

Monday, April 23, 2018 [Corrected]

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April 23, 2018, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

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

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

Mr. Weldon noted Spanish translation was available.

Frances Piccolello was honored on her retirement. She was employed by the district for fifty years. Ms. Piccolello received two bouquets of flowers. Principal Marcie Julian of Blackham School said Ms. Piccolello was always the face of Blackham and described her as her right hand and singled out her smile, warmth and cooking abilities.

### **RECOGNITIONS:**

Dr. Johnson introduced the Harding High choir, who performed the song "Praise." Alicia Robinson, director of performing and visual arts, said the choir consists of current students as well as Harding alums. The choir will be performing this Saturday with the Greater Bridgeport Symphony Orchestra at the Klein Memorial.

Angela Bhushan, director of science, announced the finalists and winners from the Connecticut Science and Engineering Fair from the district: Alia Aguilar, Brian Duffy, Jinkuk Hong, Jamielyn Iquina, Julia LaPenna, Evan O'Keefe, Catherine Odendahl, and Ethan Skuches of Aquaculture; Carlos Guzman of Central; Mariam Dobosz, Olivia

Walton and Kenny Pineda of Fairchild Wheeler; Clementine Gnoto, Ahkiriah Johnson and Iris Rivera of Geraldine Claytor; John Paul Atehortua and Savannah Guzman of Multicultural Magnet; and Thu Do of Park City Magnet.

Dr. Luis Planas, principal of Multicultural Magnet, said the school's students were recognized for their work with poetry by Fairfield University in the Poetry for Peace program. Six students' works were selected to appear in a book.

### **STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:**

Two students from Bassick reported on their school. They highlighted the upcoming AP exams, the dance team's second-place finish in a national competition in Maryland, this week's report card conferences, conversations with the community about the new Bassick and its curriculum, the PTSO's parent-teacher-student-community celebration on April 27, and Build-On's senior day,

Angel Rivera of Bridgeport Military Academy reported on his school. He highlighted May 21 to 25th's college week, the junior Ring Dance held on April 20th, the school's continued second place ranking in the district for highest attendance, and a visit by students and staff to the U.S. District Court, the National 9/11 Museum in New York and the Connecticut Fire Academy in Windsor Locks. He said this year's graduation will take place on June 22nd at the University of Bridgeport.

Jennifer Martinez, a junior at the Aero/Hydrospace School at Fairchild Wheeler, reported on her school. Among the items she highlighted were students who competed in the Connecticut science competition, the Earth Day events, continued college acceptances and scholarship opportunities being received, the prom on May 10th and the Relay for Life event on June 1st.

Emily Niveló, a junior at the IT School at Fairchild Wheeler, reported on her school. Among the items she highlighted were 11th grade students who came in first place in the AAA Traffic Safety contest and this week's report card conferences,

Angelo Rodriguez, a senior at the Fairchild Wheeler IT School, reported on his school. Among the items he highlighted were the upcoming Ring Dance, SAT testing tomorrow for juniors, registration for early college at UConn, and May 10th's senior prom.

Aniyra Barnes, a senior at the Fairchild Wheeler Biotechnology and Zoology School, highlighted the exposition day on May 9th and the recognition of the IT School from Magnet Schools of America.

Demirya Soto and Nathaniel Perez of Harding High reported on their school. They highlighted tomorrow's SAT exams and report conferences, as well as discussions around the naming of the new building.

Mr. Bradley asked the student reps to come back to the board with actual numbers of the views of young people on the naming of the new Harding High.

Nathaniel Perez said he had been working on a survey of the students to see if they want to change the name, and if they do, what name they would like to see. He said we want the new name of the school to be represented by somebody who graduated from Harding and has made a big impact on Bridgeport.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Charlene Armour, a parent of a Fairchild Wheeler senior, said she was disappointed in the choice of the graduation venue this year. She said she believed the kids deserved Harbor Yard, not Central High, for the graduation. She said if it rains tickets will be limited. She also expressed concerns about the parking and seating.

Marge Hiller invited the board members to the annual Inspiration event on May 2nd, which honors teachers who have been selected by their peers.

Albert Benejan asked for a moment of silence for Maria Silva, the PAC president at Marin School, and a young graduate of BMA, who passed away. He said the community celebration at Bassick was upcoming. He said he would be chairing the Parent Convention on

May 30th and invited the board to attend. He asked where the \$25 charged for attendees at the convention who are not Bridgeport parents went to. He thanked Faith Acts for coming to Bassick today.

Crystal Mack said she heard disturbing news about Puerto Rico, including 50,000 homeless people. She also objected to charter schools in Puerto Rico. She noted 137 people have died from a deadly flu which has returned to Connecticut. She urged there be nurses in the schools. She also spoke on the minimum wage and foreclosures, including her own.

Trisha Pankowits, a property owner in Bridgeport, said she had been working with a nonprofit out of California which she recommended. The organization, AVID(Advancement Via Individual Determination) is a college readiness program born out of the desegregation movement. The mission includes getting first-generation students ready for college.

David Gordon spoke on the serious dropout rate and drug and gang problems that exists in all middle schools and high schools. He asked if the board investigated the article by Linda Lambeck which indicated between September 2013 and June 2017 there was a 60 percent dropout rate at Bassick. He said Dr. Johnson closed her eyes to this as supervisor of high schools.

Steve Karjanis, a school social worker or 21 years in Bridgeport, asked if anything was being done about drugs, gangs and violence since his retirement. He said he had not seen any statistics indicating the success of the RULER program.

Crystal Aguire, a Harding student and a youth leader at Make the Road Connecticut, said there is a campaign called Walking Towards a Brighter Future, which addresses the lack of preparedness for college faced by students, including walking routes that are not safe and unfair consequences for being late to school. She said she took a recent test at Housatonic Community College and said she had never learned a large portion of the math test.

Chai, a graduate of Bassick and a member of Make the Road Connecticut, said walking twenty minutes to an hour to get to school

is a great challenge. She said when less money is invested in education it shows that we are not a priority. She said the schools could not take more budget cuts.

Ms. Pereira said the board was facing a financial crisis. She said the board policy was clear that no individual board member can authorize an expenditure on behalf of this board. She said a law partner of Shipman & Goodwin was in the audience.

Mr. Weldon said he requested the attorney to be present by his authority. Ms. Pereira said the attorney will not be allowed to speak.

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

Ms. Pereira moved approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 26, 2018. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez. Corrections were noted. The motion was unanimously approved.

Ms. Martinez moved to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of April 3, 2018, with one edit. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Pereira, Sokolovic, Illingworth, Weldon, Allen, Bradley and Martinez. Mr. Walker abstained.

Ms. Pereira moved approval of the Special Meeting minutes of April 3, 2018. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Pereira, Sokolovic, Illingworth, Weldon, Allen, Bradley and Martinez. Mr. Walker abstained.

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

Mr. Weldon said tomorrow at 6:00 p.m. at the City Council there would be a public hearing regarding the city budget. He urged those who wish to speak in favor of an increase in the board's budget to do so.

He said the board would be holding its own public hearing regarding its upcoming budget at Batalla School on April 30th.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:

Ms. Pereira noted previous referrals to the Facilities Committee: Policy 7550 on new construction naming committees; the T-Mobile contract; security line issues at high schools; going out to bid for security at games and athletic events; the Connecticut Avenue lease; and BMA possibly moving to Harding. She said there are savings opportunities on a lot of those referrals.

Ms. Martinez reported on the Finance Committee. There was no meeting this month, but the budget gap proposals were referred to a Special Meeting. She said the next committee meeting would be on May 9th.

Mr. Walker reported on the Teaching & Learning Committee. The committee met last week.

Mr. Walker said John DiDonato reported there are no outstanding state Department of Education complaints against the district regarding special education. Complaint 18-0332 was filed against New Beginnings charter school for not providing services due to a teacher vacancy. The resolution of this complaint is the responsibility of the charter school.

Mr. Walker said the development of alternative high school-level self-contained Academic Improvement Module classes is underway. Research supports the efficacy of programs such as this. He challenged the board to take the escalating costs of special education seriously because it will take a greater portion of the district's operating budget each year.

Mr. Walker said although under Mr. DiDonato the district had made great strides towards compliance we are rapidly reaching a tipping point to where the cost of special education will overwhelm the budget.

Mr. Walker said the next item was a discussion of the proposed textbook for the African-American history course. The text is *From Slavery to Freedom* by John Hope Franklin and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. He said the course development committee's advisor,

Dr. David Canton, professor at Connecticut College, went into great detail comparing the disciplines of African history and African-American history, as well as answering all questions concerning why this text is the best choice. The course begins in the year 500 B.C., far before slavery. This text was also the choice of former board member Sauda Baraka.

Mr. Walker said the cost of the books will be 240 texts at \$180.17 each, totaling \$43,240, which includes a digital connect.

Mr. Walker moved that “*we add approval for the text From Slavery to Freedom to the agenda under New Business.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

Mr. Walker moved “*the approval for this text from New Business to be voted on now as part of the Teaching & Learning report.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

Mr. Walker moved that “*we approve the text From Slavery to Freedom to be used in the course African-American History.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

Mr. Walker asked if Dr. Canton could address the board.

Dr. Canton said the first book selected, by Henry Louis Gates, started in the year 1500. He said where to start such a text is a preference by scholars. Some books start with West Africa; some start with Ancient Egypt. He said additional material from pre-slavery history will be included via other readings. He said the real key is how people of African descent resisted slavery. He said that was what people were missing. He said the course should be taught in terms of resistance and agency.

Dr. Canton said things like the Portuguese going to Africa will be taught from an African perspective and integrated with the larger curriculum. He said students will get from an African-American perspective how they engage racism, sexism, how they build communities and how the progress has been made in spite of all the historical inequities.

Dr. Canton described this as an introductory course and students could pursue more detailed studies in college. He said he was confident that the students will know more than 99 percent of their peers.

Dr. Canton said this was a big step; he urged the board to make a compromise to make it happen. He said the board would see a big difference as the course develops.

Mr. Bradley said the board requested further information be sent out to parents. Dr. Johnson said an informational session was held for parents at Batalla School which included a strategic plan overview. One of the breakout sessions discussed graduation requirements. There will be two more informational sessions for parents.

Mr. Walker said he didn't know that there was other efforts to get the word out, although a number of community groups expressed interest and were planning on attending the committee meeting. He said attendance was light at the committee meeting.

Assistant Superintendent Dr. Deborah Santacapita said Dr. Canton made a presentation of about an hour and a half at the committee and spoke to the community members. She said the parents at the informational session were told about the new graduation requirement. She said more phone blasts and flyers would be done to spread the word about the courses.

Mr. Bradley said the specific request of the board was to e-mail the parents and inform them of the next committee meeting. He said it sounded like that didn't happen. He said community members had reached out to him and expressed frustration or a lack of understanding of what our motives or intentions are.

Mr. Bradley said he viewed the courses as Americans understanding our history, not just African-Americans understanding their history. He said he was frustrated by the presentation because African-American history had been neglected in the past. He said he did not want to see electives that watered things down and that did not give the whole view of everything.



Dr. Johnson said the textbook issue had been put on pause by the board and it went back to the committee meeting, which was publicized. She said different community members were personally invited to be part of the conversation.

Dr. Johnson said one of three courses – African-American history, Latino studies or Perspectives on Race – will be required for graduation. If funding is available, the plan is to add other electives, which may be interdisciplinary.

Ms. Pereira said the minutes of the previous board meeting did not indicate a specific direction to the superintendent by the board to do phone blasts or other notifications. She noted the textbook selected was the one recommended by Ms. Baraka.

Mr. Bradley said this was a very sensitive topic and we lose nothing by sending out an e-mail to let all stakeholders hear about the course. He said if the courses were just electives, we're going to segregate.

Ms. Pereira said the specific motion at the last meeting was to table the items. Mr. Bradley said he didn't understand why we would be against informing the parents about the meetings. He said he was concerned that people would be further divided if it was perceived the board was shoving this down people's throats.

Ms. Pereira moved that *"the superintendent send out phone blasts for the next two meetings scheduled regarding the African-American studies and Latin American/Caribbean Studies and Perspectives on Race."* She urged there be a citywide Power School message inviting parents to the forum. Mr. Bradley said that would satisfy him.

Ms. Pereira urged that we give that clear direction to the superintendent that she's to do Power School phone blasts for each of those scheduled forums to parents in the Bridgeport Public Schools. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said the courses are a requirement to graduate so students can take it at any time during their high school career. She noted African-American studies was not a new course; the difference is now one of the three courses is

mandated.

The motion was approved by a 6-2 vote. Voting in favor were members Bradley, Allen, Martinez, Weldon, Walker and Pereira. Voting in opposition were members Sokolovic and Illingworth.

Mr. Walker said the development of this course started with an idea, which was developed into a curriculum. He said the curriculum is what's being taught; the textbook is just a guideline to teaching the curriculum.

Mr. Sokolovic recommended approval of the textbook.

Mr. Illingworth said he appreciated the work of the committee; his only concern was the lack of parent and student input and said he would vote against it.

Dr. Canton said if it was math and science books there would be no discussion, but with history and social science people are quicker to weigh in. He said students are not trained in the subject. He said he was an expert in the field, even if it doesn't know everything. He said in Texas people pick textbooks that are conservative and political. He said the discipline of African-American history had been developed over thirty or forty years, with much research. He asked the board have faith in the process. He said he wanted the same respect as his science peers.

Mr. Sokolovic said the committee approved a science textbook at the same meeting and the room was empty. He said he had no opposition to parental input, but we have to rely on experts on textbooks.

Dr. Santacapita noted the funds had been encumbered by the chief financial officer and have to be spent.

Mr. Bradley said he studied political science and had taken a great deal of history classes and he respected Dr. Canton's profession a hundred percent. He said his concern was not to dictate to Dr. Canton, but to make sure the community is clear as to our motives and intentions.

Dr. Canton said he has been grading AP history exams since 1999 and he would workshop with the teachers on the curriculum to get them up to speed. He said when it comes to hiring those with backgrounds in these fields could be sought.

The main motion was approved by a 7-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Bradley, Allen, Martinez, Weldon, Sokolovic, Walker and Pereira. Voting in opposition was Mr. Illingworth.

Mr. Walker said the committee also discussed the proposed textbook for the Latin/Caribbean American history course, which is *Latin Americans: The 500-Year Legacy That Shaped a Nation* by Ray Suarez. He said the book is paired with a DVD series from PBS. The course development committee revisited the text following discussion at the last Regular Meeting and concluded this text was adequate and appropriate. The cost is 240 books at \$14.53 per text, for a total of \$3,487.20. One hundred DVDs will be purchased for \$1,784.

Mr. Walker moved “*to add approval for the Latin American text, Latin Americans: The 500-Year Legacy That Shaped a Nation*” to the agenda under New Business.” The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

Mr. Walker moved that “*we approve the text Latin Americans: The 500-Year Legacy That Shaped a Nation to be used in the course Latin American/Caribbean American History.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she believed Dr. Elizabeth Garcia was the consultant on this text.

Ms. Pereira said the matter was discussed at length in committee repeatedly. Mr. Bradley said now that it was before the full board the members should be told what we’re voting on.

Mr. Walker said Dr. Garcia is also a professor at Connecticut College. He said the course development committee had met about two dozen times to discuss the curriculum.

Mr. Walker said he viewed the textbook as almost irrelevant. The curriculum and the teacher that is in front of the students is what is relevant. He said a master teacher could teach a course without a textbook. He said textbooks help students stay on track and gives them a timeline of information.

Mr. Bradley questioned why money was being spent on textbooks if they're not relevant. Mr. Walker said it is part of the teacher's toolbox in order to prepare for each class day.

In response to a question, Dr. Santacapita said Dr. Garcia has recently decided she cannot make the commitment to the district. She said she has reached out to experts in the district and UConn has been contacted. She said she received notification that there is a UConn professor who will be able to help the district with curriculum and early college experience.

In response to a question, Dr. Santacapita said Dr. Garcia did not receive any payment from the district. She said Dr. Lyles, a strong proponent of these courses, has also been invited to help.

Dr. Santacapita said Dr. Canton has already laid out a curriculum.

Mr. Bradley said it sounds like we don't have curriculum and we don't have an expert who has told us something about a particular book. Dr. Santacapita said Dr. Garcia said the textbook chosen was used at the college level, is very user friendly, and she wholeheartedly recommended it. She added we want to challenge our students and not water things down.

Dr. Santacapita said curriculum did not exist in terms of week by week. She said the curriculum writers will start right after school ends.

Mr. Bradley said what was described by the committee chair as the most relevant portion for us to make a decision on has not been presented to look at or seen an example of what the curriculum will be.

Dr. Santacapita said there are twenty weeks in the semester, which translates into forty meetings at 45 minutes each. She said Fairchild

Wheeler does 90 minute classes. She said we have to make standards work backwards by design.

Dr. Johnson said the teachers who will be teaching courses should have the opportunity to weigh in on the curriculum development, which will be done during the summer and be funded by the grant.

Dr. Santacapita said the curriculum writers and teachers had already met with Dr. Canton and they were very excited by the work.

Ms. Pereira said under state statute the board approves the textbooks, not the curriculum.

Mr. Bradley said his question came directly from Mr. Walker's statement that we should be talking about curriculum. He said people who aren't on the committee haven't seen the book. He said he wasn't receiving answers to his questions and he is being told that questions about the book are irrelevant.

Dr. Santacapita said she had a copy of the book available. Mr. Bradley asked what was in the book and what were the kids going to learn.

Ms. Pereira said the titles of the books were on the last board agenda, and anybody could have just Googled the information. Mr. Bradley said he wants to hear from the experts what's in the book.

Dr. Santacapita said the committee liked the book's treatment of the nation of 50 million people, the largest minority in the United States. She said the books talks about different destinies of people from different areas, but the one unifier is that all are Latino. She said there is also discussion of the differences between Latin and Latino.

Mr. Bradley said he's not hearing history there. Dr. Santacapita said the book talks about Latin Americans coming from Europe, Africa, Asia and ancient nations of the hemisphere, and how they came into the United States. She said she had read the whole book.

The motion was approved by a 6-2 vote. Voting in favor were members Allen, Martinez, Weldon, Sokolovic, Walker and Pereira.

Voting in opposition were members Bradley and Illingworth.

Mr. Walker said the committee also received a report on STEAM in the elementary classroom. Angela Bhushan reported on science, technology, engineering, arts and math and the transition to Next Generation Science Standards, which includes project-based teaching and learning.

Mr. Walker noted Discovery Magnet, Claytor, Roosevelt and Park City Magnet have STEAM-themed presentations.

Mr. Walker said Alicia Robinson reported on performing and visual arts. There was an Arts Counts Day, where over 60 local artists were deployed to fifth grade classrooms across the district.

Mr. Walker said the district's Black History concert had performances by Blackham, Harding, Hall and Read students. The All-Magnet Band participated in the city's St. Patrick's Day Parade for the first time since 2011. An all-magnet concert is in the works.

Mr. Walker said the Rockwell Dance Center donated 200 tickets for district staff, students and parents to attend a benefit concert, which featured the performance of Jenna Ushkowitz of *Glee*.

Mr. Walker said the Harding choir, under the direction of Sheena Graham, will be performing with the Greater Bridgeport Symphony Orchestra.

Mr. Walker said Bridgeport students participated in the NASA patch design contest. The winning patch will be launched into space on June 6th. Seven students are in the running for this honor.

Mr. Walker said over 300 students participated in The Links, Incorporated, national poster contest.

Mr. Walker said fifteen students from our five Turnaround Arts schools performed at the 2018 Turnaround Arts talent show at the Kennedy Center in Washington. The students received a standing ovation for their performance of "We Can If We Believe," an original composition by Sheena Graham.

Mr. Walker said students from Hall School will be featured on Google's blog on architecture.

Mr. Walker said the Turnaround Arts program will be expanded into Bryant School.

Mr. Walker said Ms. Bhushan presented on science textbooks for Grades 6 to 8. This school year the new Next Generation Science Standards(NGSS) were implemented. This was difficult because the older textbooks did not align with the NGSS.

Mr. Walker said the search for a new textbook began last October and the committee heard presentations from four different vendors, and chose IQWST from Activate Learning as the best textbook, which also includes online digital access and professional development.

Mr. Walker said the cost of the textbooks and professional development is \$395,658, payable over a six-year plan.

Mr. Walker moved that "*we approve adding this to our New Business*" as part of his report. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and approved by a 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Walker, Pereira, Sokolovic, Weldon, Illingworth, Allen and Martinez. Mr. Bradley abstained.

Mr. Walker moved that "*we approve this text series from IQWST to be used in our sixth, seventh and eighth grade science curriculum.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

Mr. Bradley said he did not understand why these things aren't posted on the agenda which would give parents a chance to see it on the agenda. He said it happens repeatedly out of the Teaching & Learning Committee. He said it looks underhanded, which has been a problem in Bridgeport for a long time, although he did not believe Mr. Walker was doing it for that reason.

Mr. Walker said the textbook was on the April agenda of the Teaching & Learning Committee. He said the textbooks for the African-American and Latin America courses were on two different agendas,

which are posted publicly on the district's website.

Mr. Bradley said it was not posted on the agenda of the Regular Meeting.

Mr. Walker said the reason the textbook items were not on the agenda is because the committee meeting is on Tuesday and to make the next regular meeting it has to be submitted to the chair by Tuesday at 5:00 o'clock. He said he followed the board policy to the letter. Mr. Weldon said it could have gone to the next meeting agenda.

Mr. Walker noted there were time constraints on the matter such as the participation of Dr. Canton. He said he resented the fact there was an insinuation that he was trying to do something sneaky.

Ms. Martinez said she didn't understand how anyone thinks every one of us can make it to every single committee meeting. She said board members come to the meetings with lack of knowledge and they have to vote in ignorance or abstain. She said she agreed with Mr. Bradley on this.

Mr. Walker suggested we change the policy. Ms. Martinez suggested he change his meeting date.

Mr. Illingworth said he personally can't attend every committee meeting. He said at least a heads-up given before the meeting would be helpful on his end.

Mr. Weldon said we operate on the premise that things are placed on the agenda so the public knows something is going to happen. He said he didn't believe anyone was trying to pull the wool over people's eyes, but it was just a lot of ambitious work that Mr. Walker is trying to get done.

Ms. Pereira noted the money is encumbered in this year's budget and Ms. Siegel is working on ensuring that we spend every dollar and not give money back to the city. She said it was not only board policy that items can be added by a two-thirds vote, but a state law. She said she noticed Ms. Siegel is shaking her head repeatedly that we need



to spend the money.

Mr. Bradley said it could have easily been placed on the agenda. He said it was a theme that we are not informing the public.

Mr. Weldon said perhaps Mr. Walker could have placed in the items on the agenda in advance of his committee meeting, with the option of tabling them at the Regular Meeting.

The motion was approved by a 5-2 vote. Voting in favor were members Allen, Weldon, Sokolovic, Walker and Pereira. Voting in opposition were Mr. Illingworth and Mr. Bradley. Ms. Martinez was not in the room.

Mr. Illingworth said the Personnel Committee would meet this Wednesday.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Students & Families Committee would meet on May 10th.

Ms. Pereira noted there was a referral to the committee for an updated spreadsheet for PAC and PTSO members.

Mr. Illingworth said a youth group had been addressing the board frequently that raised a lot of concerns. He said he would like to have an open dialogue with them at the Students & Families Committee. Mr. Sokolovic said he has invited the group to a couple of meetings.

Mr. Walker left the meeting

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

Dr. Johnson said she and Mr. Chester met with two housing commissioners to speak about potential housing in connection with recruitment from historically black colleges and universities. Five units have been set aside for potential teacher candidates to help with their transition.

Dr. Johnson said the legal RFQ had been posted on BidSync. She said two responses to the RFP for the Harding early learning center

had been received from ABCD, Inc. and Creative M.E., LLC.

Dr. Johnson said over 200 high school students participated in the Learn to Live initiative at Housatonic Community College. The purpose of the program is to bridge the gap between the police and our students.

Dr. Johnson said the state Department of Education is looking to support the district's efforts on attendance and with a pilot on behavioral health partnerships.

Ms. Pereira said the District at a Glance includes reference to risk factors including special education, utilities and legal services.

Dr. Johnson said as a result of the Special Meeting an updated budget gap plan for 2018-19 was requested. She said there is information in the board packets on it, including the six percent across-the-board cut requested that evening, totaling about \$9 million. She said the board agreed we would go out to bid for the transportation and there is information in the packet about that as well. She added the board agreed we would not agree to an extension. Other information on contracts will be forthcoming as well.

Ms. Pereira said transportation is our third largest budget item. Ms. Siegel said the total amount for next year is approximately \$21 million. Ms. Pereira said this is why it is critical to go out to bid. She said under the city charter there cannot be more than a three-year contract. She described the negotiation for about \$300,000 as peanuts. She said it was to the board's advantage to go out to bid.

Ms. Pereira said she was unable to make the Special Meeting due to illness, but she did read the minutes. She said the AFSCME and NAGE contracts are not negotiated by the board, but by the city. She questioned whether those contracts could be cut by six percent. She noted the contract with BEA is the board's largest expenditure. The contract went to arbitration last year, so the board did not get to vote on it. She said it went to the City Council, which unanimously approved it.

Ms. Pereira asked what was the incentive for the BEA to give up six

percent when they're the lowest paid teachers in all of Fairfield County. Mr. Bradley said we determined we were going to start cutting from the administrators and then we would look at contracts we could get ourselves out of. He said we specifically said we didn't want it to affect the classroom.

Ms. Pereira said the word for word motion said "We look for six percent cuts across the board, highlighting and concentrating on possible cuts in central office and contracts." She said agreement by labor would be needed for the six percent cut.

Ms. Pereira said she was deeply concerned because the board has to pass a specific budget gap plan that totals \$13 million, and then say if additional funds are received to designate what should be reinstated in priority order. She noted July 1 is right around the corner and said we are asking for pure chaos. She apologized for not being at the Special Meeting.

Ms. Pereira said terrible cuts were needed even though the board has cut \$40 million in five years. She said as a board member who had been through this more than anyone else we are in trouble right now without a budget gap plan.

Ms. Pereira said contracts are about negotiation. She said we don't have anything to offer in return for a six percent cut. She asked why anybody would agree to that since they have a binding contract.

Mr. Sokolovic said it didn't make the minutes, but he attempted to amend the motion to leave the BEA out because undercutting the lowest paid educators in Fairfield County would be devastating to morale and retention and cause teachers to leave for surrounding towns. He said a motion to cut six percent with labor being 50 to 60 percent of the budget is really not realistic. He said no union in its right mind is going to let us take the money we already gave them.

Ms. Martinez said as the chair of Finance it was brought to her attention that we needed to make recommendations at the last meeting. She said the committee had trouble obtaining a quorum. She added she requested a very detailed, itemized list of every single expenditure so that we each can come prepared with what we

suggest to cut. Ms. Martinez said that did not happen, which was quite frustrating. She said she came with over \$600,000 of suggestions.

Ms. Martinez said as the Finance chair she believed we can spend our funds better and in different areas. She said cuts in central office that could be made, including two assistant superintendents. She said she was hoping to go line item by line item through the budget and was hoping to get feedback from Ms. Pereira at the meeting. She said she was unwilling to remove assistant principals in certain schools. She added she was willing to remove the remaining ten coaches from the budget.

Ms. Pereira said no eliminations are good, but even with every elimination on the proposal we were at \$6 million. She asked how we can take items off the list when we're not at \$13 million yet.

Ms. Pereira said she had many disagreements with Ms. Siegel, but she is incredibly competent and the best financial person we've had in her nine years involved with the board,

Ms. Martinez said she initially opposed the six percent cut and wanted to push for \$6 million in cuts and then make further cuts later.

Ms. Siegel said the myON and Lexia contracts are not in the budget.

Ms. Martinez said Dr. Johnson did an amazing job fighting for us in front of the City Council for what we deserve. She said she was hoping and praying the City Council would increase funding.

Ms. Pereira said we need to hold another special meeting and go line item by line item. Ms. Martinez said she agreed. Ms. Pereira said she had been through this year after year and it breaks her heart. She said decisions would have to be made that are not good for children or our dedicated employees.

Ms. Pereira said she would be shocked if the City Council gives us \$2 million. Ms. Martinez said she was holding onto hope for more.

Mr. Illingworth said he agreed with Ms. Pereira. He said it would

require several meetings to go through the budget. He said the board members would have to roll up their sleeves and begin with what we absolutely have to have.

There was a discussion of when to hold the special meeting on the budget.

Mr. Bradley said we're missing an opportunity here by painting a grim picture. He said in his three years on the board we do the band-aid way of budget cuts by cutting the amount of employees in a given department, but we're not looking at what works and what doesn't work. He urged that it be looked at as what's the return on investment.

There was a consensus to hold the special meeting this Friday at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Illingworth asked the administration provide a list of all consultants in every single department. Dr. Johnson said it was e-mailed this afternoon.

Mr. Sokolovic asked the information be separated out between grant-funded and general-fund positions. He noted a grant-funded position could not be cut.

Ms. Pereira moved to "*approve Items I through VII on the consent agenda.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

The next item was on the ad hoc committee on creating the board's own legal department. Ms. Pereira said this was discussed at the March 26th meeting. She said she volunteered to serve along with Mr. Bradley and Mr. Taylor. She said we need to move on that because it could mean potentially significant savings.

Mr. Weldon said he has since found out that we are not permitted to have our own internal law department. He said the city attorney's office was available to provide legal services.

Ms. Pereira said there are many school districts that have in-house attorneys. She said the board has the right to spend its money any way we see fit. She said the city had no authority over the board because we get our power from state statute.

Mr. Weldon said the city charter indicates the law department of the City of Bridgeport, also known as the Bridgeport City Attorney, shall be the legal counsel for every board, commission, department and officer of the city and to represent those parties except as otherwise expressly provided by law. No board, commission, officer or department of the city shall retain legal counsel to represent it in any matter without the approval of the city attorney.

Mr. Weldon said under Dr. Ramos there was an agreement between his office and the city attorney's office where they dedicated personnel to the board.

Dr. Johnson said in some cases Shipman & Goodwin does collaborate with the city attorney's office. She said she can look into that if that's what the board's pleasure is.

Mr. Illingworth said it was the will of the board to form the ad hoc committee to look into the issue. He suggested the board move forward with the committee and have the board hear from the committee on any issue regarding a possible prohibition.

Ms. Pereira said the city charter does not give the board its powers or control its powers. Mr. Weldon asked if there was state statute that covers our legal affairs. He said the city charter says in black and white the city attorney is the counsel for every board in the city. Ms. Pereira says the city does not govern the board and the only section in the charter about the board covers the number of members and when they're elected. She said we decide how we spend our money. She said this is nothing more than the city attorney, who loves to dole out business to their Democrat Town Committee friends, controlling board funds.

Mr. Illingworth moved that *"we create an ad hoc committee to look into the possibility of retaining an in-house lawyer in whatever*

*fashion.*” He urged we let the committee do its work and find out what is legal and what’s not. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

Mr. Illingworth amended the motion to include the three board members that originally asked to serve on the committee, Ms. Pereira, Mr. Taylor and Mr. Bradley. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

Mr. Weldon said Mr. Illingworth was saying to explore all options. Mr. Illingworth said we had an attorney years ago. Mr. Weldon said it was through the city attorney.

The motion was unanimously approved.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

The next item was an FOIA request regarding Shipman & Goodwin and John Weldon.

Ms. Pereira said it was outrageous there was a lawyer present after the board discussed that Mr. Weldon nor any individual board member had no authority to authorize expenditures on behalf of the board. She said this was discussed at length at the last meeting. She said a partner in Shipman & Goodwin has been sitting in the audience since at least 7:45 and that Mr. Weldon testified he invited the attorney without the board’s permission.

Ms. Pereira said she “filed a Freedom of Information act request regarding all communications between Shipman & Goodwin, John Weldon and Aresta Johnson, although no board member has to file a Freedom of Information Act request, because we are the nine-member board and we are the client, not John Weldon.”

“There were eleven e-mails, text messages exchanged between Gary Brochu and John Weldon. You have the exchanges before you. If you recall, I specifically asked John Weldon why he had not forwarded a copy of an unauthorized legal opinion regarding the FOI as it pertained to board members as required under board policy. Materials are required to be provided in advance of board meetings so that we have time to read all the necessary information and be

adequately prepared to ask questions and knowledgeably debate the matter at hand. John Weldon responded he had not received the legal opinion in question. I then stated, 'Are you stating that as you as the chair that you have neither received nor read the legal opinion we are scheduled to review in our Special Meeting in just an hour from now.' He replied he had not received nor read the legal opinion in question.

"When Attorney Gary Brochu joined us in the Special Meeting I specifically asked him if he had sent a copy of the legal opinion to John Weldon in advance of the meeting. Attorney Brochu simply responded, quote, 'Yes.'

"I then asked him when did he send the copy of the legal opinion to John Weldon. He replied, quote, '3:00 o'clock.' John Weldon then announced, quote, 'I was on the train at 3:00 o'clock,' intimating he had neither seen the 3:00 o'clock e-mail nor read its contents.

"May I ask all board members to read e-mail number 3 on the first page. I put numbers next to them of the e-mail exchange. Now, please read the e-mail number 2. It was sent from Gary Brochu to John Weldon at 1:05 p.m. on the day of our Special Meeting and simply states: 'Here it is.' That is not a redacted statement in the FOI.

"Clearly, the e-mail was referencing the legal opinion. Therefore, the legal opinion was not sent at 3:00 o'clock p.m. as Attorney Gary Brochu so emphatically stated, and John Weldon was not on the train back to Connecticut.

"Now, please move to the e-mail number 1. As you can see, at 1:19 p.m., just minutes after the legal opinion was sent to Mr. Weldon, he responded to Gary Brochu and said – affirmed that he had received it and it looked good.

"It's absolutely clear that both Attorney Gary Brochu and John Weldon purposefully misled this board. What is further troubling is that John Weldon attempted to enter executive session, claiming the legal opinion qualified for executive session due to attorney-client privilege. If you recall, Mr. Illingworth, Mr. Sokolovic and I challenged that legal opinion and it did not qualify as one of the six reasons the



board could enter into executive session under the Freedom of Information Act. I specifically asked John Weldon which of the six reasons he was asserting the legal opinion fell under. John Weldon in turn punted over to Attorney Gary Brochu. Attorney Gary Brochu also stated on the record that the matter qualified for executive session because it was protected by attorney-client privilege, and did not answer the question regarding which of the six allowed categories were being used to enter executive session.

“On page four, paragraph four, of the Special Meeting minutes, I specifically asked John Weldon if any individual board member or an employee would be discussed in the executive session. Mr. Weldon simply replied, quote, ‘No.’

“The reason that is relevant is that the Freedom of Information requires that if you are entering executive session to address the performance of any employee or a public officer, the individuals must be notified in advance because they have a right to demand that conversation be held in public session.

“To be clear, none of us are employees and none of us are public officers. A public officer would be the police chief, the fire chief, Dr. Johnson – those are public officers. We are elected officials; that is not part of the Freedom of Information Act,

“To support my position, please go to the e-mail numbered as 5. You will see that both Attorney Gary Brochu and John Weldon were well aware of the law, conspired to violate board members’ rights, both individually and collectively, in violation of the Freedom of Information Act.

“In closing, this material demonstrates that our chair, John Weldon, has abused his position as chair by knowingly violating our own bylaws, which every board member is required to adhere to. The chair is our leader, who should be building relationships and trust among his colleagues, not working behind our back with the board’s own attorney.

“Shipman & Goodwin’s behavior also instills a lack of trust as they represent the interests of the board as a collective body, not John

Weldon, not any one of us individually.

“Going forward, I implore the chair to serve as an example to his colleagues and staff by following the bylaws we are all expected to follow and govern this board.”

The next item was on discussion and possible action regarding Shipman & Goodwin legal fees for unauthorized legal opinion and appearances before the Board of Education.

Ms. Pereira moved *“that the following letter to Attorney Dolphin, who’s sitting here as a partner from Shipman & Goodwin- I would like to make a motion that the following letter to Attorney Dolphin from Shipman & Goodwin be authorized by the Bridgeport Board of Education, placed on Board of Ed letterhead by Dr. Johnson, and the letter be transmitted to Shipman & Goodwin, all board members, Marlene Siegel and all business office staff.”*

Ms. Pereira said the letter reads, “Dear Attorney Dolphin: As the attorney for the Bridgeport Board of Education you should be aware that Board Policy number 9010 addresses the limits of authority of the Board of Ed. In plain and unambiguous language the relevant section states the following, quote, ‘The Bridgeport Board of Education is the unit of authority. Apart from their function as part of the unit, board members have no individual authority unless duly authorized by a vote of the board or a committee thereof. Individually, a board member may not commit the district to any policy, act or expenditure(emphasis added). The board member acts for the community as a whole. No individual member of the board by virtue of holding office shall exercise any administrative responsibility with respect to the schools, nor as an individual command the services of any school employee.’

“The public records of the BBOE reveal that on or about March 31st, 2018, John Weldon, chair of the Board of Ed, exchanged e-mails with Attorney Gary Brochu, a member of Shipman & Goodwin. The e-mails were seeking advice and guidance on a matter involving the effect of the Freedom of Information Act on board members. Additionally, Mr. Weldon requested a written legal opinion from

Attorney Brochu.

“On April 3rd, 2018, Attorney Brochu appeared at a BOE meeting to discuss his legal opinion. I’d like to add – and Attorney Dolphin appeared at a BOE meeting on April 23rd, 2018.

“Please be advised that the Board of Ed was unaware of Mr. Weldon’s request and never approved the expenditure of funds to research this issue. Mr. Weldon acted unilaterally and without board approval.

“Therefore, in light of this fact, Mr. Weldon had no authority to incur legal fees nor to commit the board to the expenditure of funds.

“You have represented the Board of Ed for some time and should be familiar with our policies.

“No bills for legal services for this unauthorized work should be submitted nor will any request for payment be honored.

“Please be advised that on April 23rd, 2018, the Board of Ed formally voted to deny payment for these unauthorized expenditures.”

The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

Mr. Weldon said that bylaw 9121 states clearly as “the presiding officer of the board, the chairperson, shall refer questions of legality to the board attorney.” He said he asked the question of legality. Ms. Pereira said the board has to ask the question of legality. Mr. Weldon said he did have the authority to ask in black and white. Ms. Pereira said Mr. Weldon doesn’t make such decisions; they are made together by the nine-member board. She said the chair was not a king or a dictator.

Mr. Weldon says he has a certain degree of authority and it says it here in black and white.

Mr. Illingworth said that’s for the board to decide. Ms. Martinez said it was subject to interpretation – the legal question, not the expenditures. She said incurring a bill is different than what Mr.

Weldon was reading and he was interpreting it wrong.

Mr. Weldon asked if Atty. Dolphin would like to speak. Ms. Pereira said she was not going to be allowed to speak. Ms. Martinez said we're not paying for her.

Ms. Pereira moved that "*Leander Dolphin not to address the board.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

Mr. Sokolovic moved "*to remove the chair for the remainder of the meeting.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Weldon was violating board policy and disrespecting the board. She asked Mr. Illingworth to call the question.

Mr. Weldon said you people are embarrassing yourselves. Mr. Illingworth said Mr. Weldon was. Ms. Pereira said Mr. Weldon was out of line.

Mr. Illingworth said if Mr. Weldon didn't do what he did two weeks ago and throw all of us under the bus because you disagree with us. He said as board chair he was supposed to bring us together, not divide us. He said we supported you because we thought you would be the best person to do that.

Atty. Dolphin said she does represent the entire board. Ms. Pereira said the board did not request Atty. Dolphin's presence.

Ms. Martinez moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

Ms. Martinez and Ms. Pereira said the board had to vote on sending the letter.

The motion was approved by a 6-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Bradley, Allen, Martinez, Illingworth, Sokolovic and Pereira. Mr. Weldon was in opposition.

Ms. Martinez moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion was

seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the board on May 14, ,2018*