

Monday, February 10, 2020

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held February 10, 2020, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m. Present were Chair Jessica Martinez, Secretary Bobbi Brown, John Weldon, Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, Chris Taylor, and Joseph Lombard. Albert Benejan arrived subsequently as noted.

Acting Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Dasha Spell said she agreed with Mr. Taylor's comment that we should go after the state for additional money. She said the part of the board's budget goes to juvenile detention and educating five residents at the correctional institution on North Avenue. She said the state should pay for these expenses. She said she agreed with Mr. Sokolovic and Ms. Martinez about going after the city for more money also.

Ms. Spell said representatives in Hartford have told her that they don't work with communities that don't work with themselves, so the city needs to fund the board.

Mr. Benejan arrived at the meeting.

Kelly Brown, art teacher at Multicultural Magnet School, spoke on efforts to bring back the district's single-stream

recycling program. She said she has learned that the district is only recycling cardboard. She described the school's Great Team and its activities in this school year. She said she has learned the garbage is burned in Wheelabrator nearby.

Hector Diaz said he wanted to echo the sentiments of Ms. Brown. He said when he was a Boy Scout he collected newspapers to create funding. He said the group formed at Multicultural, which includes his daughter, could be created in other schools. He urged the contract entered into include recycling.

Ed Davies, president of the School Volunteer Association(SVA), said he had been volunteering in the schools for 21 years. He said the SVA's funding was eliminated by the board two years ago and the SVA grant funded positions that were eliminated for two years. He said the SVA was now near the bottom of the piggybank.

In response to a question, Mr. Davies said the amount of funding needed was about \$175,000.

Marge Hiller said she was a long-term board member of the School Volunteer Association. She said the SVA would be at every meeting and telling the board what will happen if the money is not restored to the budget. She said last week a large amount of books was distributed to every elementary school through the work of the SVA. She said there are 500 volunteers in the schools every week.

Craig Gordon said he runs a nonprofit devoted to nutrition and exercise. He said he wrote articles in 2003 about the school lunch program and he applauded the trend of feeding students from salad bars. He said he was proposing a

program, which requires board support, to establish baseline health indicators for middle-school student and teaches proven facts about healthy nutrition and exercise. He presented material about his proposal to the board.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 27, 2020, with edits. The motion was seconded by Mr. Weldon. A correction was noted.

The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Martinez, Brown, Benejan, Sokolovic, Lombard, and Allen. Mr. Taylor abstained.

CHAIR REPORT:

Ms. Martinez said the budget had not been reviewed by the Finance Committee as of yet since rolling out its budget request. She said she anticipated reviewing the items the board designated to bring back in the event of receiving adequate funding, including the SVA.

Ms. Martinez said she would be speaking on funding and equity in Hartford before the Budget & Appropriations committee on Thursday.

Ms. Martinez said the committee assignments were now final. Mr. Illingworth will chair the Facilities & Security Committee with Mr. Benejan, Mr. Weldon and staff members Robert Hammond and Alan Wallack. Ms. Martinez will chair the Finance Committee with Ms. Allen, Ms. Brown and Mr. Lombard. Staff member is Marlene Siegel.

Mr. Illingworth will chair the Governance Committee, with Ms. Martinez, Mr. Weldon, and Supt. Testani. The Ad Hoc Committee on Males of Color is chaired by Mr. Sokolovic, with staff member Dr. Melissa Jenkins. Mr. Weldon will chair the Personnel Committee, with Ms. Martinez and Mr. Illingworth. The staff member is Lissette Colon.

Mr. Benejan will chair the Students & Families Committee, with Ms. Brown and Mr. Sokolovic. The staff member is Herminio Planas. Mr. Sokolovic will chair the Teaching & Learning Committee, with Mr. Lombard and Mr. Weldon, and Mr. Testani as the staff member.

Mr. Weldon will chair the Contracts Committee with Mr. Taylor and Mr. Lombard.

Ms. Martinez said the charter school liaisons will be Mr. Benejan for Achievement First; Dr. Victor Black for Bridge Academy; Ms. Martinez for Capital Prep Harbor School; Dr. Selena Morgan for Great Oaks Charter School; Dr. Melissa Jenkins for New Beginnings Family Academy; and Ana Sousa-Martins for Park City Prep.

Mr. Weldon will be the representative to the School Building Committee, with Mr. Sokolovic and Mr. Taylor as alternates. Ms. Martinez will be the CES representative.

Mr. Sokolovic asked if it was wise to not hold a Finance committee in February since there was a \$15 million budget gap.

Mr. Testani said beginning this Thursday there will be three budget workshops held in the city to engage the community in presenting the proposed budget. The first one will be at Blackham School.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:

Mr. Taylor referred the recycling issue raised during public speaking to the Facilities & Security Committee. Mr. Sokolovic referred a standing item to the committee regarding building capacity and usage.

Ms. Martinez said the Finance Committee would meet in March. She noted the three budget hearings to be held by Mr. Testani.

Mr. Sokolovic said he had referred an item on overtime usage by department to the Finance Committee previously.

Mr. Benejan referred the issue of a security director for the district to the committee.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Teaching and Learning Committee would meet on February 18th. Mr. Taylor referred the concerns brought by Mr. Gordon during the public speaking to the committee.

Mr. Weldon said the Personnel Committee met on January 21st and conducted interviews with a recommendation to the superintendent.

Mr. Benejan said the Students & Families Committee would meet on February 20th.

Ms. Martinez referred the children of Multicultural Magnet School to present the recycling program to the committee.

Mr. Sokolovic welcomed the student representatives to the board. He encouraged them to participate in the meeting.

Ms. Martinez encouraged the students to also consider attending board committee meetings.

The student representatives present were Kevin Frank, Harding; Jozsef Lopez, Bassick; Dajonique Small, Central; Queston Parker, FCW-IT; Adriana Garcia, FCW-IT; Moeen Khawaja, FCW-Biotech; Joseph Lopez, Bassick; Ariana Smith, Bridgeport Military Academy; and Meredith Waters, FCW-Aerospace.

Mr. Sokolovic reported on the Ad Hoc Committee on Males of Color meeting. He said the white paper is still in progress and there was discussion of suggested professional development. The next meeting will be on February 25th.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Mr. Testani said he had flyers in English and Spanish available for the budget workshops. He urged everyone to encourage people to attend to get an understanding of the budgetary needs. He said the SVA brings a lot of value to the district that he would love to include, along with items such as a director of security and the athletics director, provided the level of funding permitted it.

Mr. Testani said the district's Science Expo would be held tomorrow at Sacred Heart University

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the item he presented on facilities and usage was just an informational piece. Mr. Sokolovic urged if there was any closing or consolidations of schools that the public be involved early. Mr. Testani said everyone will have a voice in the process, which is only in the beginning stages of discussion.

Mr. Weldon noted it was an involved process to close a building or consolidate buildings and it would have to include far-reaching feasibility studies.

NEW BUSINESS:

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action on the decommissioning of the old Harding High School back to the city.

Mr. Taylor said the item was previously tabled at his request. He said with the superintendent's help he realized the building would not be usable. Mr. Taylor moved "*to return it to the city.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Weldon and approved by a 7-1 vote.

Voting in favor were members Martinez, Taylor, Weldon, Lombard, Allen, Brown, and Benejan. Mr. Sokolovic was opposed.

In response to a question from the Harding student representative, Mr. Frank, Ms. Martinez said the plan for the old Harding building will be up to the city. Mr. Taylor said more than likely it will end up in Bridgeport Hospital's possession. Mr. Weldon noted the board does not own any of its properties, which are the property of the city. He added the board did not have the funds to maintain the building in its current state.

Ms. Martinez said she was willing to go to the City Council to have conversations on the future of the Harding property.

The next item was discussion and possible action on the RFP for refuse and recycling.

Mr. Taylor suggested tabling the item until the recycling issue was discussed at the committee level. Mr. Testani said the matter went through the Facilities Committee. He said after correspondence from Ms. Brown of MCM he conferred with Country, the vendor, and was informed the refuse is taken offsite and separated in Wallingford. He said there is no revenue generated any longer through recycling due to the lack of demand from China.

Ms. Brown indicated she wanted to change her previous vote.

Mr. Weldon moved *“to reconsider decommissioning Harding High for the benefit of Ms. Brown.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

Mr. Taylor moved *“to decommission the Harding High School back to the city.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Weldon. The motion was approved by a 6-2 vote.

Voting in favor were members Martinez, Benejan, Allen, Lombard, Weldon, and Taylor. Ms. Brown and Mr. Sokolovic were opposed.

Discussion resumed about the RFP for refuse and recycling. Mr. Testani said he was assured the contractor was recycling. Mr. Weldon said he believed the single-stream recycling involves the items being sorted after it leaves the district. Mr. Testani said the cardboard is separated. He said blue bins were not provided at one school because the custodians were having a difficult time monitoring the items being put in the recycling bins.

Ms Martinez said she would like to see students engaged in the recycling program. Ms. Brown of Multicultural Magnet

said the students are told not to separate refuse for recycling purposes in the schools.

Mr. Sokolovic said the proposed RFP indicates the contractor may be required to provide appropriate containers for refuse and recycled materials and calls for recyclables to be picked up once a week. He said if the recyclables are not getting into the bins it is a breakdown on the school level.

Mr. Sokolovic said if the board mandates the items must be recycled it will likely be at great additional cost.

Mr. Lopez, the Bassick student rep, suggested the teachers emphasize with younger students what should be put in the recycling bins. Ms. Martinez said she would like the students to learn to treat their school and their neighborhood right.

Mr. Taylor said the issue seems to have been covered in RFP as pointed out by Mr. Sokolovic. Kelly Brown said she had been told there are two dumpsters – one for cardboard and one for everything else.

Ms. Martinez said it seems we could do better at the schools.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said there is some time sensitivity to the matter. He added it was the same RFP used for the last contract.

Mr. Taylor said he was a professional in the field and knows the contractors involved. He said if it's going in the garbage truck the only thing being recycled is cardboard.

Mr. Weldon suggested including an option for single-stream recycling in the RFP. Mr. Taylor said that was reasonable.

Mr. Weldon moved “*to approve the issuance of the RFP for refuse and recycling with an inclusion of an option for single-stream recycling.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Weldon said if it was determined it was too cost-prohibitive the board did not have to pick up the option.

The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Taylor moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Weldon and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod