

Monday, March 26, 2018 [*Corrected*]

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held March 26, 2018, 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 John Weldon, Secretary Jessica Martinez, Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, Ben Walker, Chris Taylor and Maria Pereira. Dennis Bradley and Vice President Hernan Illingworth arrived subsequently as noted.

Supt. Aresta Johnson, Ed.D. was present.

### **RECOGNITIONS:**

Blackham School 8th graders performed music with West African rhythms using African drumming and xylophones. Dr. Johnson said the group also performed at City Hall for a Black History Month presentation.

Principal Brett Gustafson introduced three Curiale students, under the guidance of security guard Elizabeth Morales and Barbara DePass, who choreographed the demonstration of African dance they performed. Dr. Johnson presented the young ladies with certificates.

Principal Cynthia Fernandes of Hall School, a small K to 6 school, described the students who appeared in the Turnaround Arts' National Talent Show at the Kennedy Center in Washington on March 11th. The 25 Bridgeport students presented an original piece of music written by a Bridgeport teacher, Sheena Graham. Dr. Johnson also presented certificates to the students.

### **STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:**

The Bassick student representative highlighted the 285 students who made the honor roll, the science department's 3rd place finish in the science fair competition, boys' basketball's loss in the semifinal of the state tournament and the girls' team's loss in the second round, the preparations for SAT testing on April 24th and the male mentoring program at the school

Mr. Bradley arrived at the meeting.

Dafne Hernandez of Bridgeport Military Academy reported on her school. Among the items she highlighted were the assembly for sophomores and juniors on electives available to students, a CPR class for students, the March 16th change of command ceremony, and the April 6th fundraising event at Buffalo Wild Wings in Milford.

Jeniel Edmonds, a senior at the Aerospace School at Fairchild Wheeler, reported on her school. Among the items she highlighted were student exhibition day on March 14th, the student-held and student-organized volunteer walkout where names of the victims of the Florida shooting were announced, the certification received by all Fairchild Wheeler schools by Magnet Schools of America, the upcoming talent show on Thursday, and the creation of visuals posted in the school about college acceptances received by seniors.

Mr. Weldon said Spanish translation was available.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to suspend the thirty-minute time frame to allow all speakers signed up to speak, adhering to the two-minute time frame."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Dr. Anna Greer, a Bridgeport resident and a professor of public health at Sacred Heart University, said she was here to support Make the Road Connecticut. She said her research focuses on healthy eating and promoting physical activity, however, the walks to school in Bridgeport are just not safe due to the lack of crossing signals or crossing stripes, snow on sidewalks, a lack of greenery or shade and long lines at security when students arrive at school.

Isiah Rodriguez, a student at Read School and a member of Make the Road Connecticut, said he was part of the campaign called Walking Towards a Brighter Future. He said his family had to move, at great expense, to be eligible for bus transportation to school. He said he often had to walk in the street because of the sidewalks being blocked.

Morgan Gonzalez, an 8th grader at Read School and a member of Make the Road Connecticut, said the education system, especially the lack of supplies available, is very bad, and expressed concern about whether the same issues would present themselves next year in high school.

Crystal Aguirre said she gets up at 5:30 in the morning to get ready to leave for school by 6:10. She said the walk includes sidewalks that aren't clear, cold weather, rain and snowy weather. She said she does not have access to a winter coat or nice boots. She noted Dr. Johnson and one of the board members walked with the students to school. She asked the other board members to also walk with students to school.

Shawaban Banyasharabia said walking to school was a severe problem. He said when he attended Bassick he had to walk up to 40 minutes to school. He said after he moved to near Central High, he still had to walk to Bassick, which took him 90 minutes. He urged the board to change this and get funding for busing.

Charlie Hernandez, a Bassick student and a youth leader with Make the Road Connecticut, said he was a proud child of an immigrant mom who makes sacrifices to support him and his sister. He said his dream is to have a bright future. He said as a young man of color in an underfunded school district holding onto hope can be hard. He said students have to walk unsafe routes and often arrive late to school.

Anika Green, a Fairchild Wheeler student, said she was lucky to have a bus to get to school. She said students in Bridgeport have many challenges including underfunding, being unprepared for college and unsafe walking routes to school. She said the lines to enter the

school are so long that many students are missing their first periods.

Jackie Cruz said she has two children in the schools and is a part of Mothers In Action. She said we need for politics to become better so our kids can be motivated to go to school and have a better education instead of being punished and prevented from graduating on time.

JoAnn Kennedy said she was greatly disappointed about the selection of the text for the African studies course, *The African-Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*, by Henry Louis Gates. She said our history does not start here in America, but in Africa. She said the Benin Empire, the Ghana Empire, the Mali Empire, and the Songhai Empire all predated the colonial period. She said Mansa Musa was an emperor who was one of the richest persons who ever lived and was known as a great conqueror. She said this was the type of history we have to teach to our students to extenuate positive images.

Councilwoman Karen Jackson said she submitted books to the board ten years ago about black and Latino history, but there was no parent input into the new curriculum. She said the book *Harvest of the Empire* was available free and treated the topic in a more appropriate manner. She said the board won't deal with the District PAC or put the FCIAC back because our children are beating schools with the wrong demographic. She said the matter should be sent back to committee.

Mark Perkins, a former teacher and football coach, spoke in favor of naming the football field at the new Harding High School after his uncle, John Lewis. He said Coach Lewis did a lot to encourage young men to choose education. He said the city would remiss if it forgot the legacy of Coach Lewis.

Mr. Illingworth arrived at the meeting.

Katrina Mebane-Stougenke, a 1984 graduate of Harding, said the name of Harding should remain the same. She cited the accomplishments of John Bagley, Michael Jones, Dr. Shelley Jones, Walt Kelly, Wes Matthews, Wayne Moore, David Rowe, Charles Smith, John Lewis and Samuel Tedesco. She said a petition has

been created on Facebook with over 500 signers to keep the name of Harding High to continue the legacy.

Patrick Dixon said Harding High needs to keep its name. He said President Harding was accused of having black blood in his presidential run and had to fight against a wicked racist. He said Mr. Harding did nothing to lose his name on the school. He said he didn't know if the proposal to change the name was made because of politics, but they didn't take that walk up Central Avenue or from Newfield Park every morning in five-degree weather.

Clyde Nicholson said he wanted to support the kids who have to walk to school. He said in cold weather it's not safe or healthy to walk to school. He said Mayor Ganim had not put up a dime for these kids while he's speeding on a highway and not getting a ticket. He said given the taxes in Bridgeport there is no reason these kids have to walk to school.

David Gordon said Linda Lambeck's story in the *Connecticut Post* shared disturbing data. The incoming class in Bassick in 2013 only had a 40 percent graduation rate in 2017. He said Dr. Aresta Johnson was the direct supervisor of high schools at this time. He said the board's decision to promote Dr. Johnson was sad. He said the current administration conspired with John Ramos to destroy the program that changed the climate at Central High, the Leadership Group. He said the board should ask for the resignation of Dr. Johnson and John DiDonato.

Steve Karjanis said it was hard enough to be successful without having to go the nightmare of getting to school. He said drugs, gangs and violence are in the schools and nothing has been done about them. He said Bridgeport now has more charter schools than the rest of the state put together. He said if our children were successful, they couldn't bring the charter schools in.

Councilman Ernest Newton said the football field at Harding should be named after John Lewis. He said Mr. Lewis lived in the community and cared about the children. He said Harding High had a rich history and the board should not make a feel-good decision to name the school after Barack Obama. He urged the next school be named after

Barack Obama. He said he would campaign against board members who voted to change the name of Harding.

Alexis Johnson, a 1986 graduate of Harding, said her son graduated from Harding in 2007, as did her grandmother and her uncle. She said she was impressed with President Obama, but the board should not take away our school's name. She said she volunteers in the CNA classes at Harding. She added that the football field should be named after John Lewis, citing a recommendation Mr. Lewis made to her to attend Hampton University.

Helen Olga Losak, a summa cum laude graduate of Harding High, said she was opposed to changing the name of the school. She said she had great teachers at Harding, which led to college. She said to change the name would be a travesty to all its graduates.

Damon Lewis, a graduate of Harding and middle school principal in Norwalk, said he was the proud son of John Lewis. He urged the board to name the field after Coach Lewis. He said Coach Lewis was born and raised in Father Panik Village and worked with students to pull them to their highest capabilities. He said there were a lot of proud graduates of Harding, including educators, and urged the Harding name be kept. He said when faced with challenges you have to show mettle and say: So what, now what?

Crystal Mack said Coach Lewis was a mentor to her husband and a father figure to everyone. She said he was a no-nonsense person with a loving spirit. She said the children's march was just like 1968. She said an audit of the Board of Education was needed. She urged parents be put back in the school system. She added that Dr. Johnson was doing a fine, impeccable job.

Mr. Illingworth moved *"to move up the agenda item on the discussion and possible action on naming the Harding football field to the next item on the agenda."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

Dr. Johnson said the naming committee from Harding brought forward the name of John Lewis and the board asked that a larger net

be cast. She said Principal Dane Brown did phone blasts and held a meeting just prior to the March PTSO/SGC meeting at the school. John Lewis received all 58 votes cast.

Mr. Walker moved that "*we name the football field at the new Harding High School John Lewis Stadium.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Bradley.

Ms. Pereira moved to amend the motion "*that we name the new field the John L. Lewis football field.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

Mr. Bradley said the family was requesting the name include the word "memorial."

Ms. Pereira moved to withdraw her motion. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira moved to amend the motion "*that we name it the John L. Lewis Memorial Football Field.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Bradley.

Mr. Illingworth thanked everyone, including the Lewis family, for coming out tonight. He said he ran into a UPS driver who spoke about the impact Mr. Lewis had on students, not just on the football players.

Mr. Bradley said he was in full support of naming the field after Coach Lewis. He said he was told he was a no-nonsense type of person. He said the virtue he taught people would have an impact.

John Lewis's wife was in attendance and received applause. She said she graduated from Harding in 1959. She said she loved Harding. She said she lived below Newfield Park, close to Pleasure Beach, and it was a difficult walk. She thanked everyone for coming tonight.

Ms. Pereira said when she attended Harding she always wanted to do right around Mr. Lewis because she feared him a good way. She said he was an amazing person.

The amendment was unanimously approved. The motion was then unanimously approved.

Mr. Illingworth asked the superintendent to work with Harding to plan a dedication ceremony for the field.

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

Ms. Pereira moved approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 12, 2018, with one correction. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker. Two corrections were noted. The motion was unanimously approved.

### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:**

Mr. Weldon asked for a moment of silence for Terra Holloway, a security guard at Curiale School, who passed away.

Mr. Weldon said a board retreat is being planned for June. He asked board members to respond to his e-mail in regard to possible dates. He said the board would adopt some goals at the retreat.

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:**

Mr. Taylor reported on the Facilities Committee. He said he recently visited Read School and saw the roof leaking and an immense amount of mold. He said a stair tread broke at Black Rock School when he visited it today. He said the next committee meeting would be held at Black Rock School.

Mr. Sokolovic referred the policy on naming committees, Policy 7550, to the Facilities Committee.

Ms. Pereira noted she referred the T-Mobile contract to the Facilities Committee. Mr. Taylor said it would be on the next agenda.

Ms. Pereira asked that the Facilities Committee look at the long lines at high schools going through the metal detectors. She said she



urged Make the Road to go before the City Council and the mayor because they are in charge of sidewalks, stop signs and crosswalks.

Mr. Taylor said he observed the guards at Harding doing a thorough search and working very diligently.

Ms. Martinez reported on the Finance Committee meeting on March 14th. She said the meeting failed to achieve a quorum and no decisions were made. She said the meeting was informational. She said Attorney Uri, the MGM representative, was present to have a conversation on what could be done for the district if MGM comes to Bridgeport. The project would create 7,000 jobs during construction and 2,000 jobs upon completion. She said he indicated there could be work with schools on curriculum to tailor vocational programs and opportunities for the district to apply for grants offered by MGM's foundation.

Ms. Martinez said the 2016-17 and 2017-18 budgets were also discussed. The next meeting will be on April 4th.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said an internal committee would be set up to look at the date and timing of the use of long-term subs in the district. Ms. Pereira said that needed to be pursued because she had received many complaints about long-term subs. Ms. Martinez said the decision when in the fiscal year to hire a long-term sub will be based on the status of next year's budget.

Mr. Taylor referred the board's lease of the property at the corner of Connecticut Avenue and Bishop Avenue, which he said was packed with police cars, to the Facilities Committee.

Mr. Weldon said the Governance Committee would meet next on April 16th.

Mr. Walker reported on the Teaching and Learning Committee. At the last meeting, Mr. DiDonato reported a state Department of Education complaint against New Beginnings Charter School for not providing service due to a teacher vacancy. The resolution of the complaint is the responsibility of the charter school. The district has the responsibility to provide services if the parents re-enroll their children

in a public school.

Mr. Walker said Principal Michelle Matera of Skane School reported on early childhood special education services. Close to 800 students up to five-years old have been identified as needing services consistent with IDEA. The district is mandated to provide free public education for children by age three, including evaluating and placing students within the IDEA-prescribed 45-day timeline. He said fulltime programs are not available to special education preschool students, while typical peers get a full-day program. This often leads to parental requests for out-of-district placement.

Mr. Walker said the lack of resources include readily available, highly trained teachers, speech and language services beyond IEP mandates, and the lack of embedded professional development.

Mr. Walker said Ms. Matera reported that recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers for preschool and early childhood special education is a significant challenge because of the limited pool of candidates. He said Fairfield County districts pay considerably more than Bridgeport.

Mr. Walker said with budget cuts from the state and the federal government the provision of mandated special education services will take a greater portion of the district's operating budget each year. He said we are reaching a tipping point where the cost of special education will overwhelm the operational budget. He said he was advocating for finding a way to alleviate much of the out-of-district placement costs.

Mr. Walker said the committee discussed educating children on how to interact with police and other authority figures. He said Mr. Taylor expressed his concerns and gave an impassioned tale of growing up and learning to deal with authority figures. Dr. Johnson described several programs and initiatives aimed at developing positive relations with the police. The committee challenged the district to go farther, including conversations between elementary students and police. He said he was sure the district's executive staff would come through for our children.

Mr. Walker said the last item was a discussion of proposed texts for

Latin-Caribbean American history and African-American history courses. He said Dr. Santacapita and Mr. Lipp of the course development committee described the selection the process, including recommendations of the texts chosen by our consultants, Dr. David Canton and Dr. Elizabeth Garcia of Connecticut College.

Mr. Walker said the texts concentrate on the experiences from their time in America. Although the history of both races goes back further, this is the limitation of these courses and an approachable amount of material for a one-semester course. He said these courses are the first phase of multiphased course additions in race history and will be taught to 9th graders in one semester.

Mr. Walker said both texts are paired with a DVD series produced by PBS as supplemental materials and have extensive online services for both educators and students at no additional cost. The Latin American history text and DVD series will cost \$14.53 per text, with 800 to be purchased, along with 100 copies of the DVD series at \$17.85 each, totaling \$13,408. The African-American text and DVD purchase will consist of 800 texts and 100 DVD series, totaling \$14,154.

Mr. Walker said he was planning on reading a response to our discussion submitted by former board member Sauda Baraka. He requested indulgence be provided to Ms. Baraka to able to speak at the meeting.

Ms. Baraka said she reviewed the text selection for the African-American course and asked the matter be sent back to committee. She said the selection lacks the international perspective and necessary historical foundation to prepare students for future coursework on the African-American experience. She said this particular book only speaks to our collective history at the onset of chattel slavery, but it is necessary to provide a perspective that predates the worst period in world history, the African-American Holocaust. She said the book is more of a supplemental work than a main text. She said there should be emphasis on the glorious West African history, the Mail Empire, the Songhai Empire and the Empire of Ghana.

Ms. Baraka asked the board to refer the selection of a text back to committee to identify a book that provides a well-rounded view of African-American studies. She said she would provide free consultative services to the board. She suggested *From Slavery to Freedom* by John Hope Franklin.

Mr. Walker moved that “*New Business items A and C be moved up to this particular point.*” He said there were members of the audience who were interested in these items. He said his plan was to send Item C back to committee. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

Mr. Walker moved “that we approve *Latino Americans: The 500-Year Legacy that Shaped a Nation* and the companion DVD series for approval to use in our Latin American history class.” The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

Mr. Bradley said he echoed the concern brought up about the African-American history. He said parents indicated they weren’t included in the process in evaluating the material. He said a lot of the Latino population does not have English as a first language. He said the books should be considered in the committee again with parent input.

Mr. Taylor said he had not seen anyone in support of either book. He said what’s most disturbing is we spent \$5,000 on a consultant. He asked if we’re going to get the \$5,000 back. He said Dr. Johnson should ask for a refund because they gave us a book that nobody is happy with.

Ms. Pereira said no one had spoken against the Latin American course. Ms. Martinez said Ms. Jackson mentioned something about the text tonight. Ms. Pereira said if it goes back to committee there have to be parents at the meeting who understand the topic.

Dr. Johnson said some of committee members in the text selection were present tonight. She said the books would be purchased under the Title IV grant. She said this is only phase one of the courses. If more Title IV funding is obtained the course options will be expanded. She said the textbooks should be viewed as supplemental materials

and resources, but it is really about the instructor and the curriculum.

Mr. Taylor said his only concern was the \$5,000 paid to the consulting firm. He said we were defrauded out of the \$5,000.

Ms. Martinez said we need to start being more diligent and decisive and a little bit quicker because our children can't wait. She said it's unfortunate we have qualified staff members to choose these books and they're not being honored. She said the staff members made a presentation that included analysis of California and Philadelphia, which shows they did the work.

Dr. Johnson said the textbook was vetted with all the committee members on multiple occasions. The consultant's role is to provide professional development to the teachers. She said this was just the beginning and the students should have the ability to select several courses in this area.

Mr. Bradley said right now we only have one course. He said we always seem to fall into these traps. He asked why there was not parent engagement from the beginning; an e-mail blast would be free as opposed to \$5,000 to a consultant.

Mr. Walker said the consultants' job was multi-faceted. They met with the course development committee to give guidance as to curriculum design, staffing and other things, as well as future professional development for teachers.

Mr. Walker said the committee went through a number of textbooks in its work. He said the appropriateness of the age of the student is also considered, in this case 9th graders. He said when Ms. Baraka proposed the course it was looked at as a multi-phased project because of the way graduation requirements are set up.

Mr. Walker said all eight members of the committee picked this textbook prior to even asking the consultant for his or her recommendation. He said he can appreciate parents wanting to give input on the books, but we run the risk of a slippery slope when we add parents to textbook selection committees. He said we have to trust the superintendent's executive staff.

Mr. Walker urged we move forward to approve the Latin American textbook.

Mr. Bradley said when dealing with delicate issues of race in America it was free to send an e-mail blast to parents to gather input at the committee level. He said this would help build bridges of trust.

Ms. Pereira said every meeting of the board or its committees are publicized. She said parents were allowed to speak at the last Teaching & Learning Committee. She said she didn't think one parent gets to dictate what a committee has worked on for months. She said the matter had been under discussion since 2009. She said she had some concerns about the African-American text and urged the committee to reach out to Ms. Baraka because her opinion is valuable.

Mr. Bradley said we should proceed with caution on matters dealing with race. He said Ms. Pereira was speaking from a standpoint of not being from Latin American or not being African-American. He said the board should be sensitive to this.

Mr. Weldon said in the interests of treating the items equally he wondered if someone would also move to table the other textbook approval.

Mr. Bradley said Linda Brown of *Brown vs. Board of Education* passed away today. There was a moment of silence to recognize the sacrifice she made for our nation.

Dr. Johnson said in terms of fairness and equity if we extend one courtesy to the African-American course, then we should do the same for the Latino course. She said she'd rather go slow and get it right as opposed to moving too swiftly.

Mr. Walker said in view of the superintendent's words he would withdraw his motion. The withdrawal was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

Mr. Walker moved "*that we table Items B and C on New Business.*"

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

Mr. Illingworth reported on the Personnel Committee. The last meeting was cancelled due to the weather. The next meeting will be on April 18th.

Ms. Pereira said the board received a letter from the personnel director at civil service on testing in April. She asked the committee receive an update on the testing and that the committee start getting ready for the superintendent's annual evaluation.

Mr. Sokolovic reported on the Students and Families Committee. The last meeting included a presentation by Anne Gribbon, the executive director of the School Volunteer Association, who talked about the partnership with Bridgeport Public Schools. She highlighted the read aloud programs, volunteers and its financial sponsors. Mr. Sokolovic thanked the School Volunteer Association and its volunteers for its charitable works.

Mr. Sokolovic said the question of nutrition bids was handled in a highly contentious manner, which strayed into territory best left to the superintendent because it was a personnel issue. He said we hired the superintendent to manage our schools and staff, and she is the best judge of how to manage staff without any undue pressure from this board, whether at a committee meeting, e-mail or elsewhere. He said the board seems to be traveling down the slippery slope of micromanaging the superintendent.

Mr. Sokolovic said issues like this can be avoided in the future by allowing the superintendent to do her job. If interference in a personnel matter is warranted the board should call a special meeting, which can go into executive session where it belongs. He said he only feels the need to feel confidence in one employee, Dr. Johnson. He said he would support Dr. Johnson and trust her judgment on any personnel matter.

Mr. Sokolovic said the committee approved the request of First Serve, a nonprofit tennis organization, which wishes to donate the use of a vehicle free of charge to the Central High tennis program.

The insurance and riders had to be brought before the board to ensure no liability to the board.

Mr. Sokolovic said Ms. Mason reported on parent engagement policies, including a webinar which he found to be very well done. An anonymous survey brought up a concern that not all schools are creating a welcoming environment for parent leaders. Progress is being made in filling vacancies in the PACs and PTSOs. There will be training after the elections.

Mr. Sokolovic said the committee also discussed holding future graduation ceremonies at a less expensive venue. He said it seems unlikely a change of venue was feasible for this year.

Mr. Sokolovic said the next meeting would be held on April 5th.

Mr. Taylor asked what personnel matter Mr. Sokolovic was referring to. He said he was in the dark about this. Mr. Sokolovic said a personnel issue was brought up at the Students & Families Committee, an inappropriate location. He said it would be inappropriate to go into the personnel issue as it is a sensitive issue and it is better that it take place in Dr. Johnson's hands.

Mr. Taylor said he was confused about why Mr. Sokolovic brought it up and his accusation about the board micromanaging Dr. Johnson.

Mr. Weldon suggested the board members have their own discussion. Ms. Martinez said she believed the statement about the entire board was out of line.

Ms. Pereira said the agenda item was about the nutrition bids, which affects students and families. The issue at hand was the legality of awarding bids and the process followed. She said under state statute the board never has to go into executive session unless it's about a specific student.

Ms. Pereira said the committee heard that Dr. Johnson would return with a revised magnet school policy in April. Mr. Sokolovic said he had not spoken to Dr. Johnson about it, but it should be handled in April. Ms. Pereira asked for an updated spreadsheet on PAC and



PTSO membership.

Mr. Sokolovic said it was made clear that all nutrition bids over \$25,000 will come before the committee, which would resolve any personnel issue that came up.

Mr. Taylor said Mr. Sokolovic made accusations about the entire board and it turns out it was a contract issue, not a personnel issue. He said Mr. Sokolovic should apologize to the board. He said he was a great guy, but that statement was out of line.

Mr. Sokolovic said, without going into details, six members of this board signed a petition of no confidence. Ms. Pereira said that did not happen in his committee.

Mr. Weldon said Mr. Sokolovic was talking about activity that occurred outside of the scope of his committee. He said it was a personnel matter.

### **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT AND AGENDA:**

Ms. Pereira moved *"to postpone item on the School Volunteer Association of Bridgeport, Inc., to the April 3rd meeting."* The good motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

Dr. Johnson said representatives from the Bridgeport Higher Education Alliance were present, along with Marge Hiller and Anne Gribbon.

Dr. Bob Hannafin of Fairfield University said the Bridgeport Higher Education Alliance had been in existence for 14 years, with Sacred Heart, Fairfield University, the University of Bridgeport and Housatonic Community College, along with some nonprofits, in partnership with the district and serving some direct needs.

Dr. Hannafin said ECMC Foundation and the United Way had been active on the executive committee. He said the four universities had provided lots of professional development and targeted academic support identified by the district.

Dr. Hannafin said in May 2017 a big celebration was planned in response to the negative stories about the district. A ton of awards were given to parents, teachers, staff members and students. He said Dr. Johnson identified 14 awards in this category. Each party was attended by 400 students and family members.

He said the 2018 events will be held on four dates and will be kicked off with a video by Congressman Himes. He invited the board members to attend the parties. He noted the awards recognize not just the high achieving students, but categories such as peacemakers, kids with spirit, and most improved, mentoring awards for teachers and staff members.

Dr. Johnson thanked the Bridgeport Higher Education Alliance for their patience and presenting. She said last year the events had full houses.

Ms. Allen moved approval of consent agenda items, I to VII. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth.

In response to a question, Ms. Pereira said she did not know if the Daniel Pereira listed was related to her and she intended to abstain.

The motion was approved by an 8-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Illingworth, Martinez, Allen, Bradley, Walker, Taylor and Sokolovic. Ms. Pereira abstained.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said there was no cost to the district for the Girls, Inc. program including from the nutrition department.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she e-mailed to the board information about playgrounds at High Horizons and Multicultural Magnet and the dollar amount allocated in the capital plan. She said there was funding for Park City Magnet as well

### **OLD BUSINESS:**

The next agenda was on SRO fees for athletic practices/events.

Ms. Pereira said according to the information received the board has paid approximately \$142,000 in costs for SROs covering mainly athletic programs, which takes away from the savings we planned on when we eliminated the five SROs.

Dr. Johnson said she met with the police department again last week. She said the expenditure was approximately \$70,000 year to date as of last Friday. She said for 2016-17 the total was \$101,159.

Dr. Johnson said she learned in the meeting with the police department that four new SROs started today and the additional five will start in December. She said she will meet the new SROs tomorrow for the first time. She said she spoke to the chief about getting a handle on overtime moving forward into 2018-19. She said she wanted to work collaboratively with the police and they agreed to have joint conversations on this work.

Mr. Illingworth said he brought up the issue of staggered shifts, which were used in the past, and the chief has indicated it can't be done right now. He said they hired new SROs, which should create an opportunity to establish staggered shifts.

Dr. Johnson said that was discussed and the staggered shifts could be looked at in December with the five new SROs.

Mr. Taylor said Mayor Ganim gets a driver and they get overtime. He asked why we are being billed to protect our citizens. He asked if he calls 911 will he get a bill. He said he did not agree with negotiating with Chief Perez. He said they're parked in our property that we rent for an overpriced amount of \$240,000 a year. He said he can't understand the audacity of sending the board a bill for these services.

Ms. Pereira said she found documentation from 2010 when the same issue came up. The board had ten SROs on our payroll, but the city would use them for non-school business. Two of the board's SROs worked night shifts. She added the Connecticut Avenue lease is outrageous and the police are using the facility.

Ms. Pereira said according to the city charter we have to go out to bid for the security forces being provided by the police, including an

armed force. She said the matter should go to Mr. Taylor's committee.

Mr. Taylor said he would take it up at his committee. He said when the \$140,000 bill was presented at the committee it voted unanimously not to pay any overtime. He said we should tell Chief Perez we're not paying for the SROs.

Ms. Pereira said when the issue came to the full board it was determined to proceed by having Dr. Johnson meet with Chief Perez, but we have continued to be billed.

Mr. Bradley said a lot of these seem to be protocol and he wondered if we had done homework as to whether other jurisdictions in the state pay for police coverage. He said outsourcing security was an interesting idea. He said the conversation did not have to be combative. He added that SROs are trained to understand kids and which ones are truly bad apples and which need more intervention.

Mr. Weldon said there is a difference between a sworn officer and a security guard. Sworn officers cannot be bid out. He said the issue is how optimally we are using the SROs and who has control of them. He said in many instances more officers are being used than are needed and we don't get a say-so.

Ms. Pereira said SROs in Connecticut get one more extra week of training than a traditional police officer. She said since Columbine 10,000 SROs have been hired nationwide, which has increased the school-to-prison pipeline, mainly affecting males of color. She said she did not agree with SROs being in our schools. The issues they encounter should often be addressed by social workers and guidance counselors, not through arrests.

Mr. Bradley said he currently represents three students who are former district students who have very serious criminal charges pending against them, including violent acts. He said there are students like that in our schools and a lot of students don't feel safe in schools. He said he doesn't dismiss the school-to-prison pipeline and it should be addressed.

Mr. Sokolovic said too often our students are judged before we have all the facts. He said Mr. Bradley must have meant the students allegedly committed acts of violence. Mr. Bradley said he was very familiar with the standards of law and a person is innocent until proven guilty. He said SROs can help identify dangerous students and keep the vast majority of students safe in our schools.

The next agenda item was on the possible creation of an internal legal department.

Ms. Pereira moved *“that Dr. Johnson form a committee to investigate an internal attorney and a paralegal so that they can at least handle, based on the cost that we received and the analysis, expulsion hearings, contract review, personnel issues.”*

Ms. Pereira said we are being billed up the wazoo by our attorneys with outrageous monthly bills. She said she had not seen savings from hiring the current law firm after Durant, Nichols represented the board for over thirty years.

Ms. Pereira said it would be important that the committee have an attorney or retired judge. She said she would ask Judge Lopez to serve on the committee. She said the goal was to have significant savings for the 2018-19 school year.

Mr. Walker seconded the motion.

Ms. Pereira said it was important to have the personnel director on the committee because they know why they have to call on our attorneys.

Mr. Taylor said so far nobody had impressed him with their fiscal ability. He said this was a specialty area. He said he supported the committee but didn't think it should be under Dr. Johnson.

Ms. Pereira said she would support board members, including Mr. Taylor and Mr. Bradley, being on the committee. She said the savings would come from having the attorney handle rudimentary issues. Ms. Pereira said she would like to serve on the committee as well, noting she had spent hours and hours studying the board's legal bills.

Mr. Walker said it was in Mr. Weldon's power to form an ad hoc committee on the issue. Ms. Pereira said that was a good idea.

Mr. Weldon said he would form the ad hoc committee comprised of Ms. Pereira, Mr. Bradley and Mr. Taylor.

Ms. Pereira withdrew her motion. Mr. Walker seconded the withdrawal. The withdrawal was unanimously approved.

The next item was on an RFQ for legal services.

Mr. Illingworth moved "*we approve the RFQ, also with the modifications in regards to on page 16, the evaluation process.*" He said it talks about the evaluation committee being the board as a whole. He said he believed it should be a smaller group and proposed three board members as appointed by the chair, as well as the superintendent, the chief talent officer and John Bohannon from the city attorney's office in an advisory capacity.

The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

Ms. Pereira said we discussed this at length and it was the intention of the city to be on the contract for the new law firm. She said on page 2 and in the letter dated November 22, 2017, it states clearly that it is the intention that the contract will be signed by the Board of Education and the Bridgeport City Attorney. She said that is a violation of state statute because no city employee can decide how to spend Board of Education funds.

Ms. Pereira said the city did not sign the contract three years ago.

Mr. Bradley said the verbiage on page 2 about the city attorney signing is protocol to demonstrate you had an opportunity to speak to legal counsel, to have somebody who's an attorney review the contract with you. He said this was standard in contracts such as a personal injury case or divorce agreement. He said the city attorney's signature is there reflecting the fact that we had an opportunity to seek legal counsel.

Ms. Pereira said three years ago the city did not sign the contract. She added there is language about entering into a contract with the Board of Education and the Bridgeport City Attorney. She said that it did not include language about having an opportunity to review the contract with an attorney. She added that contracts reviewed by Shipman & Goodwin were not signed by them.

Mr. Bradley said it would be a conflict of interest to have our attorney review an RFP such as this. The city attorney would be a neutral third party in the process because they can't bid. He added that page 17 clearly indicates the board would make the decision on which firm to hire.

Ms. Pereira said she did not understand how the city attorney was entering into a contract with our law firm when we pay a hundred percent of the cost.

Ms. Pereira said a motion to rescind the previous vote was needed, which would need to pass by two-thirds, because the board has voted twice on the issue. She said this was similar to the Lighthouse vote.

Mr. Weldon said we voted to investigate the possibility of the internal legal department and now we're proceeding with the RFQ. Ms. Pereira said the prior Board of Education voted on the RFQ and it was binding on the current board.

Mr. Bradley said the law clearly states we are not bound by decisions of previous boards.

Mr. Weldon said we can make our own decision as a new entity.

Ms. Pereira said the decision to rescind on the Lighthouse vote included three new appointees. She said a motion to rescind requires six votes.

The motion was approved by a 4-3 vote. Voting in favor were members Bradley, Illingworth, Martinez, and Weldon. Voting against were members Pereira, Sokolovic and Walker. Ms. Allen and Mr. Taylor abstained.

Ms. Pereira said it was incorrect to say the motion was approved.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

The next item was a contractual agreement with Webster Bank Arena at Harbor Yard regarding graduation.

Dr. Johnson said she reached out to Sacred Heart and Fairfield University. Sacred Heart is not available to host the district's graduation ceremonies. The University of Bridgeport is willing to host Bridgeport Military Academy's graduation, which has a smaller class and can fit into the Bernhard Center. She added the Arena is willing to reduce the price by \$4,000.

Mr. Walker moved that *"we enter into a contractual agreement with Webster Yard Arena regarding the 2018 graduation ceremonies."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

Mr. Taylor said it was nice \$4,000 was shaved off the bill, but they're still not in the ballpark. He said the city has pending litigation with the Arena. He said he was told by Russell Liskov that one of his companies was not allowed to bid on a city matter because he was suing the city at the time. He said he didn't know why the board wants to continuously give away money. He said \$10,000 was a fair amount.

Dr. Johnson said the graduation date is set for June 22nd. She said moving forward in 2019 the hope is that some graduations can be held at Kennedy Stadium. She added that the new Harding High would be open. She said the University of Bridgeport seemed willing to host Bridgeport Military Academy for 2019.

Mr. Bradley said he agreed with Mr. Taylor because it's a lot of money and parents don't want it at the Arena. He said maybe we could find more economical alternatives.

Mr. Illingworth thanked Dr. Johnson for looking into other options that he suggested at the Finance Committee meeting. He said he agreed with Mr. Taylor and Mr. Bradley, but there did not seem to be another solution. He said Bassick outgrew the Klein. He said it was easy to



say I don't like something, but another solution would be needed.

Mr. Taylor said he would look at the Kennedy Center and someone who has aggressive negotiating skills to deal with the Arena. He said he knows people who have rented it for much cheaper. He also suggested the Klein, Sacred Heart, and Roosevelt School's soccer field.

Mr. Taylor said he would be happy if the board wanted to put him in charge of negotiating the contract with the Arena.

Mr. Bradley suggested Seaside Park.

Mr. Walker said he doesn't like the expense, however, rain was an issue. He said there can't be a rain date, but a place to relocate the graduation indoors on the same day. He said a lot of the indoor places in the city would create ticket situations where each student could only have one or two persons attend.

Mr. Walker said the Arena protects against the rain situation. He said he did not like the cost and they probably are gouging us because we don't have much of another choice. He said we need to set the date for this year and move forward. He said we could look for another solution next year or renegotiate.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said the Arena confirmed June 22nd was available and Shipman & Goodwin has reviewed the contract. She said fire, police and medical services are an additional charge to the board. She said that amount totaled about \$8,000. She said an ambulance has to be present.

Ms. Pereira said it was outrageous that the police and fire departments were charging us in a city in which 37 percent of our children never make it to graduation. Dr. Johnson said the \$8,000 was charged in 2017.

Mr. Taylor said we don't know what they're going to charge us for 2018. He said we're dealing with students' money and an underfunded board.

Ms. Pereira suggested Ms. Siegel as a shrewd negotiator be used to speak to the Arena.

Ms. Pereira said she agreed with Mr. Walker that it was not possible to postpone a graduation for rain; they must be moved indoors. She said the indoor venues lead to limitations on how many family members can attend.

Ms. Pereira suggested the stage be relocated at the Arena so families would feel more connected.

Dr. Johnson said the cost for BMA at the University of Bridgeport would be three security guards at about \$24 an hour.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said the funds for the Arena rental were set aside based on last year. She said she agreed the cost was extremely high, but we're on March 26th and the district is receiving inquiries about the date from persons who want to make vacation plans and fly family members in. She said the high school seniors are in limbo because a decision hasn't been made. She asked the board keep students front and center.

Dr. Johnson said she could check the status of Central High construction to see if it could be made available.

Mr. Taylor said a lack of prior planning on Dr. Johnson's part does not constitute an emergency on his part. He said he was not going to take the statement of Dr. Johnson like the board is holding up graduation. He suggested the other high schools graduate at the University of Bridgeport.

Dr. Johnson said the Bernhard Center was too small to accommodate other schools. Mr. Illingworth noted UB has its own graduation at the Arena as well.

Mr. Sokolovic said to cut BMA out of the Arena where the other schools graduate is kind of a slap in the face. He said he would like to see BMA's graduation kept at the Arena and the \$4,000 price reduction kept in the contract. Dr. Johnson said she could look into that.

Ms. Martinez said there was a foundation in place that we could advocate for. She said we should be in Hartford talking to the Legislature about more money. She said this was allocated last year and this is one more school year.

Mr. Bradley said it is possible to get statistical analysis of how often it rains on particular days. He said there were lots of other alternatives to the Arena. He said Seaside Park would be a beautiful option with the weather forecasts being watched closely.

Mr. Walker said he had been involved in quite a few graduations as a high school band director. He noted the uncertainty of weather predictions and said the seven graduations are spread out over the day and it may rain at times and not rain at other times. He said you can't run the risk of rain. He said at his school if the graduation has to be relocated indoors the graduation has to be split into two separate ceremonies.

Mr. Walker said the superintendent had the graduation planned and the only reason it came up was because parents with a tiny bit of information spoke in public comment. He said he was glad it was on our agenda because we can look at new venues moving forward.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested postponing the vote and making the vote contingent upon including BMA for the \$33,000. Ms. Pereira suggested the contract be approved with the condition that the board try to renegotiate with Ms. Siegel at the table.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to amend to approve the Harbor Yard Sparks and Entertainment license agreement on the condition that we still go back and try to negotiate a lower price, including BMA."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

Mr. Bradley said approving the contract takes away our leverage.

It was noted the next board meeting was next Tuesday.

Ms. Pereira withdrew her motion. Ms. Martinez seconded the withdrawal. The withdrawal was unanimously approved.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said postponing the matter to the next meeting would be fine.

Mr. Walker withdrew his motion. The withdrawal was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira moved "*to postpone the item until the next Regular Meeting.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was the First Serve agreement. Chris Johnson, director of athletics, said the agreement would help keep athletic programs going. Last year, First Serve paid all of our busing bills for Central's boys' and girls' tennis teams. First Serve was in the process of getting a van for their tennis programs and they agreed to give the district access to the van.

Ms. Allen and Mr. Taylor left the meeting.

Mr. Johnson said First Serve would be paying the gas, insurance, maintenance and all costs. He said the tennis coaches do have the passenger endorsements and board policy would be followed. Parents would be put on notice about the use of the van. He said it would save the board about \$4,000 and keep tennis alive at Central.

In response to a question, Mr. Johnson said the insurance policy was reviewed by Shipman & Goodwin and they drew up a rider for the board. He said First Serve's insurance would cover all the costs.

Mr. Weldon said the board is an additionally named insured.

Mr. Sokolovic moved "*to approve the First Serve agreement.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 10:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the board on April 23, 2018*