allen, Pereira, Sokolovic and

Weldon. Mr. Taylor was opposed.

The next agenda item was on the BPS healthy food certification.

Mr. Gerritty said the healthy food certification is an annual requirement. By the district agreeing not to sell a'la carte items that do not meet the definition of a healthy food as determined by the state the district is given ten cents per meal based on the previous year's total of lunches served. He said this is approximately \$339,000.

In response to a question, Mr. Gerritty said all the items sold meet the state's requirements.

Ms. Pereira moved "*to approve the Bridgeport Public Schools healthy food certification food and beverage lists of the cafeteria.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

The motion was approved by a 5-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Allen, Pereira, Sokolovic and Weldon. Mr. Taylor was opposed.

The next item was on the BPS healthy food certification survey.

Mr. Gerritty said the list that would be submitted summarizes the items that are being sold this year. Ms. Pereira asked why it was being approved in the middle of the school year. Mr. Gerritty said Mr. Esposito worked on the matter and he was not familiar with it.

Ms. Siegel said the approval was needed to maintain the program.

Ms. Pereira moved “*to approve the healthy food certification documentation survey for school year 2018-19.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

The motion was approved by a 5-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Allen, Pereira, Sokolovic and Weldon. Mr. Taylor was opposed.

Mr. Gerritty said the list was submitted on November 1st for the current school year.

The next agenda item was on the We Transport contract for 2019 to 2022, contract version 7-A.

Ms. Pereira moved “*to approve the We Transport contract for 2019 to 2022.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

Ms. Pereira suggested a date be added to the contract. Ms. Siegel said the term of the contract is July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2022.

Ms. Pereira noted the contract called for potential services provided to other departments of the City of Bridgeport. Ms. Siegel said that was included in prior contracts and the city department would have to pay for such use. She added that the city attorney reviewed the contract.

Mr. Taylor said he wanted to avoid controversy with the city, so it should be made clearer in the contract they have to pay for it. Ms. Siegel said We Transport would not provide a bus to a city department without a purchase order.

Mr. Taylor said the CFO should not be advising the board on standard practices in contractual law.

Mr. Weldon suggested a statement be added that the city department would pay for such bus use. Mr. Taylor said he was in favor of a simple sentence to that effect.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was similar language in the section about field trips. Ms. Pereira asked that a provision be added indicating the city would pay for such use in that section of the contract.

Ms. Pereira said she loved the provision which would provide a van for all parents and children enrolled in the Harding early learning center. Ms. Siegel said Dr. Johnson requested that provision.

Ms. Pereira said a provision indicating the city was an additional insured should be changed to the board being an additional insured. Ms. Siegel said it could be changed. Mr. Weldon said it could reference both the city and the board.

Ms. Pereira commended Ms. Siegel for including a provision for sexual misconduct insurance.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said the contract incorporated the language about cameras in prior amendments to the contract.

Ms. Pereira said the language about criminal backgrounds and references to sexual abuse and morally bankrupt behavior comes from a state statute. She noted the provision that indicates if a person is charged with a crime they cannot be an employee of We Transport. She said the five-year period after a person has been charged or convicted should be since the completion of probation or parole. She said Atty. Anastasi agreed with her during a

discussion in committee. She said Atty. Anastasi is working with the state Department of Education on such language for the expelled students RFP.

Ms. Siegel said she was willing to add the “completion” language.

Mr. Taylor said he did not care if it was state statute or not; he said he disagreed with Ms. Pereira’s legal opinion.

Mr. Weldon said he believed Atty. Anastasi was researching the validity of the language. Ms. Pereira said the city attorney had reviewed the We Transport contract.

Mr. Taylor objected to language about being litigious, since it could apply to civil court cases. He said this was BS and giving them the right to disqualify anyone they don’t want to work for them. He said it was racism at its best. He said he agreed with the language about sexual crimes.

Mr. Taylor said he was an ex-offender and he was concerned about ex-offenders having the opportunity to sit at the table of equity and get a job that pays a living wage.

Ms. Siegel said approval was requested tonight because We Transport has to place orders for new buses that can accommodate wheelchairs.

Ms. Pereira questioned the limitation of drivers to those aged twenty-one and above. Raul Laffitte, director of transportation, said that provision was in accordance with state statute.

Mr. Taylor objected to references to a civil judgment, which could be something as minor as a \$500 judgment for a

landlord in small claims court. Ms. Pereira said the reference is to civil judgments that would preclude employment in the Bridgeport Public School system. Mr. Taylor said it was just a racial tort and another way to suppress the people of Bridgeport

Ms. Pereira said Ms. Siegel negotiated an amazing price in the contract. She said she was pleasantly surprised by the increase – 1.06 percent in year one; 1.5 in year two, which is significantly lower than the bid submitted.

Ms. Siegel said the total three-year increase of the contract is \$718,000 or 3.96 percent, with new buses to be provided as delineated in the contract.

Ms. Pereira thanked Ms. Siegel.

Ms. Allen left the meeting.

Ms. Siegel said the analysis pertained to the primary services of about \$18 million. The other \$3 million in the current contract include summer services, homeless services of about \$500,000, and out-of-district sites.

Mr. Taylor left the meeting and there was no longer a quorum of the board.

Ms. Allen returned to the meeting.

Mr. Weldon said there appeared to be issues relative to the language in the contract.

Ms. Pereira requested the vote take place.

Ms. Allen left the meeting and there was no longer a quorum

of the board at 8:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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