

Monday, December 10, 2018

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE  
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held December  
10, 2018, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science &  
Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road,  
Bridgeport, Connecticut

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

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

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

### **RECOGNITIONS:**

Dr. Johnson asked Saleh Hanaif, coach of the Bassick High soccer team, who had a 13-3-2 record, finishing number four in the state, to talk about the season and his players, who were present. Coach Michael Silver was also present. She congratulated the team and thanked them for the autographed photo.

Mr. Hanaif thanked the parents and the community. He said the police department worked with the young men over the summer by running at 8:00 in the morning preparing for the season. He thanked the board, as well as the Bridgeport Field of Dreams for sponsoring five players and Jessica Martinez for sponsoring a player.

Mr. Hanaif said the team has had success for a number of years. This year's team made it to the quarterfinals against a very powerful Avon High team. The game was played on a very cold night and unfortunately lost on penalty kicks. He noted the team lacks some of the facilities and size of other schools, but makes up for it in heart. He said he could not be more proud of the young men for working hard.

Dr. Johnson presented certificates of recognition to the team and the coaches.

### **STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:**

Alicia Brockenberry of Bassick High reported on her school. Among the items she highlighted were congratulations to the soccer team, her thanks to the board for support for a new Bassick, and the National Honor Society's tour of the school with the board.

Jinary Fulgencio of Bassick highlighted the toy drives by the PTSO and the SROs, boys' basketball's first game on Thursday, and the 176 students who achieved first or second honors or perfect attendance.

Abud Hennawi of Central High highlighted the National Honor Society's blood drive, the annual Multicultural Night, a college application event, and holiday decorating based on the theme of kindness.

Julenny Jimenez of Bridgeport Military Academy reported on her school. She highlighted the election of PTSO officers, the successful naval inspection, November 30th's homecoming dance, the 485 applications received for entrance to the school and the school's participation in the Bethel drill competition.

Emily Nivello of the IT School at Fairchild Wheeler highlighted the awards ceremony on November 30th, the Junior Achievement event on December 4th, tomorrow's open house, and the drama club's second annual play upcoming on Friday night.

Queston Parker of the IT School at Fairchild Wheeler highlighted the new monthly gaming tournaments, a partnership with Sacred Heart University involving autonomous vehicles and the anti-bullying initiative.

Anthony Miller of the BioTech School at Fairchild Wheeler highlighted the 59-point increase by juniors in PSAT scores over last year, the Snowball Dance, and Wednesday's last Exhibition Day for the calendar year.

Allana Marrett of Harding High School highlighted the PTSO's turkey drive for Thanksgiving that collected over 100 donated meals, the football team's victory over Central High, and the three players named All-SCC. She said the girls' basketball team begins its season at Wilton tonight. She said there are evening programs at the school on social-emotional health and college counseling on Thursdays, sponsored by the Great City Schools/Males of Color Committee.

Ethan Wei Aoki of the Aero/Hydrospace School at Fairchild Wheeler highlighted Dr. Johnson's meetings with parents and staff concerning the consolidation of the three schools. He said Dr. Johnson had agreed not to consolidate the schools. He also highlighted today's Quarter 1 honors ceremony, including nearly 40 percent of the school achieving perfect attendance. He said Aero students exceeded the district by 87 points in PSAT testing. This

week there will be a trip to the submarine base at Groton and Electric Boat to learn about current technology.

Mr. Taylor wished everyone a Happy Hanukkah. He asked for a moment of silence to remember December 7th, 1941, and the bombing of Pearl Harbor. He said that Doris Miller, a mess hand on the *U.S.S. West Virginia*, received a Navy Cross for his actions at Pearl Harbor. He said if he had not been a man of color he would have received the Medal of Honor. He urged President Trump and Congress to award Doris Miller the Congressional Medal of Honor.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Betty Lizardo, a single mother of four children, said she works fulltime at Federal Express and another part-time job from 4:00 to 9:00 p.m. She said her son is a special education student at a facility in Hamden and will be transferred to ACES in North Haven this week. She said the board will not authorize busing for him to get picked up and dropped at her home. She said Mr. Laffitte told her the board is the only entity that can make the change for her. She said We Transport had been acting inappropriately towards her.

John DiDonato, chief of specialized instructional reform, said the current board policy is that students cannot be picked up from day-care centers or baby-sitters.

Ms. Pereira referred the matter to the Teaching & Learning Committee. Mr. Taylor said when Dr. Johnson negotiates with We Transport she should bring up their being rude to a constituent. Mr. Walker asked Mr. DiDonato to send him an e-mail on the matter for consideration at this month's Teaching & Learning Committee.

John Mulero, a Fairchild Wheeler student, said he has had special education services since kindergarten. He said he had gone through experiences with bullying, rejection, and labeled and marginalized as an incompetent minority. He said he found Fairchild Wheeler to be a safe environment. He urged the board to let the school continue as three academies and to retain the excellent staff of principals and assistant principals.

Keyla Medina, a Bassick graduate and parent of three girls who attended district schools, said great distress was caused at Fairchild Wheeler by the idea of consolidating the school into one school. She said students are worried they will lose teachers, teachers are afraid they will lose their jobs, and parents are afraid to lose the culture that has been built. She said the consolidation would have taken away scholarships from students and led to the loss of many suburban students. She said the parents were told they would have to give something up, like they were striking a deal at a poker table, such as administrative staff.

Christy Duffy, a supplier of clean energy systems in Bridgeport, said he wanted to leave information for the board on how to achieve energy savings without cost to the city. He added he was available to answer any questions about building a safer, greener Bridgeport.

Mr. Walker said the matter could be referred to the Facilities Committee. Mr. Taylor said he met Mr. Duffy and saw the solar panels in the East End. He said he would look forward to discussing the matter in committee.

Patricia Roberts, a PTSO member at Fairchild Wheeler, thanked the board members for serving. She said students have still not recovered from the shock of the proposed

consolidation of the three schools. She said the latest news is now possible layoffs or removal of assistant principals. She urged there be a sit-down talk about the impact of removing staff from the school. She said recruitment of suburban students was needed to keep magnet status.

Albert Benejan, PTSO president at Bassick High, thanked the board for their vote for a new Bassick. He said he likes to work together with all the board members. He said he was very sad about what was going on with Fairchild Wheeler and he did not understand trying to remove an assistant principal, which would hurt students. He said he was talking slowly so people could better understand his Spanglish. He said he was talking from the heart and for the students.

#### **APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:**

Ms. Pereira moved approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of November 26, 2018. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen. A correction was noted. The motion was approved by a 8-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Pereira, Bradley, Walker, Sokolovic, Allen, Illingworth, Martinez and Weldon. Mr. Taylor abstained.

Ms. Pereira moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of November 16, 2018. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez. The motion was approved by a 8-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Pereira, Bradley, Walker, Sokolovic, Allen, Illingworth, Martinez and Weldon. Mr. Taylor abstained.

Ms. Pereira moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of November 30, 2018. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez. The motion was approved by a 8-0 vote.

Voting in favor were members Pereira, Bradley, Walker, Sokolovic, Allen, Illingworth, Martinez and Weldon. Mr. Taylor abstained.

### **CHAIR REPORT:**

Mr. Weldon said he had the privilege of attending the event honoring Ms. Sheena Graham for being Teacher of the Year in the state.

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said Rep. Santiago is exploring four possible dates in December to have a meeting between the board and the legislative delegation.

Ms. Pereira said the ad hoc committee on security protocols is still not on the district's website.

Ms. Pereira requested Mr. Weldon reschedule a meeting to work on the board's goals and objectives. After discussion, December 19th was decided upon.

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

Mr. Taylor reported on the Facilities Committee. He said the next meeting would be in January.

Ms. Martinez said the Finance Committee would meet on December 12th. She said she would be discussing the Fairchild Wheeler situation and the School Volunteer Association in the committee's January meeting.

Ms. Pereira asked that the whole debacle around the SROs be discussed at the Finance Committee.

Mr. Weldon said the Governance Committee would meet

again in January.

Mr. Walker said the Teaching & Learning Committee will meet on December 18th.

Mr. Walker said the board voted to approve an application for Roosevelt School to enter into the Commissioner's Network. He said the next step is to form a turnaround committee, which will include two representatives nominated by the board. He suggested that Camille Cox, the PTSO president at Roosevelt, be the parent representative and Principal Jackie Simmons be the administrative representative.

Mr. Walker moved that "*we approve Camille Cox, PTSO president, for the parent rep and Jackie Simmons as administrative rep.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she will also be adding a designee to the committee.

The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Walker said the next item was the RFP for expelled students' mandated instruction. He said the RFP had been vetted by the committee and requested board approval.

Mr. Walker moved that "*we approve the RFP for expulsion.*" Ms. Pereira seconded the motion with edits.

Mr. Taylor said he would not sign onto this. He said he represents the people, while having no personal interest in the 38-year contract that's been awarded to The University School. He said he doesn't like some of the verbiage in the



RPP, but unfortunately he was caught off guard and did not have time to do his diligence or take it to his constituent base or obtain professional input. He suggested the matter be tabled.

Ms. Pereira said the RFP had been vetted in three committee meetings, although she suggested extending the date for responses from January 17 to the end of January. She said the contract itself did not need to be attached to the bid.

In response to a question, Ms. Pereira and Dr. Johnson said the contract had been vetted by the city attorney's office. Ms. Pereira said the city attorney's office looked at the RFP before it came back to committee. Mr. Walker said the final edits went through Tony Pires.

Mr. Taylor said he was informed today it was not reviewed by the city attorney. He said he had issues with vagueness such as references to moral character which could disqualify someone who had an affair. He said he agreed with criminal background checks.

Ms. Pereira said the language was taken from the state Department of Education that is used for anybody in a certified position and above. Mr. Taylor said he could not go along with the language referring to lack of moral character because it is too ambiguous. Ms. Pereira said the language was added by the city attorney's office.

Ms. Martinez said she needed further clarification on the language regarding criminal activity, including whether the five years run from conviction or release from prison.

Mr. Weldon said Dr. Johnson suggested the city attorney

explain the verbiage to the board. Mr. Weldon suggested it be done at the December 17th meeting.

Mr. Weldon moved to withdraw his motion on the RFP. Ms. Pereira seconded the withdrawal.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Students & Families Committee had not met recently. He moved *“to adjust the control policy transfer number from 5116 to 5116(a) to properly align with the table to contents in student series 5000.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

Ms. Pereira said the date for the approval of the elementary magnet entrance and performance policy is incorrect on the index, as all three were approved on November 26th, not November 8th. There was a discussion of the proper date to put on the policy.

The motion was unanimously approved.

## **SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT AND AGENDA:**

Dr. Johnson discussed the District at a Glance report. She said the students at Harding High did a phenomenal job in musical performances at the event honoring Sheena Graham.

Dr. Johnson said the community forum at Johnson School, in collaboration with BMA, Columbus School, Curiale, Bryant, Classical Studies and Hall, had an excellent turnout. She said the principals, parents and students made it a success.

Dr. Johnson said she is working with Atty. Bohannon in regard to the city paying for the arbitration process with the SROs. Ms. Pereira said the city did not send out the layoff

notices to the SROs on time, the arbitration was lost, and the city should have to pay the amount awarded.

Dr. Johnson said the next item was on accepting the Fairchild Wheeler Campus as complete in order to receive the reimbursement from the state.

Larry Schilling said when the state makes payments to the city they hold back a certain percent until the project is closed out with the state. On Fairchild Wheeler it was five percent (approximately \$5 million). When the board votes to declare the project complete the reimbursement can be received by the city.

In response to a question, Mr. Schilling said he meets with the board's facilities department every two weeks and they bring up the issues. The last issues addressed were building controls, a railing on the roof and the gray wire system. He said he was not aware of any issue with the turbines.

Dr. Johnson said she has discussed the issue with Mr. Wallack and the building is complete and ready to go before the board for a vote.

Mr. Taylor said as chair of the Facilities Committee this is the first he's heard about it. He said Bridgeport has the worst school construction that he has ever seen. He said he was not signing off on anything until he visits the school and meets with the staff in private. He said he was free tomorrow and would clear his calendar for when Dr. Johnson can get him in the school.

Ms. Pereira said she didn't understand why this keeps happening. She said this should go to the Facilities Committee first. She noted there was a major water leak at

Harding and Mr. Schilling said at another meeting that stuff happens all the time.

Mr. Taylor asked Fairchild Wheeler parents to reach out to him about any issues with the school.

Mr. Schilling said he asked for the item to be on the agenda of the November 5th Facilities Committee meeting, but the meeting was not held.

Mr. Bradley said he was a big fan of football and noted there were problems with the football field at Harding, including the audio system and stands on one side of the field. Ms. Pereira said the audio issue is being addressed by the School Building Committee.

Mr. Weldon noted it was the city that paid the bills and is awaiting reimbursement. Mr. Schilling said the project was finished in 2014, there was a one-year warranty on the project and some issues that have come up have been dealt with by the contractors after the warranty expired.

Ms. Pereira asked Mr. Taylor to look into the turbines on the roof. Mr. Taylor said he would be going on the roof of the school.

Ms. Pereira moved “to *postpone until the next regular meeting.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira moved to approve Item I. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker. The motion was approved by an 8-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Pereira, Bradley, Walker, Sokolovic, Allen, Illingworth, Martinez and Weldon. Mr. Taylor abstained.

## OLD BUSINESS:

The next item was on community forums. Mr. Illingworth said he attended two of the three forums and they are not in conformance with what the intent was. He said he had received a lot of phone calls that they are held just to bash the City Council, even though the council was not involved in setting the dates. He said we can't allow one board member to use this as a stage to attack partners on the City Council. He said it would do more harm than good.

Mr. Illingworth moved that *"we put a hold on these community forums and somehow we regroup and try to plan them the way the intent was initiated to begin with."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Bradley.

Ms. Martinez moved to amend the motion *"to create structure around the community forums and they be special meetings."* She said she agreed with Mr. Illingworth. She said the board should act as one. She said board members out in public were representing the Board of Education and a reflection on all of us. She said there should be structure to the community forums.

Mr. Illingworth seconded the amendment.

Ms. Pereira said all board members had the right to their own opinion and to express their opinions. She said if the City Council and mayor can't tolerate facts of the budgets they've voted for and they can't handle what their constituents say who they represent, they should do what's in the best interests of children. She said that the mayor had proposed three consecutive budgets with a zero increase was factual information. She said every board member had

a right to free speech by board policy and the U.S. Constitution.

Mr. Taylor said he was for the people, but did not agree with the community forums. He said it was the community's job to facilitate a community forum, not the superintendent and the board. He said the board meetings were the community forum for the board.

Ms. Martinez said the board agreed on the community forums for one reason, to get ahead of the city's and state's budget sessions and arm the city and the state with the facts. She added that we need their partnership.

Ms. Martinez said divisive measures do not help us. She said the olive branch should be extended to the City Council to build bridges. She said the board was a department of the city and should work together. She said the forums should continue and thousands of people should come to request money from the state and the city.

Ms. Martinez said Ms. Pereira does more than speak the facts because she creates divisive measures such as referring to a City Council member who is ill. She said Ms. Pereira did things without the board's knowledge such as phone banking. She said bridges should be built, not burned.

Dr. Johnson said she shared with principals in phone conferences about the community forums that they are intended to be collaborative and collegial. She said she had followed up with thank-you cards to the City Council members who attended. She said her goal is to have the City Council members comfortable enough to sit down and talk with us. She said she wanted the council members to feel they had been treated with dignity and respect when

they came to the schools, which will make colleagues more inclined to also come.

Dr. Johnson noted the forums were part of her evaluation and she was charged with setting these up and going out into the community. She said principals are working diligently on them.

Mr. Walker said the board wanted the superintendent to focus on community outreach, which is what he heard from Dr. Johnson at the forum he attended. He said his biggest concern moving forward was the message getting out that the board is closing schools and firing teachers. He said the messaging should be tempered and directed towards indicating it was about partnering for the budget.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was a discussion at the committee about outreach to constituents and it was not like Ms. Pereira went rogue. He said he agreed with creating structure at the forums, but not restricting First Amendment rights. He said he felt very uncomfortable when the City Council cuts the board's budget requests and there needed to be a balance between instructing, advocating and respect at the forums.

Ms. Pereira said under board policy any member can connect with a principal. She said after the terrible Bassick forum, which had only had seven parents attending, she met with the four principals whose schools were in the next forum and a strategy was created to phone bank and she agreed to participate. She said she followed board policy.

Ms. Pereira said a City Council member confirmed their attendance and then did not call to cancel. She said it was factual to say the council member was a no-show. Ms.

Martinez said the council member was sick.

Ms. Pereira said she had been involved in the board longer than anyone and everyone has been cordial to the City Council and the Legislature and it hasn't gotten us anything. She said it was time to hold the mayor, City Council and legislative delegation to fulfill their obligations to children. She said somebody at Thomas Hooker thanked the Democratic Town Committee, which had nothing to do with the forum.

Ms. Martinez said she agreed with much of what Ms. Pereira said, but after much damage control she has sat down with the City Council leaders and asked them not to hold Ms. Pereira's actions against us.

Ms. Martinez said her amendment was to continue the forums with structure as a special meeting. Mr. Weldon said there would be a set agenda to be developed by the superintendent. Ms. Pereira noted there were seven more meetings scheduled.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested an amendment that in the event there is not a quorum that the event be converted to a community forum. Mr. Weldon said the last forum at Johnson School had a set agenda. Dr. Johnson said the agenda had been refined after each community forum in an effort to get it right.

The motion as amended was approved by a 7-2 vote. Voting in favor were members Pereira, Walker, Sokolovic, Weldon, Martinez, Allen and Bradley. Voting in opposition were members Taylor and Illingworth.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**



The next item was on mandating college preparatory courses and applications for all high school students as a requirement prior to graduation.

Mr. Bradley said it was his item. He said he was blessed after being elected to higher office of running into a lot of people, including at people from preparatory schools, who say the schools mandate college application.

Mr. Bradley noted when he was growing up he rarely met with a guidance counselor, but his parents insisted he and his siblings go to college. He suggested a mandate that students and counselors talk about what is on the students' agenda for the future. He said college and law school had transformed his life, and we need to see more of that in urban America.

Mr. Taylor said he did not want to make graduation any more difficult for Bridgeport students. He said when he was young college was never on his radar, although he appreciated Mr. Bradley's outlook. He said trade schools were a good option, noting he can't find a CEL driver, plumbers or HVAC guys. He said there was a lot of ways to earn wealth in this nation.

Mr. Weldon said it sounded like Mr. Bradley was advocating having a system in place where students are thinking about what they're going to do at the end of high school. Mr. Bradley said as we look at America people of color are in deficit. He said he can count on one hand the amount of people of color in courtrooms. He said more doctors, engineers and lawyers were needed, not just blue collar workers.

Ms. Pereira said a child's future endeavors should be

determined by the child and their parents. She noted there would be an advanced manufacturing program, a field in which there are high-paying jobs, at Bassick. She said BMA was another route for students. She suggested the concept be looked at in the Teaching & Learning Committee, particularly when it is appropriate, and the costs.

Mr. Walker said he applauded Mr. Bradley's lofty ideals. He said he did not believe any public schools in the state had these kind of restrictions. He said we don't have the infrastructure in the guidance department for it. He said he would look at it in the Teaching & Learning Committee.

Mr. Bradley said he understood there needed to be more legwork, but it had to start somewhere, like the African-American history requirement. He noted he comes from a blue-collar family himself. He said having the conversation about going to college was important, although everyone was not suited to go.

Mr. Walker noted the district gives aptitude tests to students during high school and said he would like to look at the available data.

Dr. Johnson said career and college readiness courses are offered in the high schools. She added there are freshman seminar courses offered through Housatonic Community College to Harding, Central and Bassick students.

Mr. Weldon said Dr. Johnson requested an item be added to the agenda on the Bridgeport Chargers.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to add to the agenda discussion and possible action on the Bridgeport Chargers."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker.

The motion was approved by an 8-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Martinez, Taylor, Walker, Allen, Pereira, Bradley and Sokolovic. Mr. Illingworth was opposed.

Dr. Johnson said the Bridgeport Chargers would be traveling tomorrow night to a national competition. She said they reached out to the city and the board for assistance in traveling. There are 26 students on the team, of which 20 are Bridgeport Public School students. The total cost is \$15,000. They have received \$1,000 from the city and the team raised \$1,000 by fundraising on their own. She asked if the board was willing to contribute some financial support.

Mr. Taylor said he would try to get Ms. Schilling to open his checkbook for the students tomorrow at Fairchild Wheeler. He said they deserved to have the whole tab paid.

Ms. Pereira said the board's job was to educate students, not send them to football championships. Mr. Taylor said it taught students teamwork and leadership.

Mr. Taylor moved "*to fund the difference of what they don't fund-raise on their own*". The motion was seconded by Mr. Bradley.

Mr. Sokolovic said the board was coming off budget cuts. He said he supported the students one hundred percent but this would be a very slippery slope, where the board would have to decide whether to fund subsequent groups or not. He said the district is bleeding and the status of the budget is unknown.

Mr. Bradley said as a position of moral authority there cannot be board meetings where we besmirch the name of the City

Council and mayor for not supporting our children and then when given an opportunity to give to our children we say we don't have any money.

Ms. Pereira said our charge is educating them. Mr. Bradley said education includes arts and sports.

Mr. Walker moved to amend the motion that the board would fund at the same level as the city.

Mr. Taylor said he was going to talk to Mr. Schilling tomorrow about this. He said the Chargers deserve to go and they're our students. He added the board represents their parents. He said he agreed with Mr. Bradley.

Ms. Pereira said we don't have money for our own sports programs. Mr. Taylor said they had money to hire who they want to hire, but we can never find money for students.

The motion was approved by a 6-3 vote. Voting in favor were members Allen, Taylor, Bradley, Illingworth, Martinez, and Weldon. Voting in opposition were members Walker, Sokolovic and Pereira.

Mr. Bradley said the motion was to pay for the difference between the cost and the amount raised. Mr. Weldon said it would not exceed \$14,000.

Ms. Allen moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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