

Monday, March 22, 2021

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held March 22, 2021, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown, Secretary Joseph Lombard, Albert Benejan, Sosimo Fabian, and Joseph Sokolovic. Sybil Allen joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Weldon noted the passing of a longtime district employee, Annamae Dragone, who served from 1960 to 1997. There was a moment of a silence.

Mr. Benejan asked for a moment of silence for Rosemary Muniz, who passed away recently. She worked as a teacher's aide for 31 years and was a crossing guard for 7 years.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Yorelys Cardenas, a mother of a BPS student and a member of Make the Road, Mothers in Action Committee, said her daughter is in the bilingual program at her school, but the school has not informed her of progress. She added the child was required to enter a classroom entirely in English. She said her daughter was transferred to another school and she was not consulted or asked if she understood the decision.

Nohelia Sanchez, a mother of a BPS student and a member of Make the Road Bridgeport, said her son started at Batalla School a year ago and the school never told her about any test he had to take to know his level of English or what the results were. She said she never knew what kind of program he was in or how they were monitoring his progress. She said it is the duty of the schools to communicate with each and every parent. She asked the board and the superintendent agree to implement our suggestions.

Dasha Spell asked with the \$40 million coming in for Covid relief and the magnet school settlement with other towns if that would be part of the 2021-22 budget presentation that Supt. Testani will be doing. She noted Bassick High is not on the five-year capital plan and asked that the Facilities Committee add Bassick to the plan.

Minerva Antigua, a mother of a BPS student and a member of Make the Road Connecticut, said her experience with the bilingual education program has been similar to other speakers tonight. She said there are many other parents going through the same thing and changes are needed now. She urged ensuring that teachers and administrators understand the law, and that neighborhood schools offer bilingual programs and ensure that the planning process prescribed by ELL is being followed for ELL students. She urged that transportation is offered to all students in bilingual schools.

Marge Hiller, a board member of the Burroughs Community Center, said the center has been operating throughout the pandemic and people are coming from all over the state to have their income tax forms done at that location. It is also a blood donation center. She said staff are also helping people get vaccination appointments. She asked that Burroughs

help provide the information they use to district families through cooperation with the district.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Mr. Benejan moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of March 3, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

Mr. Benejan moved to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 8, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic. A correction was noted. The motion was approved by a 5-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Brown, Sokolovic, Fabian, and Benejan. Mr. Lombard abstained.

Mr. Benejan moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of March 10 , 2021. The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown. The motion was approved by a 5-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Brown, Sokolovic, Fabian, and Benejan. Mr. Lombard abstained

CHAIR REPORT

The next item was on a discussion with counsel regarding pending district litigation and administrative hearings, which qualified for executive session.

Present were Atty. Bruce Levin from the city attorney's office, and Attys. Richard Buturla and Floyd Dugas of Berchem Moses.

Mr. Benejan moved *"to go into executive session for the purpose of discussing with counsel pending district litigation and administrative hearings. Invited to participate were the*

board, the superintendent, and Attorneys Levin, Dugas, and Buturla.” The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard.

The executive session began at 7:04 p.m.

The board reconvened in public session at 7:42 p.m. Ms. Allen was now present.

Mr. Weldon noted Atty. Levin left the executive session at 7:13 p.m.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:

Ms. Brown said the Ad Hoc Districtwide Branding Initiative Committee would meet on the second Friday in April.

Mr. Weldon referred an item for the development of a standardized staff summary that can be used to submit items for board consideration.

Dr. Fabian said a meeting of the Educational Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee would be scheduled soon.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was concerned with the committee since it had not met since November. He said the predecessor to this committee did not meet for a whole year. He said the equity work needs to be done.

Mr. Weldon said the next Facilities Committee meeting will be held on a date to be determined.

Mr. Benejan referred a security update, including overtime budget, to the committee, as well as an update on the cleaning of schools in Covid.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Finance Committee met on March 10th and received updates on the 2020-21 and 2021-22 budgets. No major differences were noted in either presentation. He said the committee will shift its focus to Covid-related funding and expenditures for greater overnight. ESSER-2 funding is cumulatively over 50 percent of the operating budget.

Mr. Sokolovic said he, Ms. Brown, Mr. Weldon and Supt. Testani all testified on the governor's budget. He thanked staff, members of the public, and two City Council members who testified as well. He said perhaps the mayor and the 18 other council members who did not participate will cover the shortfall over the next two years

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 21st.

Mr. Weldon said the Governance Committee would meet on a date to be determined.

Mr. Benejan asked if the board's 9000 series policies would be updated. He said he would e-mail Mr. Weldon suggestions. Mr. Weldon said the committee was working on bylaws on remote participation

Mr. Benejan said the Students & Families Committee met and received a report on Columbus School and a potential name change. He noted a majority of the parents do not want the name changed. He said Ms. Rocha-Reaes reported schools are spending parent engagement money and those that have not are being worked with. The parent convention money of \$18,000 has to be spent before April 1st. There was information from the principal of Achievement First. Mr. Benejan reported there was a meeting with Make the Road and the superintendent.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Teaching & Learning Committee met and reviewed the audit procedures of special education IEPs. He said the procedures and checks and balances all seemed in order. There is a backlog of past-due IEPs due to the pandemic.

Mr. Sokolovic said the other committee items will be covered later in tonight's meeting. The next meeting will be on April 16th.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Supt. Testani said all district staff who have requested it have been vaccinated with at least the first dose. He said this will allow everyone to be two weeks out from the second dose when in-person instruction resumes.

Supt. Testani said health and safety is first and foremost when decisions are made and include consultation with health officials. He said custodians are constantly out sanitizing. He said the nationwide data shows schools are healthy and safe places.

The superintendent said Roosevelt School had to go fully remote this week due to personnel issues, along with some Covid issues creating an inability to staff the school properly. It was not closed due to a Covid outbreak.

Supt. Testani said there will be another professional development day for staff to receive their second dose.

The superintendent said the final plan for Wilbur Cross School for the Commissioner's Network has been submitted to the state.

Supt. Testani said there will be a FAFSA virtual event on April 1st. Participants who call in can speak to someone from the district about the FAFSA process.

The superintendent said March saw a five percent decrease in chronic absenteeism districtwide. He said this was the result of a lot of hard work by district staff.

Supt. Testani said last Wednesday was the first professional development day with Dr. Derrick Gay on diversity, equity and inclusion with the entire district staff participating. He said there has been overwhelming favorable feedback from staff.

The superintendent, in response to public comments, said ESL/bilingual families receive a letter on progress and participation at the beginning and end of every school year.

Supt. Testani said he was proud to receive a call from the U.S. Department of Education to participate in a nationwide webinar. He said he received a shoutout from Secretary Cardona for the district's work during COVID. Bridgeport was the only district recognized. The superintendent said it was a great honor.

Mr. Weldon said it was significant to be recognized nationally.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the school schedule will continue for the rest of 2021, retaining a remote half day on Wednesdays. He said the plan is to resume a regular schedule in 2021-22.

NEW BUSINESS:

The next agenda item was on Study Sync from McGraw-Hill for Grades 7 and 8.

Dr. Melissa Jenkins, executive director of early childhood and literacy, said textbook digital licenses for Grades 7 and 8 expired in 2019 and teachers have worked without a formal digital resource for the last two years. She said students would benefit from a core program that would support necessary skills and support SBAC instructional shifts.

Dr. Jenkins said three programs were reviewed using four important factors. About 20 to 25 middle school teachers reviewed the three programs; while costs and professional development proposals were reviewed by district leaders.

Dr. Jenkins described the ratings of the three alternatives in the review. She said the request is to purchase Study Sync as a primary core program, with six-year access, at the cost of \$657,418.63, which will cover access to all aspects of ELA content. There is a second request to engage in two-year access with Actively Learn for a supplementary program for access to culturally relevant texts.

Dr. Jenkins said Study Sync covers a softcover textbook for each student and supports for ELL students and special education students. There are also digital materials. Actively Learn is a completely digital program.

Mr. Lombard said he understood the importance of the supplementary program from discussions at the Teaching & Learning Committee.

Mr. Lombard moved *“to approve the purchase of Study Sync from McGraw-Hill for Grades 7 and 8 as well as the Actively*

Learn supplemental reading program “ The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the magnet operation plan for the Fairchild Wheeler campus.

Dr. Michael Watson from the Biotech School at Fairchild Wheeler said there were three plans, one for each school, which is required by the state for all interdistrict magnet schools.

Dr. Watson said there are a total of twelve sections in the plan, including the school enrollment and composition, marketing and student recruitment, admissions process, the sibling process, the lottery and student notification, the parent acceptance process, the STEM camp, the academic program structure, AP and dual enrollment courses, professional development, and SEL protocols. Other topics covered are student supports, special education, school culture and climate, community partnerships, parent engagement, school safety procedures, disciplinary and attendance procedures, organizational structure and talent management, school facilities, grants received, and program effectiveness.

Dr. Walston said a five-year goal plan is also included. A change in Section 1.4 has been made that was suggested at the Teaching & Learning Committee.

Dr. Fabian congratulated Dr. Watson for having a large number of students graduating from college this year, including Dr. Fabian’s child.

Mr. Lombard moved “*to approve magnet operations plans for Fairchild Wheeler Interdistrict Magnet Campus as presented*

by Dr. Watson.” The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

Dr. Watson asked that board members write letters of support for our district magnet schools to be included in the submission. Mr. Weldon said he would like to put together a joint letter. Supt. Testani said he would work with Mr. Sokolovic on this.

The next agenda items related to the nutrition center and exemptions from healthy food options. Mr. Weldon said this is done annually and Mr. Garrity had provided a letter to the board on this.

John Garrity, director of food and nutrition, said the matters cover the 2021-22 school year.

Mr. Weldon moved that *“pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-215f, the Board of Education certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups.”*

The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

Mr. Weldon moved “*The Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards provided that the following conditions are met: (1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; (2) the sale is at the location of the event; and (3) the food items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An ‘event’ is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The ‘regular school day’ is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. ‘Location’ means where the event is being held, and must be the same place as the food sales.*”

The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

Mr. Weldon moved “*The Board of Education will allow the sale to students of beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: (1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; (2) the sale is at the location of the event; and (3) the beverages are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An ‘event’ is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting or extracurricular activity. The ‘school day’ is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. ‘Location’ means where the event is being held, and must be the same place as the beverage sales.*”

The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

Mr. Lombard moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod