

Monday, May 24, 2021

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 24, 2021, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:41 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown, Albert Benejan, Sosimo Fabian, Sybil Allen, and Joseph Sokolovic.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Benejan moved to add the following item to the agenda: Discussion and possible approval of new Bassick High School Project, phase 1, abatement and demolition. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

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

Ms. Allen moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of May 3, 2021. The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved,

Ms. Brown moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of May 6, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the board's minutes of the Regular Meeting of May 10, 2021. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

#### **CHAIR REPORT:**

Mr. Weldon said he attended the year-end Elementary school debate league at High Horizons Magnet this week. He said all the participants were very impressive, with Cesar Batalla School winning the competition.

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

Ms. Brown said the Ad Hoc Districtwide Branding Initiative Committee met on May 19th. There was a discussion of a new logo for the district, which will include input from district staff. Students will be able to participate in a campaign for social-emotional learning by contributing artwork. She said the superintendent would report back to the Contracts Committee on a new districtwide communications system.

Ms. Brown said she and Mr. Benejan asked Supt. Testani to prepare a communications outline for proper messaging for the new school year.

Mr. Benejan asked that the staff members join the next committee meeting to report on the logo. The superintendent said Ms. Robinson said she will identify those who will be working on the logo from her department.

Mr. Weldon said the Contracts Committee met this week and three of tonight's agenda items came out of the meeting.

Dr. Fabian said he had not scheduled a meeting of the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee. He said he would like to report on numbers he has studied at the next regular board meeting on the richness and diversity the district has. Mr. Weldon suggested a meeting be held with the committee to go over the numbers.

Mr. Sokolovic said it was getting ridiculous that the committee had not met in six months. He said the committee found there was a big chasm between personnel and student ratios, which the committee was supposed to be working on, and the chair is incapable or unwilling to call a meeting. He said Mr. Weldon should remove the chair from the committee and have someone else pick it up. He said to not address this is the very definition of institutional racism and discrimination.

Mr. Weldon said he would give Dr. Fabian the benefit of the doubt on the presentation he was planning.

Mr. Weldon said the Facilities Committee would meet on June 7th.

Mr. Benejan said he would like to hear a security update from Lt. Grech or Mr. Collazzo, including budgetary information.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Finance Committee met on May 12th. The 2020-21 budget still appears to be finishing in a balanced condition. He said the 2021-22 budget was also discussed, which indicated if ESSER funding is needed to cover escalated costs we will have a structural deficit, which will only grow year to year that we are underfunded by the city and the state. The district would then hit a fiscal cliff and face massive cuts.

Mr. Sokolovic said it was alarming that the cliff is not on our radar with the possibility of cuts to existing services. He said planning for ESSER-3 is currently going on. He said the next meeting is June 9th and there may have to be summer meetings with the ESSER funding at issue.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said there would be a better answer at the next meeting on the status of the budget in the current fiscal year.

In response to a question the superintendent said the district staff is based on need and all departments will be assessed and staffed accordingly. He said he could have an offline conversation about that. He added we're not going to use federal funds to add additional staffing where people would lose their jobs when the funding ends. He said unfortunately collective bargaining units may have interests that are separate from those of the district.

Mr. Weldon said the Governance Committee will meet on June 7th. Mr. Benejan referred an item on the board's policy about communicating with staff members. He said he likes to communicate with staff, students, and parents, and listen to their views. He said he wants to see everyone work as a team.

Mr. Benejan reported on the Students & Families Committee. He said a lot of the parent leaders are not spending parent engagement properly because they are using the money for the schools and not for parents. He said the next meeting will be on May 27th.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Teaching & Learning Committee will meet tomorrow.

## **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:**

Supt. Testani displayed the high school graduation information, which will take place at the Bridgeport Amphitheater. He said he would share information with the

board on events for 8th grade, 6th grade, kindergarten, and pre-K ceremonies.

The superintendent said we are into the home stretch of the school year and everyone in the district had done a tremendous job, from food and nutrition, custodians, security, paraprofessionals, clerical, administrators, to teachers.

Supt. Testani said it was the hiring season and the district would be adding somewhere between 100 and 150 new staff members for next year.

In response to a question, the superintendent said the upcoming agenda item gives everyone the clear understanding that we're moving forward with the Bassick High project. He said it would be a beautiful, state-of-the-art school, which was long overdue. He noted the original Bassick opened in 1929.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

The next agenda item was on the new Bassick High School project, phase 1, abatement and demolition.

Larry Schilling said Phase 1, which requires board approval, costs approximately \$9.8 million. He said further meetings with state and city officials will take place, along with the submission of documents.

Architect Joe Banks said this phase includes demolition of buildings, demolition of utilities, and having erosion controls in place. He displayed visuals of the buildings to be demolished. He described discussions with utility companies, the University of Bridgeport, and the city about

the utilities. In some instances services are capped and removed in other instances.

Mr. Banks said civil engineers have made recommendations on erosion control measures to be used during this phase.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “*approval of the new Bassick High School project, phase 1, abatement and demolition, as presented by the project architect.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on contracts for temporary, noncertified staff services for the period of July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2024, with Kelly Services, Inc., Global Solutions Group, Inc., and Midtown Personnel, Inc.

Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, said an RFP was issued and there were eleven bidders. An evaluation committee rated the eleven proposals, which were ranked, and the top three ranked bidders were selected for the development of contracts.

Ms. Siegel said the three contracts are similar in structure and content, and have been reviewed by the city attorney. She described the job titles covered by the contracts. There is a provision in the contract to extend the contracts by mutual agreement for two one-year terms.

Ms. Siegel described the procedures to be used internally to request services from the vendors, which will be determined by the lowest price. The contract requires that in recruiting and selecting employees each of the vendors will give preference to the employment of Bridgeport residents.

Dr. Fabian said he hoped the board would require the last-mentioned provision in most of the contracts it approves. He described it as fiscal equity.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve the contracts as presented by the CFO for temporary, noncertified staff services for the period of July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2024, with Kelly Services, Inc., Global Solutions Group, Inc., and Midtown Personnel, Inc.”* The motion was seconded by Dr. Fabian and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on issuing solicitation of bids for food and nutrition items for the 2021-22 school year.

John Gerrity, director of food nutrition, said in response to a question at the Contracts Committee that there is language in the bid specifications that contracts are renewable at the discretion of the board. He said city purchasing ordinances allow up to three years of bid extensions.

Mr. Gerrity said there are eight companies that have agreed to extend their bid pricing for 2021-22. He recommended we take advantage of the bid extensions due to inflationary pressures on food costs.

In response to a question, Mr. Gerrity said he was seeking authorization to go out to bid for the food items that the nutrition center uses. The bids will be brought back to the board for final approval.

Ms. Allen said she was disappointed in food services over the years. She said older elementary children get the same food and portions that are fed to kindergartners.

Mr. Benejan said he agreed with Ms. Allen. He said students are receiving cold meals and packaged meals, and sometimes there is a shortage of food.

Mr. Gerrity said hot breakfasts and hot lunches are provided, but during Covid grab and go meals are provided for parents to pick up for remote learners that are not heated. In-school learners are getting the normal meals. He said service in schools varies by school, with some students eating in cafeteria and some eating in the classroom. He said some of the grab-and-go meals can be heated at home.

Mr. Gerrity said the portion sizes are regulated by federal regulations, which are followed stringently. In K to 8 schools students are offered a full compliment of five components. If students take at least three of the five components it is considered a reimbursable meal. High school students get larger portion sizes.

Mr. Gerrity said pre-Covid there were share tables where students could obtain extra items left by other students. He said the district provides universal free meals to everyone in the district. He said the same menu is served in the K to 8 schools, including schools that only go up to Grades 5 or 6. The five components are bread, protein, dairy, fruits and vegetables.

In response to a question, Mr. Gerrity said food is delivered to schools fresh every morning. He described the delivery patterns. He said all meals are prepared at the nutrition center between 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Ms. Allen said there was a lot of waste in the lunch program because the items are not packaged according to the child's grade level.



Mr. Gerrity said previously students had to take all five meal components, which led to quite a bit of waste. The federal regulations have been revised so that students have to take a minimum of three of the five components.

In response to a question about high school meals, Mr. Gerrity said during the pandemic the menu had to be tailored for in-school learners and remote learners. At the beginning of the year, students could only attend school two days out of five. He said we had to tailor the menu to items that could be packaged to send home with students. He said students that attended Monday and Tuesday were provided with meals for the rest of the week if they desired. He said because it was not a typical school year the menu was slightly different than in the past.

Mr. Weldon said he believed we should go out to bid on all items because you never know what price you will get in the market. Current providers that will extend pricing can submit that price as their bid.

Mr. Weldon moved *“to go out to bid for all food items with the resulting bids to be returned to the board for final approval before any awards are made.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

Supt. Testani said the federal guidelines did not seem to break down portion sizes between elementary and middle schools. He said in the grains area there could be an extra ounce. He said he would like to present further information to the board in the future.

The next item was on the second amendment to the professional agreement with The University School(TUS) for expelled student education services.

The superintendent said there is a contract with TUS to provide the educational component for expelled students. He said we'd like to extend the contract for one year, to have the time to come up with an in-house program if it's cost-effective. The prices in the amendment will stay flat. He said there may be some creative ways of using what was learned during Covid to create a new program.

Mr. Sokolovic moved "*to enter into the second amendment to the contract with The University School as presented by staff.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

Mr. Benejan said as board members we have to work as a team and we should not be saying to each other that they don't things. He said sometimes body language says a lot with the people who are watching us.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod