

Monday, September 23, 2019

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held September 23, 2019, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:48 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Secretary Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, Maria Pereira, and LaMar Kennedy.

Acting Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Eva Mitchell Sokolovic, wife of Joseph Sokolovic, said she was objecting to the aura of racism from Mr. Weldon and the rumors that he decided to give legs to that affect her family, especially her son. She said Mr. Weldon's writings on Facebook amounted to calling millions of people who assign their race as black ignorant. She noted her great-grandmother, who was purchased in Ghana and transported to the West Indies as a slave would not qualify as an authentic African, based on Mr. Weldon's comments. She said contrary to comments on Facebook she was living with her husband and they were raising their son in Bridgeport. She requested an apology.

Mr. Weldon said he and Mr. Sokolovic engaged in a nasty back and forth. He said Mr. Sokolovic said some not-nice things as well about him and his family. He said that he

should have allowed that to bait him into saying something about Ms. Sokolovic or her family. He apologized to Ms. Sokolovic and the son of Mr. and Ms. Sokolovic.

Maria Pereira said in May 2019 the board discussed the requests for proposal(RFP) for a superintendent search firm. The RFP was posted with a specific timeline that the board voted on. She said Mr. Weldon never scheduled a meeting to interview finalists in July 2019; nor was the firm selected by July 26th. A contract was supposed to be approved on August 19th to start on September 16th, but these events did not occur. She said in the past Supt. Rabinowitz, the acting superintendent, ended up staying two and a half years. She said the delays were purposeful to eventually make Michael Testani the permanent superintendent because of his connections with John Fabrizi, Mario Testa, Mayor Ganim and Dan Shamus.

Clyde Nicholson said he received information that the new Bassick location is fully contaminated. He said he would like to see the results of testing if it has taken place. He recommended leaving Bassick in its current location and rehabilitating it. He said the Bassick students should attend school at the Margaret Morton Center and he suggested relocating the mayor's office. He said this would save a lot of money.

Gail Janensch thanked the board and Mr. Testani for encouraging the League of Women Voters to have a forum for board candidates. She said about 75 people attended the forum. She said as a citizen she was concerned about the delay in finding another superintendent and urged the board to get busy on it.

Joseph Sokolovic said his interactions with Mr. Weldon on

Facebook started with a public post he made about a news story about a tiger. He said Mr. Weldon tried to forbid him from speaking to the press for the board. Mr. Sokolovic said as an individual with freedom of speech he can speak on Mayor Ganim wasting \$2.5 million in taxpayer dollars that could go to schools and children. He said if his family ever comes out of Mr. Weldon's mouth again he will be addressing the matter a whole different way. He said it was pathetic for Mr. Weldon to shift the blame to him for making him do it.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Ms. Allen moved approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of August 26, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Kennedy. A correction was noted. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Kennedy moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of September 12, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

Mr. Weldon said he discussed with Mr. Testani his performance evaluation. He said he would provide a draft for the board to study and comment on. Ms. Pereira there was nothing on the academics in the document.

Mr. Weldon said Mr. Testani requested an item under New Business be moved up.

Ms. Pereira moved to "*move approval of extended school hours contracts through the Priority Grant for CSMA up.*" She said the agenda should have listed the four contracts

the board was voting on. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, said the contracts pertain to the two sites of Classical Studies Magnet Academy. She said the extended school hours funding is received through the Priority Grant. She said the community-based organizations are the Carver Foundation and three other organizations for the Annex.

Ms. Siegel said previously the contracts were approved for a two-year cycle, but the state has informed the district that it must issue an internal RFP to the district schools every year. She said Classical Magnet and other schools have applied in the internal RFP.

Lindsey Davis, assistant principal of Classical Studies, said the grant had provided experiences to the students they wouldn't experience otherwise. She said the extended-day program provides support to parents. She said the Carver program provides an hour of academics and an hour of enrichment.

Ms. Pereira said the dates needed to be corrected on all four contracts even though they were already signed. She said a provision on sexual molestation insurance had to be added to the contracts and the board named as an additional insured.

Ms. Siegel said she was told by Ms. Clarke on the phone that the contracts matched the same template that was used last year, but she said she would ensure those provisions are included.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to approve the contract with Classical*

Studies Magnet Academy with Lego League Junior, JA Elementary Program Kits, Discovery Museum STEM Learning Program and Extended School-Day program for this current school year on the condition that all the dates on the first page of each contract be addressed and the addendum, and that every one have molestation insurance with the Bridgeport Board of Education named as additional insured for anywhere between one and three million dollars.” The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen.

Mr. Sokolovic said it was a reflection on the board that the contracts had not been properly vetted at committee. He said he was not comfortable rushing these things through. He added he had heard nothing but good things about Carver and these programs.

Mr. Weldon said the administration did attempt to present the item at the Finance Committee, which was unable to pull a quorum together.

Ms. Pereira said there were new board members who had not seen the matter presented in committee previously.

The motion was approved by a 4-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Pereira, Kennedy, Allen and Weldon. Mr. Sokolovic abstained.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:

Mr. Testani said a contract regarding dental services at Tisdale School needed to be addressed by the Facilities Committee.

Ms. Pereira referred the Hubbell site and the contamination issues to the Facilities Committee.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was referring the nutrition department's vehicle issues from the Students & Families Committee to the Finance Committee.

John Gerrity, nutrition director, said the department's vehicle fleet was aging and he was trying to be proactive on replacements. He said Mack trucks are no longer available and there was a switch to Isuzu for the engine compartment and the refrigerated box provided by a separate company. He said the specifications were drawn up by the supervisor of shipping and receiving. He said certain specifications were needed to navigate the city's streets and due to the size of the garage where they are parked. He said the reference to Ford was to be consistent with current vehicles in the fleet, but the reference to the manufacturer could be removed.

In response to a question, Mr. Gerrity said there was an attempt to purchase one van using the state-approved list, but there was an issue with availability of the right vehicle in the spring.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Teaching & Learning Committee met last week and received a report on special education, which will be a recurring item to stay on top of things. The committee also vetted a translation services contract and discussed changes to the graduation requirements from a point system to Carnegie units, to bring it in line with other districts. Also discussed were new state standards for adult education and the district's approach.

Mr. Sokolovic said the committee would meet again on October 10th.

Ms. Pereira referred an after-school program at Central High referenced by the mayor and Mr. Testani at a press conference to the committee. Mr. Testani said the program was through youth services. Ms Pereira said students in impoverished areas were in greater need of such a program. She said only the board has authority over schools after hours. Mr. Testani said it was a pilot program and will be open to students outside of Central High.

Following discussion, Ms. Pereira referred the item to the Facilities Committee.

Mr. Weldon reported on the Personnel Committee. He said the district's HR director had resigned. The position has been advertised. Mr. Testani said candidates to interview should be available at the end of next week.

Ms. Pereira said she referred to the Personnel Committee 13 months ago a report on teacher turnover rates. Mr. Weldon said the former HR director did not provide the report when he requested it. Mr. Testani said he would make sure that it gets done. He noted nationwide teachers are leaving the profession within the first five years. He said teachers and administrators are not respected as they were in the past.

Ms. Pereira said she had not bashed any superintendents, while she had criticized acting superintendents. She said she loved teachers.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Students & Families Committee met last week and discussed vehicle bids and made some changes to purchasing policies that will be presented to the board at the next meeting. He said student transportation policies were also discussed.

Ms. Pereira noted some committees don't meet and she asked Mr. Weldon not to disparage someone who is actually doing the work. Mr. Weldon said he was responding to Mr. Sokolovic's comment.

Mr. Sokolovic said the committee would meet next on October 17th.

Mr. Sokolovic reported on the Ad Hoc Committee on Great City Schools/Males of Color. He said the committee did not meet over the summer, but would hold a meeting tomorrow. He said the white paper would be discussed at the meeting.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said Dr. Jenkins would be the staff member at the meeting. Dr. Jenkins said there will be an outline of the white paper presented at the meeting.

Mr. Weldon reported on the Superintendent Search Firm Selection Committee. He said proposals were received from two firms. It was discovered that other entities did not submit a proposal because they did not realize there was an RFP out. He said the general consensus among the board members present before the meeting was to interview the existing firms and then decide what to do. He said he would send a poll out to members regarding their availability for a meeting. Possible dates were discussed by the board members.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Mr. Testani said the school year was off to a pretty smooth opening. He gave kudos to Alicia Robinson and the visual and performing arts department for their work on gathering student art for the district calendar. He said the project was

financed through Bridgeport Adult Education. The student artwork is being displayed on the billboard by the Webster Bank Arena.

Mr. Testani said Read Aloud Day would take place on October 24. He said it is organized by the School Volunteer Office. He urged anyone interested in participating to contact Anne Gribbon.

Mr. Testani said the attendance awareness campaign has begun and will include a celebration. He said the goal is to reduce the chronic absentee rate to under 15 percent.

Ms. Pereira said she did not want to lose momentum on bullying and asked that Mr. Testani report back in two weeks. Mr. Testani said the SEL task force is meeting tomorrow on bullying.

Ms. Pereira requested the board be provided with data on magnet school deselections as required under the new board policy. She said the report should include a breakdown by race, gender, and school.

Mr. Testani said he will be visiting each high school to hold a roundtable discussion with a group of students regarding their concerns.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the district was in the process of selecting the student representatives to the board.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Kennedy and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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