

Monday, January 8, 2018

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held January 8, 2018, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:45 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Hernan Illingworth, Secretary Jessica Martinez, Sybil Allen, Dennis Bradley, Joseph Sokolovic, Chris Taylor, and Ben Walker.

Supt. Dr. Aresta Johnson was present.

Mr. Weldon said Spanish translation was available.

RECOGNITIONS:

Supt. Johnson introduced Principal Sharhanna Smith of Read School. The Uke group of 7th and 8th grade students led by George Prieto performed two songs, "Frosty the Snowman" and "Winter Wonderland."

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:

Daniel Campbell of Bassick High reported on his school. Among the items he highlighted were the PTSO's Three Kings celebration, Math Night, the boys' basketball team's rescheduled Virginia tournament in February, the implementation of the restorative justice initiative, and the upcoming book fair at Westport Barnes & Noble on February 6th.

Mr. Walker asked if the superintendent could get word out to the schools that all schools provide a student representative. Supt. Johnson noted the bad weather and the fact that schools were out of session the previous Thursday and Friday, which impacted preparations.

Mr. Bradley commended Mr. Campbell for braving the weather to make it to tonight's meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Angel Martinez, a Bassick student, said she was part of Make the Road Connecticut, which fights for dignity and respect in our communities. He said there is a campaign called Walking Towards a Brighter Future. He said he believed it was not the fault of any student who attended school late. He said the obstacles in their lives make them late for school.

Mr. Martinez asked a question about the board's willingness to give students a greater say in their education. Mr. Bradley suggested that matter be handled offline.

Anika Green, a Fairchild Wheeler 11th grader and a youth leader of Make the Road Connecticut, said the group meets every Friday to discuss issues. She said we are here because we want to learn more about the Board of Education and gain a better understanding of how the school district works. She said people outside of Bridgeport looked at Bridgeport students as uneducated. She said students in Bridgeport are not much different from any other school. She said teachers look down on students and are negative towards their education.

Tania Chapa, an 8th grader at Read School, said she was a member of Make The Road Connecticut. She said we address the changes we want to see with our walks to school, the lack of preparedness we face for college and the consequences when we are late to school. She said her family came to America for a better life. She said she is not fully confident that she will get the education she needs compared to other school districts.

Mr. Weldon said that the board members' contact information is on the board's website.

Malaska Hernandez, a Fairchild Wheeler student, said she was a youth leader in Make the Road Connecticut. She said she wanted to

learn more about the education system and how it impacts her journey in her life. She described a day in her life, including attending school. She said we students have been lacking materials needed to graduate. She said many students had to walk two miles or more to school and suffered unfair consequences for arriving to school late.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Mr. Illingworth moved approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 19, 2017. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Illingworth moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of December 19, 2017. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

CHAIR REPORT:

Mr. Walker said according to Policy 9130 that each board member is to serve on two committees. Mr. Weldon said one member is not on two committees and he hasn't had time to talk the member, but he has a plan to resolve the issue.

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND REFERRALS:

Mr. Walker said he would like to remind Mr. Illingworth of the superintendent's evaluation. Mr. Illingworth said it was on the agenda of the Personnel Committee. Mr. Weldon said there would be a mid-year review of the superintendent this month and he would send to members possible dates to convene.

Mr. Walker asked that the performance review document be made available to board members.

Mr. Walker said he wondered if a committee could change the date of its monthly meeting schedule to avoid having three committee meetings in one week.

Mr. Taylor said the Facilities Committee would meet at Central High on Wednesday. He said future meetings would be held in other

locations in the city.

Mr. Taylor said he was informed that a sprinkler pipe broke at Central High, an ambulance was called and two students left ill. He said he was going to put an end to the burden that Central High had been to the board.

Mr. Weldon said the Governance Committee would meet on January 17th.

Mr. Walker said the Teaching & Learning Committee would meet on January 16th.

Mr. Illingworth said the Personnel Committee would meet on January 18th. He said in future months the meetings will be held on the third Wednesday of each month.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Students & Families Committee would meet on January 11th.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT AND AGENDA:

Supt. Johnson said the water issue at Park City Magnet has been resolved and the school will open tomorrow. She added the sprinkler system at Dunbar caused the school to be closed today, but it will be open tomorrow.

Dr. Johnson said Fairchild Wheeler did not have heat today, but the facilities department and the custodial department did an outstanding job and it will open tomorrow.

At John Winthrop School there was a water leak in the parking lot area, but the school was open today and will be open tomorrow.

Dr. Johnson said there was an issue with the sprinkler system at Central High and it was quickly resolved. The school was fully operational.

Supt. Johnson said she attended The Three Kings celebration at Marin School. She noted Ms. Martinez and Mr. Bradley attended. She

added Maria Valle and the committee did an outstanding job.

Supt. Johnson noted the board members' packets contained information on budget cuts that have been experienced in the last year. She said she would present information along with Marlene Siegel at tomorrow's Finance Committee meeting.

The next agenda item was on the district's plan for displaced students from Puerto Rico. Ana Sousa-Martins, director of the bilingual and world languages department, said the district receives an Immigrant Grant money of about \$126,000 from the state, which covers students from Mexico, Central and South American, Brazil, Asia and Caribbean countries.

Ms. Sousa-Martins said registration of Puerto Rican students takes place at the bilingual office. This allows the office to provide language support assistance. Approximately 174 students from Puerto Rico have come to the district.

Ms. Sousa-Martins described the schools that have transitional bilingual programs and ESL tutoring.

Ms. Sousa-Martins said parents have a say in what schools the displaced students are assigned to. Parents have the right to decline bilingual or ESL services. Most of the displaced students have been assigned to Marin because of available seats, the dual language program and a self-contained bilingual program. Many high school students have been sent to Harding, which has a self-contained bilingual program.

Students from Puerto Rico have been referred to school-based clinics for physicals and immunizations.

In response to a question, Ms. Sousa-Martins said it has come to her attention that some of the students are returning back to Puerto Rico because of cold weather and lack of employment. She said most families have told her that they will return to Puerto Rico once the electricity and water utilities have been restored to the whole island.

In response to a question, Ms. Sousa-Martins said the Immigrant

Grant funds are not used for Puerto Rican students, but those students might participate in a tutoring session covered by the grant, which is provided by the Connecticut Department of Education. The grant amount was \$128,000 over two years.

Ms. Sousa-Martins said that students take a standardized assessment provided by the state, which assesses their speaking, listening, reading and writing. The progress of each individual student is tracked. She said she has had informal discussions with colleagues in Hartford and New Haven. She added the online software used (ESL Reading Smart and Education City) provides monthly reports on student progress.

Mr. Bradley asked if Optimus pays any rent to the district. He noted Optimus receives HUSKY reimbursements. Supt. Johnson said she didn't believe Optimus pays anything to the district. She added fees to be charged for the use of facilities will be under consideration in at the committee level.

In response to a question, Ms. Sousa-Martins said her department did not have a budget. She said she works in collaboration with the chief financial officer. Mr. Taylor said everyone needs a budget and the issue would be remedied in the Finance Committee.

Tina Peloso-Ulreich, director of early childhood, provided an update on a prior early childhood presentation. She said seven additional preschool slots were filled after informational sessions at Hall School and Wilbur Cross School.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said Erica Valentin, the PDG coordinator, followed strategies from the state Office of Early Childhood to recruit students. There was collaboration with community partners, distribution of flyers, meetings with community agencies, phone blasts, and the use of social media.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said a major issue is parents often don't want to enroll their child in certain locations. She said the Office of Early Childhood will look at her action plan and evaluate the situation.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said some sites such as Blackham and Winthrop

fill up very rapidly while other sites take a long time to fill. She said there are 11 open slots at Wilbur Cross. Total capacity at Cross is 36 students.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said her plan is to finish this school year and then move a full class of 18 children from Cross to Hall School.

Mr. Bradley asked how much the district could lose due to under-enrollment. Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said School Readiness permits the movement of seats to other locations. Supt. Johnson said we cannot move the seats without state authorization.

Mr. Taylor suggested the state legislative delegation be contacted to help move things at the state level.

Lee Helmerich, school readiness coordinator, said School Readiness is a state-funded grant and the state has full control and it allows moving seats around. PDG is a federal grant, which involves the federal government in any attempt to move seats.

Mr. Taylor said Senators Murphy and Blumenthal and Jim Himes should be contacted to help because they are always quick to be on Channel 12.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said Wilbur Cross was chosen as a location because there were two empty classrooms and it was thought there was a need there. She said she learned in late October there was a chance that PDG would take away the slots.

Ms. Valentin said proposed changes are submitted to the state at the end of the fiscal year in June.

Ms. Helmerich said the largest expense of the program are teachers and paraprofessionals, so even if all slots in the classroom are not filled it does not create "wild card" money that can be used elsewhere.

In response to a question, Ms. Helmerich said there is concern because this is the first time the federal government has said it will take the slots away, along with the payment for the slots.

Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, said if the seats aren't filled and funding is removed, there is less money available to pay the teacher and the para in the classroom. Supt. Johnson said the 11 seats at \$6400 each means about \$70,000 would be lost. She said beyond fiscal matters, the loss of slots would impact the education system and the community. She said the slots are first and foremost an opportunity for students and families.

Mr. Bradley said if the slots are not filled, the funds are freed up to use for other things. Ms. Siegel said we are only able to use the funds for specific categories covered by the guidelines of the grant.

Mr. Bradley said it's the same thing we criticize the charter schools for. The money is freed up for other expenses. Ms. Siegel said the funds have to be used for program-related expenses in specific categories, subject to specific criteria and limits. Mr. Bradley said he was happy the state is forcing people to fill the preschool vacancies.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said she was passionate about early childhood education and it bothers her that there are eleven children somewhere that are not getting the early learning experience. She said she was optimistic that the slots will be transferred to Hall School for next year.

Mr. Sokolovic said if the slots are taken they will basically be taken away forever, which leads to eleven children who will not be educated in preschool and who will be ready for kindergarten. He said the big deal was not the dollars and cents, but that children will lose out. He said anybody up here who is worried about dollars and cents rather than eleven children not filling the slots are in the wrong place.

Mr. Taylor suggested reaching out to a district leader Steve Nelson and Reverend Mary McBride-Lee for help with networking. Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said she would do that.

Supt. Johnson reported there were no injuries at Central High during the water leak. Mr. Taylor said he did not state anyone was injured. He said he received the information from Councilwoman Jeanette Herron about the pipe burst and the calling of the ambulance.

Mr. Walker moved approval of items I to VII on the consent agenda. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and approved by 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Pereira, Walker, Illingworth, Martinez, Sokolovic, Weldon, Taylor and Allen. Mr. Bradley abstained.

OLD BUSINESS:

Mr. Illingworth noted the agenda item on 2017-18 budget was on Finance Committee's agenda tomorrow night.

NEW BUSINESS:

Supt. Johnson said the agenda item on valentines for veterans came out of Congressman Himes's office. Children will make valentine's cards for veterans. An address has been provided where the cards can be mailed.

Mr. Taylor said he was not okay with this. He suggested we tell Congressman Himes if he wants these valentines that he help us with the preschool slots.

Ms. Martinez asked about the payment of postage for the valentines.

Mr. Bradley said he used to work for Congressman Himes. He said it was a wonderful veteran who came up with the idea. He said in the past the way it works is the school brings the valentines to Congressman Himes's office and his office would mail them out or distribute them.

Mr. Taylor moved that we will not participate with the valentines for vets if Congressman Himes does not facilitate a conversation for the early childhood development department. The motion was not seconded.

Mr. Taylor asked if you're going to let that guy exploit our kids and then take eleven seats. Ms. Martinez said she would do so for veterans.

Mr. Bradley said he believed Mr. Himes's office should be doing a lot more, but if they reach out they will pleasantly pleased by the staff and the work they do. He said if it doesn't happen, then he is behind Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Walker moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Bradley and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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