

Monday, December 17, 2018

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held December
17, 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 President Jessica Martinez, Joseph Sokolovic, Chris Taylor, Sybil Allen, Maria Pereira, and Ben Walker. Dennis Bradley arrived subsequently as noted.

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

RECOGNITIONS:

Dr. Johnson introduced the Park City Magnet chorus and orchestra's performance of *Gloria*. She said the students were under the direction of Catherine Ashman, Yvette Patterson and Micah Smith. She also acknowledged Park City Magnet, principal, Ms. Maguire, and the director of performing arts, Alicia Robinson, for putting together tonight's performance.

Ms. Pereira moved to recess the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved. The meeting was recessed at 6:37 p.m.

The meeting was reconvened at 6:44 p.m.

Mr. Weldon said translation services were available.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:

Alicia Brockenberry of Bassick High reported on her school. Among the items she highlighted were the National Honor Society fundraiser, the PTSO's toy drive and Christmas bazaar, and the start of basketball season

Alayjah Evans of Central reported on her school. Among the items she highlighted were the ongoing Spirit Week, recognition ceremonies, the successful Multicultural Night, and 75 seniors accepted to college last week as part of On-the-Spot Application Day.

Anthony Miller, a senior at the Biotech School at Fairchild Wheeler reported on the Aerospace School. He highlighted field trips to Sikorsky, the submarine base at Groton, and Electric Boat. Anthony highlighted items at Biotech such as the first quarter awards assembly, the successful Exhibition Day, and students who have heard back from colleges after applying for early acceptance.

Queston Parker of the IT School at Fairchild Wheeler reported on his school. He highlighted the upcoming ugly sweater day, an event at Build a Bear in Trumbull that will result in the donation of the bears to the Special Olympics of Trumbull, and the third annual play, *Crazy Town*.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Albert Benejan, PTSO president at Bassick High, wished Happy Holidays to everyone. He honored Roberto "Tito" Rodriguez for all he does for the schools and students. He also honored James Meszoros for his 25 years of service to

the children and parents.

Mr. Bradley arrived at the meeting.

Gail Janensch reported that the League of Women Voters had partnered with the schools for the community conversations, with the last two being out of sight successes. She said she believed Fairfield County Community Foundation would be funding community engagement in the district in the future. She said the seven upcoming community conversations would have representatives from the League present.

CHAIR REPORT:

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said he had not submitted the new committee assignments. He asked members to indicate to him any preferences they have about serving on or chairing committees.

Mr. Walker said the board would not meet again until January and technically none of the committees exist until the assignments are announced at a public meeting. Ms. Pereira said the assignments had to be filed with the superintendent's office and read aloud at the next regular meeting.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:

Mr. Taylor reported on the Facilities Committee. He said he had been to Fairchild Wheeler twice. He recommended that Dr. Johnson and the board fire both Larry Schilling and Mr. Wallack on the spot. He said what he saw at the school today was heartbreaking. He said it was a new building with the shoddiest workmanship he has ever seen. He said he

was writing a documented report on it that was not ready for tonight. He said he had great concerns about structural cracks he had seen.

Ms. Pereira said the board cannot fire anybody because it is not our role. She noted Mr. Schilling worked for the city. Mr. Taylor suggesting calling Mayor Ganim and telling him to fire Mr. Schilling.

Ms. Pereira asked if the issue about community gardens was ever addressed as promised. Dr. Johnson said she would follow up with Dr. Otuwa tomorrow and report to the board. She said Angela Bhushan, director of science, was going to take the lead on it.

Ms. Martinez reported on the Finance Committee. She said there was not a quorum at the December 12th meeting, but an informational session was held.

Mr. Weldon said the Governance Committee meeting for tonight was cancelled because it conflicted with this meeting.

Ms. Pereira noted there was a referral previously regarding the superintendent's evaluation.

Mr. Walker said the Teaching & Learning Committee would meet tomorrow.

In response to a question, Mr. Walker said data is being gathered about mandatory college applications for students and will be discussed in the January meeting. He said he would alert Mr. Bradley when the agenda is put together.

Ms. Pereira said certified teacher turnover data was still needed for the Personnel Committee. She said a completely

inaccurate report was received. She said the issue of updating hiring policies still had to be handled.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Students & Families Committee would meet on Thursday, December 20th.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORTS/AGENDA:

Dr. Johnson said Columbus School's contract with the Sheehan Center still requires review.

Ms. Pereira moved "*to postpone Columbus School's contract with the Sheehan Center.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and approved by a 7-0 vote.

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

Dr. Johnson said the Bridgeport Police Department raised \$31,000 to purchase bicycles for students from Wal-Mart. The students were chosen based on recommendations from the school social workers. Ms. Pereira suggested the board send a formal letter thanking them for their generosity.

Ms. Pereira moved to approve Items I, II, IV, V, VI and VII. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and approved by a 7-0 vote.

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

Regarding Item III, Ms. Pereira said she was shocked to see Ms. Cherry-Cruz retiring. She said she found her to be amazing and competent.

Dr. Johnson said Ms. Cherry-Cruz met the requirements for retirement after ten years in Bridgeport and previous service in other urban districts. She said Ms. Cherry-Cruz had been a great asset and will be missed as a person, a professional and a colleague and friend.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said there will be an interim director and the position will be posted this week.

Ms. Pereira moved to approve Roman numeral III. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

OLD BUSINESS:

Ms. Pereira moved *“to postpone the item on RFP for Expulsion to the next regular meeting.”* She said she understood the item had not been looked at by the city attorney yet. The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor and unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira said the language that concerned Mr. Taylor in the RFP was taken from the Connecticut General Statutes.

The next item was on discussion and possible action on acceptance of the Fairchild Wheeler campus.

Dr. Johnson said the acceptance was in order for the city to get reimbursed their \$5 million. She said the board needed to make a decision whether they are ready to accept it or not.

Ms. Pereira said in all her time on the board she had never heard anyone come to the board in reference to major problems at the school.

Mr. Taylor said that he will attest to how bad the construction practice there is. He urged the board not to release the \$5 million. He said he went there twice and was willing to go back again. He said it was concerning if the board was willing to accept such bad practices. He asked the board to hear from Mr. Lipp, a principal at Fairchild Wheeler.

Mr. Taylor said somebody has to be called to task on this. He said he was not embarrassed to call names and Mr. Schilling is the one directly in charge. He said he was not an engineer, but what was going on could be catastrophic.

Mr. Walker asked the chair to organize a visit to the school by the board. Ms. Pereira noted it was the most expensive school ever built in Bridgeport.

Mr. Weldon suggested the board tour the building and then hear from Mr. Lipp. Ms. Pereira suggested the School Building Committee members be invited. She suggested the visit take place on Friday morning. Mr. Taylor said he had been to the school twice and had spent hours there.

Mr. Weldon invited Principal Jay Lipp to address the board. Mr. Lipp said most of the issues that came up today had been brought up through the facilities department previously through the proper chain of command. He said some of them are being worked on and he was not sure of the status of some of the others.

Mr. Lipp said Mr. Taylor noticed issues with weather-stripping and caulking absent from the façade of the building and some splits in the membrane of the roof. He said in two of the stairwells there is cracking of cinder blocks and the cafeteria floor has some uneven areas.

Mr. Lipp said he had brought these items up in the past with the exception of the roof issue and the alignment of the façade where there are some gaps.

Ms. Pereira noted the School Building Committee would be meeting Thursday afternoon. She asked Mr. Weldon put this item on the agenda of the committee. Mr. Weldon said he would like to see the building first before submitting an agenda item. He said he would invite the School Building Committee members to the walk-through.

Mr. Lipp said the school could host the meeting if necessary.

Mr. Taylor urged the board be wary when the people start making excuses for the construction practices. He said don't buy anything they say just because they have a title.

Ms. Pereira noted the school opened in 2013.

Ms. Martinez said if Mr. Lipp went through the proper chain of command with the previously noted issues it would go to the superintendent, not the board.

Dr. Johnson said she knew of roofing issues at the school that has gone to the facilities department.

Mr. Taylor said he found it perturbing that once the construction manager hands over the building all the expenses come out of our budget and resources that go to our students.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to postpone discussion and possible action on acceptance of the Fairchild Wheeler campus."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously

approved.

Jeffrey Postolowski, IT director, said he would like to bring concerns about Fairchild Wheeler forward as well.

Mr. Lipp said since the school was built there had been a struggle with the heat balance in the building, which was temperamental. He said he has been working with the maintenance department on the issue.

Mr. Taylor suggested the board members look at the clay oven vent pipe where water runs down and leaks as well.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod