

Tuesday, December 19, 2017

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held December 19, 2017, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut

The meeting was called to order at 6:42 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Hernan Illingworth, Secretary Jessica Martinez, Maria Pereira, Chris Taylor, Joseph Sokolovic, Ben Walker and Dennis Bradley.

Superintendent Dr. Aresta Johnson was present.

Mr. Weldon said translation services were available if needed.

RECOGNITIONS:

Supt. Johnson noted the passing of Maria Miranda, a longtime principal in the district for many years. There was a moment of silence.

Supt. Johnson introduced Asst. Superintendent Janet Clayton-Brown and Dunbar principal Alyshia Perrin. Ms. Perrin introduced 7th grader Issac Anderson, who has achieved academic excellence and also helps others. Issac addressed the board and thanked the board, the Rotary Club, all of his teachers at Dunbar, his principals, and his parents for his Student Achievement Award. He said his parents got him to where he is today, by teaching him to be well read, well educated, well spoken, well dressed and well groomed. He said they taught him the value of hard work and dedication. He said he plans to become a pediatric surgeon and an actor. He said he would like to also work on a mentoring program and an anti-bullying program.

Ms. Perrin introduced Nellie Ramos, an 8th grader. She said Nellie has drive, studies hard, participates in class and does well

academically. She said Nellie is a kind and gentle person, who knows school is important in attaining the goals and high standards that she sets for herself. Nellie said she wanted to do service by serving in Iraq or helping out hospitals for children. She thanked her parents even though they were struggling. She also thanked her teachers and her principals.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:

Daniel Campbell of Bassick High reported on his school. He said there have been discussions about whether Bassick will be rehabilitated or torn down and a new school built. He said the girls' and boys' basketball teams won their games on Saturday night.

Jarissa Collado of Central High reported on her school. Among the items she highlighted were this week's Sprit Week, the 9th and 10th graders who went to see the movie *Marshall*, the thirty countries that were represented at Multicultural Night, and a student who received a full scholarship to Yale.

Emily Niveló of the IT School at Fairchild Wheeler reported on her school. She highlighted the recent open house, the school's second annual play occurring tonight, the honors assembly, the second Exhibition Day, and this week's Spirit Week event

Shanoye Ho-Sang of Harding High reported on her school. Among the items she highlighted were the forthcoming holiday recess, the successful toy drive, boys' basketball participation in the Bunnell Tipoff Classic, and girls' basketball games tonight and Thursday.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Dasha Spell, a parent of Classical Studies, congratulated the elected members and welcomed back other board members. She said she was inspired by Issac Anderson's speech. She said it was an example of what adults should be acting like as role models. She said the high school students were doing something a lot of people aren't doing: staying in school. She said education is the key and we are fighting for our kids to have the education that they deserve. She also thanked Ms. Martinez for coming to the PAC meeting at Classical

Studies. She invited the board members to the school's open house on Friday. She said the kids deserve the school to be in one building.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Mr. Illingworth moved approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 11, 2017. The motion was seconded by Mr. Bradley. Corrections were noted. The motion was unanimously approved.

CHAIR REPORT:

Mr. Weldon announced the composition of board committees. The Facilities Committee will consist of Chris Taylor(chair), Hernan Illingworth and John Weldon. The Students & Families Committee will consist of Chair Joseph Sokolovic(chair), Maria Pereira and Ben Walker. The Finance Committee will consist of Jessica Martinez(chair), Chris Taylor and Dennis Bradley. The Teaching & Learning Committee will consist of Ben Walker(chair), Maria Pereira and Joseph Sokolovic. The Governance Committee will consist of John Weldon(chair), Hernan Illingworth and Dennis Bradley. The Personnel Committee will consist of Hernan Illingworth(chair), Sybil Allen and Jessica Martinez.

The CES representative is Sybil Allen. The City School Building Committee representatives are John Weldon and Jessica Martinez, with Chris Taylor as an alternate.

The charter school governing council liaisons are Dennis Bradley (Achievement First/Bridgeport Academy), Hernan Illingworth (Bridge Academy), Ben Walker(Capital Prep), and Joseph Sokolovic(Park City Prep). Great Oaks Charter School and New Beginnings Family Academy will continue to have superintendent appointees.

The Ad Hoc Great City Schools Males of Color Committee will have Dennis Bradley as chair.

Mr. Weldon said that two other ad hoc committees will be created and chaired by Dennis Bradley: The Higher Education Financing Committee and the Teaching Apprenticeship Committee. He said volunteers to serve on those ad hoc committees could contact Mr.

Bradley.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:

Ms. Pereira clarified she referred the item about the Bridgeport Police Department fees to the Facilities committee.

Ms. Pereira referred the topic of the legal firm bid to the Finance Committee. She noted the contract expired prior to June. Supt. Johnson said she was waiting for the Finance Committee to reconvene because the city wanted to make some adjustments to the bid.

Ms. Pereira said the city has no authority to involve itself in the board's bids. Supt. Johnson said the bids had not gone out yet because the city requested language be inserted that had not been agreed to by the board. Ms. Pereira said when the board takes a vote to go out to bid, it should go out to bid without being postponed by the city.

Supt. Johnson said she did not feel comfortable with the language suggested by the city attorney's office without bringing it back to the board's attention.

Mr. Illingworth said he agreed with Ms. Pereira. He said if the city was so concerned about the language, they could have participated at the committee level. He said once the board votes he was not aware of a situation where the city stopped a bid from going out.

Mr. Taylor said we need sovereignty from the city because they do not have our best interests at heart. He said when the city meddles, the students seem to suffer.

Ms. Pereira said the presence of the law firm's attorney here tonight was in violation of city charter, which indicates a contract cannot last longer than three years. She said we need complete independence from the city.

Mr. Weldon said the language would be reviewed at the Finance Committee.

Mr. Bradley moved to refer to the Governance Committee review and possible amendment to Policy Series 9000, bylaws of the board. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth.

Ms. Pereira said the board did not vote on referrals to the board. She said under Policy 9323, which was ratified by the full board including Mr. Weldon, whenever an agenda item is added by any board member the board has to copy every other board member on the agenda item being added. She said Mr. Weldon added an agenda item without copying other members and after the required deadline of Tuesday at 5:00 p.m. She said the board should set the standard for everyone by following board policy.

The matter was referred without a vote.

Mr. Walker thanked Mr. Weldon for allowing him to chair the Teaching & Learning Committee. He said he would like to have the meetings of the committee on the third Tuesday of the month.

In response to a question. Supt. Johnson said the clerical person who would assist the committees is Rita Valle.

Mr. Illingworth said the Personnel Committee would meet every third Wednesday at 6:00 o'clock if it is okay with other members.

Ms. Pereira referred the follow-up of the Civil Service Commission to the Personnel Committee. She said the written response from the Civil Service Commission was not acceptable because they've only committed to test for Custodian I, not other positions.

Mr. Walker referred to the Personnel Committee the superintendent's evaluation process, which he said should have been done already. Mr. Weldon said the process began over the summer in the Personnel Committee and a rubric was create; the next step is to meet with the superintendent and develop her goals.

Mr. Illingworth said he would put the matter on the committee's agenda.

Ms. Pereira said the board had not set the superintendent's criteria, which could create a serious problem in holding somebody accountable. She said we do not have measurable goals that the superintendent and the board agreed upon.

Ms. Pereira said she had repeatedly referred the matter to Mr. Weldon's committee, and it was agreed to be done at the board's retreat. Mr. Weldon said the superintendent agreed not to do it at the retreat.

Mr. Taylor asked if the superintendent's evaluation included community outreach. Mr. Weldon said the evaluation was done by the board. Mr. Taylor said that should be changed. Mr. Weldon said community involvement is part of the rubric.

Dr. Johnson said in the past that Mrs. Baraka served on the Great City Schools Committee as the board's liaison but she was not the chair. There are two staff members as co-chairs, one of which is Dr. Melissa Jenkins.

Mr. Bradley said he wanted to continue the work that Ms. Baraka left behind and work with whoever is there. Supt. Johnson said she would send Mr. Bradley the co-chairs' names and contact information.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT AND AGENDA:

Supt. Johnson wished everyone happy holidays. She said the board members had the District at a Glance available to them and she suggested we get to the Bassick presentation.

Dr. Johnson said she conferred with Dr. Williams, principal of Bassick, and requested an update on all the wonderful things going on at Bassick.

In response to a question, Ms. Pereira noted the large number of students in the district displaced from Puerto Rico. She said Batalla, Harding and Marin have 65 of the 158 students. She asked for a report about the support, including by psychologists, being given at the three schools. She said she heard reports of students having nightmares from the storm in Puerto Rico. Supt. Johnson said she

would report at the next meeting.

Dr. Byron Williams said he wanted to bring a taste of Bassick to the board.

Albert Benejan, PTSO president, thanked the PTSO's officers, Angel Resto, and Tammy Boyle. He said the Parent Center at Bassick was available. He said a party in celebration would be held in January for Bassick, Curiale and Batalla. He said he spoke about Bassick at the City Council. He added that he would not give up because the students deserve something new. He wished everyone a Merry Christmas and urged everyone to believe in God and to work together. He said at Bassick we know have a team with Dr. Williams and we will be working together.

Assistant Principal Carmen McPherson and Vernon Thompson, special education coordinator, spoke. Mr. Thompson said restorative practices were being implemented. He said 13 teachers have been trained, who are in turn training other teachers. The idea is to shift the philosophy from punitive to restorative and to give students the tools to repair relationships.

Ms. McPherson said student engagement has been focused on. There are ongoing and new partnerships with community organizations. The Justice Education Center has been working with over-aged and under-credited students, including portfolio building, career planning and mentoring. The Teamsters' Union will provide graduating seniors with jobs, including at UPS.

Mr. Thompson said Dr. Johnson spoke at the school last year about the community school model. He described other community partnerships such as buildON, Street Safe and Janus House.

Ms. McPherson said currently there are two cohorts of students attending Housatonic Community College and St. Vincent's College in an early college experience.

Mr. Thompson described efforts to assist juniors and seniors in the college application process. He said the VIP program was very effective as well.

Parent Holly Johnson said she took her daughter out of a prep school and put her into Bassick. She said she had seen ups and the downs at the school. She said the students have a heart of gold, despite the fact that the news media portrays them in a negative light. She added that the principals were banding together this year. She said many teachers are very committed and stay after hours.

Mr. Cole, a parent of three children, including two at Bassick, said every kid has the opportunity to learn at Bassick and he wished the best for everybody.

Natashi Thomas, a Bassick student, said Bassick has been more than just a school for her, but a place where students, teachers and administrators of different cultures and races come together. She said the diversity of age, experience, race and many other attributes contributes to the great environment of teaching. She said the administrators and counselors are doing a great job of preparing seniors for college.

Norris Tate said in his four years at Bassick he had a different principal every year. He said he was a football player and has also traveled to Haiti as a sophomore to help build a school. He said he was going to miss Bassick when he is at South Carolina University next year. He said he viewed the teachers and staff at Bassick as his family and loved them. He said his mom and dad both work two jobs to support the family, even though his dad is at home sick.

Ms. Ryall, a biology teacher, read a poem and said she had been at the school for five years. She said she had often heard her students were failing, violent and not in school. She said she met Geoffrey Canada at a professional development about disengaged students. She said she started an advocate program at Bassick because all disengaged youth don't have a trusted adult they can go to when they need help. She described the work that goes on in workshops for disengaged students. She said she has received some grants for her work, including licenses for Dr. Jordan Peterson's self-authoring program.

John Brockenberry, a 9th grade ELA teacher at Bassick, described

restorative practices. He said the teachers at Bassick are about the students. He said restorative practices were about building school community through developing climate. He said restorative practices give us an opportunity to connect every day. He said he spoke to two different students one of whom shared he was shot at on Monday night and the other had a cycle of running away. He said restorative practices gives a way for staff members to communicate with and connect with students.

A Bassick student, Akbaru R. Niyonkuru, said he was born in Burundi and raised in a refugee camp in Tanzania. He said he came to the United States in September 2015 and is now a Bassick senior. He said when he came to Bassick he wasn't able to communicate, make friends or find anyone to help him because of language. He said Bassick teachers, including Ms. Ryall, helped him. He was encouraged to write, including poetry, and he took that as an opportunity. He said he came from the worst place ever to here. He added he helped establish a club for students with language difficulties. He recited his poem, "Under."

There was a musical performance by Bassick students, including dancing and singing.

Mr. Bradley said he would like to explore efforts to provide mentors for students.

Dr. Johnson said Mr. Gardner had started a conversation about partnering young boys of color with a mentor starting in the 9th grade.

Dr. Williams said there had been a lot of conversations about the topic. He said the focus was on providing mentors for 9th graders. He said the problem encountered was the cost of having the mentors vetted. He said we will make sure it happens.

Ms. Pereira said the District at a Glance update describes the city's mentoring program for elementary and middle school students.

Dr. Johnson said last year there was four pilot schools for restorative justice – Harding, Columbus, Marin and Curiale.

The next agenda item was an update on early childhood in the district.

Tina Peloso-Ulreich, director of early childhood, said she was pleased to be here to provide an update on preschool programs. She said research shows the early years are the learning years. She said over the past few years preschool classes have been added at Black Rock, Classical Studies, Claytor, Cross, Dunbar and Winthrop. Two part-day programs have been converted to school-day programs.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said all the programs are funded by grants. Every two years the district applies for the School Readiness Grant. There is a Smart Start grant that funds four public schools in the district. The Preschool Development Grant(PDG) funds about 144 children who are at the 200-percent poverty level or below. Discovery Magnet's preschool is covered under the school's magnet grant and funds six preschool classes. Title I funds three other pre-K classes.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said the state funding does not cover the full cost of the personnel, so the district subsidizes the program with Title I.

Fees from parents are collected from those programs covered by Smart Start and School Readiness based on a sliding fee.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said for 2018-19 she was recommending charging parents fees for Discovery Magnet preschool classes. The fees are used for things such as materials, playgrounds, field trips. The fees are on a sliding scale based on family size and income.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said there were 22 schools participating in preschool.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich discussed recruiting students for preschool slots. Registration begins in March and it is ongoing. With the exception of Discovery Magnet, registration is on a first come/first served basis. Discovery is lottery-based.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said most of the Bridgeport Public Schools preschools run for the full school day, with some part-day classes at three schools.

Lee Helmricks, school readiness coordinator, said the School Readiness Grant funds 378 children in school day and 108 in part-day classes. The Smart Start Grant funds 60 children in school-day classes. The Preschool Development Grant funds 144 children. Discovery Magnet funds the 90 children via the six preschool programs.

Ms. Helmricks said there are currently 18 preschool development spaces that are available, and the spaces do need to be filled by the end of this month. The School Readiness Council reported that the Office of Early Childhood might reclaim unfilled spaces based on December monthly reports. She said this is the first time they have talked about reclaiming the preschool development grant.

Ms. Helmricks said the schools report they are continuing to fill spaces, but there is a revolving door syndrome where parents are removing students, even though other students are coming into the program. She said many families leave for Connecticut for economic reasons or family reasons. She said the closing of Care For Kids has impacted the numbers because that funding was critical for parents. She said the Connecticut Care for Kids had dedicated almost all its funding to parents for services. The federal government attached a mandate this year for training of providers, which has a crippling effect to Bridgeport.

Ms. Helmricks said it has been discovered that transportation is one of the big reasons that students don't come to school. Bus transportation is not provided. A grant provides a monthly city bus pass, but it is not useful to many parents.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said there are collaborations with community partners to recruit more students. A flyer has been developed to announce the spaces. The flyers have been distributed in grocery stores, restaurants and other businesses, as well as agencies such as DCF, the United Way and Junior Achievement. There have been phone blasts in English and Spanish, along with the district website, Facebook and Twitter announcements. She added there was an open house at Wilbur Cross School tomorrow for families who are interested.

Ms. Helmreich said the School Readiness Council, convened by the superintendent and the mayor, directs the School Readiness and PDG grants. Funding has been secured for two electronic billboards on I-95.

Ms. Helmreich said in the past week enrollment increased by 11 students and we are starting to fill all the openings by the end of December.

Ms. Pereira said she was concerned to read in the *Connecticut Post* that a hundred early childhood slots were not filled. Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said as of today there are 17 open slots in the school program. Ms. Helmreich said there are 20 in the community programs. She said children who turn three can start preschool in January.

Ms. Pereira said Ms. Rabinowitz said one of the biggest problems was seats in locations that parents can't get to. She said it is our job to fix that.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said she knew on a daily basis how many openings there are in School Readiness, but community sites are not reported.

Ms. Pereira said this was very troublesome. She noted the administrative team was very tenured. She said she did not see outreach to licensed day care locations in Bridgeport. She said she did not believe enough outreach had been done.

Ms. Helmreich said we're working in silos, but there needs to be collaboration throughout the city.

Ms. Pereira suggested a small stipend be investigated to day care programs that do not have capacity who refer a child to the district's preschool program.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said there are locations parents don't want to send their children to. She said the state told her she could not transfer the 17 slots to another school. She said two new classes

were added this year, which is another reason there are more spaces to fill.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said she will work over the Christmas vacation if she has to to fill the slots. She said the preschools are the gateway to the district and we have to be friendly and nice and helpful.

Mr. Bradley said this sounds like it has been an ongoing problem. He said since the days of President Clinton we've been talking about universal preschool. He suggested mandating preschool be considered. He also suggested we target children who have needs, such as single-parent homes or families with limited education.

Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said busing is a big obstacle to filling spots, and the city bus passes which are available are very difficult for many families to use.

Mr. Bradley suggested control transfers of preschool children be investigated.

Ms. Helmreich said Commissioner Wilkinson, who is new to the Office of Early Childhood, has brought forward the idea of universal preschool. The different programs that fund preschool complicate the concept of universal preschool. She said for working parents non-school day care programs that operate fifty weeks of the year often make more sense to them than the district's program.

Mr. Weldon and Ms. Pereira said they understood that it is illegal to mandate preschool. Ms. Pereira noted that kindergarten is optional under Connecticut law.

Mr. Weldon said it sounded like the aggressive efforts described should start early in the year.

Mr. Taylor said he believed the administration had done a wonderful job in outreach and gave kudos to Ms. Peloso-Ulreich and Ms. Helmreich. He said he lived in one of the poorest districts, the 139th in the East End, and he saw the preschool flyers at the NRZ and the food bank. He said the moral fabric in Bridgeport had eroded, but the program only works for some people. He said no matter what you do,

there are some people that it's never going to work for. He described education as a cooperation.

Ms. Pereira said we are a district that is desperate for every dollar so we can't lose any preschool slots. She asked that the superintendent report back at the next meeting if we lost any preschool slots because they were not filled. Dr. Johnson said she would do so.

Mr. Taylor said he did not want to see these women held responsible for the loss of slots because parents are not cooperating with the system. He said we need to back up our Board of Education employees.

Ms. Pereira said the superintendent works for the board as a whole, and the superintendent is the only employee of the board who we have to hold accountable. The superintendent handles and directs her staff under state statute.

Ms. Pereira moved to approve Items I to III on the consent agenda. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth.

Ms. Pereira thanked Marcia Stabler for 36 years of service to the district.

The motion was unanimously approved.

OLD BUSINESS:

The next item was the second read of the proposed control transfer policy.

Ms. Pereira said she hoped everyone had an opportunity to read the proposed policy, which was unanimously approved by the Students & Families Committee. She said the three major changes are (1) that if a control transfer is revoked it must be done by the close of the second marking period or the child gets to stay in the school till the end of the year for stability; (2) once revoked, the student stays in the school during an appeal process unless the revocation is because of lack of space; (3) control transfers will be granted to any K to 8 student without any requirements. She noted the district does not pay

to transport students who control transfer. Students in Grades 9 to 12 will be based on administrative decisions at the high school based on availability of courses.

Ms. Pereira moved to suspend the rules of a full read of the policy and that we approve this effective January 1st. Mr. Bradley seconded the motion.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was the possibility of confusion in the language about revocation. He suggested a sentence be moved from Section C to Section D. Ms. Pereira said she agreed because it puts the language about appeals in one place.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to amend the motion by moving Section C, bullet points 1 and 2, over to Section D, bullet point 3. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

Mr. Bradley noted under the appeal provisions in Section E the superintendent had fifteen days to respond to the appeal. He asked what happens if the superintendent did not issue a decision. Mr. Weldon asked if there was a default provision if the superintendent did not respond.

Mr. Bradley suggested it read that if the superintendent did not respond the decision of the assistant superintendent would be upheld. He said if the rules are unclear it might open the door for someone to bring a lawsuit.

Ms. Pereira said she thought the chain was pretty clear. Mr. Bradley said it did not read clearly.

Mr. Bradley suggested adding language: "If the superintendent does not render a decision, the decision of the assistant superintendent stands."

Mr. Bradley moved that language as an amendment to the motion. Ms. Pereira seconded the amendment.

In response to a question, Supt. Johnson said she didn't think the language was fair to parents. She said if she didn't respond, similar

to the rules about grievances, that it would err on the side of the parents.

Mr. Bradley said he was amenable to either approach as long as the language was clear.

Mr. Bradley suggested the language, "If the superintendent does not respond within fifteen days, then the decision is rescinded and the student returns to his original school."

In response to a question, Supt. Johnson said fifteen business days was ample time to respond.

Mr. Illingworth suggested the language indicate the appeal is granted if the superintendent does not respond.

Mr. Bradley suggested: "If the superintendent does not respond in fifteen business days, the appeal is granted."

Mr. Sokolovic noted every step of the appeal has a timeline. He suggested adding language that if any of the steps are not followed that it defaults to granting the appeal.

Mr. Bradley suggested a Section G: "Should the appeal process timelines not be followed by the administration, the appeal will be upheld."

Mr. Bradley seconded the amendment with that language. The amendment was unanimously approved.

The motion to approve the underlying board policy as finalized with amendments was unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the board on January 8, 2018