

Tuesday, April 3, 2018

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April 3, 2018, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice President Hernan Illingworth, Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, Chris Taylor and Maria Pereira. Dennis Bradley and Secretary Jessica Martinez arrived subsequently as noted.

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

Mr. Weldon said translation services were available.

Mr. Illingworth moved *“to add to the agenda the adjustment of 2017-2018 BPS calendar in order to meet the minimum 180-school-day requirement.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

RECOGNITIONS:

Dr. Johnson introduced the Johnson School Tone Chime Choir led by Sarah Pysher. They performed the song “America the Beautiful.”

Dr. Michael Watson of Biotechnology Research and Zoological Sciences School introduced students Luis Fajardo and Annie Tran who participated in the HOSA competition and were selected to travel to a national event in Dallas in June. He said the HOSA organization was oriented towards health-science education and future health careers. He said about \$3,000 is needed to be raised to send students to attend the event. Both are certified volunteer EMTs for Bridgeport. Ms. Tran described the Go Fund Me page listed under Fairchild Wheeler/HOSA nationals. Two advisers will travel with the students.

Mr. Taylor said tomorrow was the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King. He asked that we honor him with a moment of silence.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:

Topacio Gomez Reyes and Itzel Sanchez of Bassick High reported on their school. Ms. Reyes said Bassick was in progress of working with five of its elementary feeder schools for a smooth transition into high school. She also highlighted the 2018 college fair at the Webster Bank Arena. The science team placed 3rd in the district science fair. Ms. Sanchez said the Justice Education Center will help Bassick with the culinary arts, construction technology and carpentry programs. She added AP exams will take place the week of May 7th.

Mr. Bradley arrived at the meeting.

Jennifer Martinez, a junior at the Aero/HydroSpace Engineering School at Fairchild Wheeler, reported on all three schools at the campus. She highlighted the Aero/HydroSpace's talent show on March 29th, student presentations at the University of Bridgeport's faculty research day, the 14 students who will travel to UConn to participate in the Connecticut state science event, and the rescheduling of SATs for April 24th.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Marge Hiller invited the board to the May 2nd Inspiration event, which is a celebration of educators in the district. Eight teachers and a principal will be honored, along with two teachers who will receive the Beard Excellence in Teaching Award.

Connie Johnson, a parent of a Bassick High student, said the school has seen a great turnover of principals over the past ten years, which she said was not healthy. She said Ms. Smith and Ms. Moore were successful principals. She said her daughter was successful in New Haven schools. She added the attacks on the leadership needed to stop.

Jennifer Weiland said her children attended Curiale School from K to

8 and then went to Bassick. She said in their 13 years in the system they had 11 principals. She said the lack of leadership is giving Bassick a bad reputation. She said the leadership should be kept for more than one year at the school.

JoAnn Kennedy said there were a lot of positive things going on at Bassick. She said there are twenty students at the school in the National Honor Society. She said people who feel they don't want to be at Bassick, including teachers, should leave. She said the students, who are mainly African-American and Hispanic, need mainly African-American and Hispanic teachers in the building who relate to our children.

Maria Pereira said for the third consecutive year the mayor has presented a budget that gives the public schools zero dollars. She said the board already made \$40 million cuts over the last five years and was facing a \$16 million deficit next year. She said the board was being raped by the current law firm with charges of as much as \$92,000 a month. She said it was disturbing that the board received a notice late Monday for a special meeting after this evening's meeting. She said Mr. Weldon requested a legal opinion in violation of board policy because the board did not discuss or approve it.

Albert Benejan thanked the board and Dr. Johnson for taking time to make sure the parent elections were held properly. He said he was disgusted about numerous incidents that took place around the election. He said Assistant Superintendent Dr. Christiana Otuwa did not act in a professional manner, including screaming. He said she took pictures of himself and other parents without permission. He said he was still the PTSO president at Bassick for two more years.

Tammy Bogdanyi, a BMA parent, said her conduct at the last board meeting was a little out of character. She thanked the board for allowing Dr. Johnson to speak to the Arena about including BMA in the graduation ceremony. She said the kids work hard and suffered from the lack of resources and deserve to graduate from the Arena. She said if the Arena is not available, the graduation should take place at the University of Bridgeport.

Michael Boyle, a BMA senior, said he had concerns because his

principal was sending phone blasts to parents and asking them to vote on the location of the graduation. He said the students should have the say. He said there was a safety concern with holding the graduations at Central's field, citing a previous shooting at a football game.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Ms. Pereira moved to table approval of board minutes to the next regular board meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:

Mr. Taylor said the Facilities Committee's meeting was cancelled due to inclement weather. He said he wanted to thank Mr. Postolowski of the IT department for solving all the problems at Waltersville School.

Ms. Pereira referred to the Facilities Committee a discussion of moving BMA to the current Harding building and moving Classical Studies into the BMA/swing space.

Mr. Illingworth said the Personnel Committee would meet on April 18th.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Students & Families Committee would meet on April 5th. ‘

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORTS/AGENDA:

Dr. Johnson said the president of the School Volunteer Association, Ed Davies, and Anne Gribbon were present to update the board about the association.

Ms. Gribbon said along with Joyce Goodwin she comprises the staff of the School Volunteer Office, which works very closely in a partnership with the nonprofit School Volunteer Association of Bridgeport.

Ms. Gribbon said the hallmark event is the annual Read Aloud Day, which includes 650 volunteers reading to every pre-K to 6th Grade classes. She said the event provides great publicity for the district's schools and attracts new volunteers. She said calculating the value of the volunteer hours totals \$563,000.

Ms. Gribbon said last year 5,650 books were given to tutors to give to children for their home libraries. One volunteer has a relationship with a publisher who donated about 32,000 books last year to schools and children.

Ms. Gribbon said her office has a budget of about \$80,000 a year, which includes insurance for volunteers. She said she participates in many outside associations and institutions that provide substantial benefits to the district.

Mr. Davies said he has been a volunteer reader for 17 years at Batalla School. He described some of his interactions with the students while doing volunteer reading, including acting as a tutor and a mentor. He said volunteering was a very positive experience. He described his interaction with a young student he met at Waltersville School over the last fourteen years.

Mr. Davies urged the board not to cut the district staff dedicated to the volunteers.

Mr. Taylor said as a frugal board member he will not vote to cut the volunteer association.

Ms. Martinez arrived at the meeting.

Ms. Pereira moved to approve Roman numerals I and II on the superintendent's consent agenda. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

OLD BUSINESS:

The next item was the high school graduations in 2018.

Dr. Johnson said the fee for Harbor Yard Arena was \$33,000, plus an additional \$8,000 for police, fire and medical services.

Dr. Johnson said she visited Central High as a possible alternative. In the event of rain, the gymnasium at Central could be used to accommodate about 2,350 people, with 1,244 in the bleachers. She said the rental costs for chairs, podium, risers and equipment is \$2,038. The audio equipment would be an additional expense.

Dr. Johnson said there were phone conferences with high school principals to keep them updated. She said the lights are currently not operable at Kennedy Stadium, but the construction company has reported to Mr. Hammond that the lighting would be installed within the next week. She said there will be a walk-through of the Central site on May 8th, which will include the police department, to make sure there is ample parking.

Dr. Johnson said the two options for BMA were Kennedy Stadium and the Bernhard Center. She said the University of Bridgeport would only charge the district for three security guards for the graduation. She said Principal Soares reported her poll of the staff and students indicated three-quarters of the respondents preferred the Bernhard Center.

Mr. Taylor thanked Dr. Johnson for thinking outside the box. He said he was happy to see the savings from not holding the graduation at the Arena. He said he had been in contact with John Ricci, who assured his full cooperation. He said he apologized to the people adversely affected, but with the deficit every penny counts.

Ms. Pereira expressed concern about Harding and Bassick having to graduate inside Central High in the event of rain. She said it was outrageous and unheard of to hold a graduation in another high school.

Dr. Johnson said the Arena would keep the price at \$33,000 whether BMA participated or not.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said Central High will graduate about 400 students, so in the event of an indoor ceremony each student would receive four to five tickets.

Dr. Johnson said she was concerned about the trailers parked in the parking lot.

Ms. Pereira said she was opposed to holding the graduations at Kennedy Stadium. Dr. Johnson said in 2012 the Central and Harding graduations were held at Kennedy Stadium with Bassick at the Klein.

Mr. Illingworth said the graduations were held at Kennedy Stadium 2013 and 2014, except for Bassick, which used the Klein Memorial. He said he didn't hear any complaints from Harding in those years. He said he would support the Arena, but since there were other options he would support those to save money.

Mr. Taylor said it was a dollar decision. He said he had enough confidence in the graduates that there would be no problem between the schools.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she had been given assurances but could not put a percentage on her level of confidence. She said there are 368 parking spaces at Central High, but that does not include the spaces beneath the stadium. She added there would be street parking available.

Mr. Taylor suggested carpooling and working together. He said even if the graduations were at the Arena the city no longer lets the Arena use the parking garage and one of the lots. Ms. Pereira said a judge ruled that the city could not ban the Arena from using the parking lots. Mr. Taylor said Atty. Liskov told him today that the Arena was not using the parking lots.

Ms. Pereira suggested biting the bullet for this year and reevaluating the situation next year with the new Harding High. Mr. Taylor said nobody was happy, but this was a tough fiscal decision the board had to make. He said the Arena would cost \$42,000 while the Central option could be done for less than \$5,000.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said the principals had been flexible in their conversations and were principally concerned to pin down the date and time.

Ms. Martinez said she was proud of Mr. Taylor. She said she didn't realize it would be such a huge savings. She would now support the Central option.

Mr. Bradley said he didn't recall much about his high school graduation, but he remembered the impact of a retired Marine Corps colonel who mentored him during school. He said the ceremony will be short-lived and will matter very little in the long-term development of the students. He said he was in support of the option to save money.

Mr. Illingworth said his daughter graduated at the Arena and he believed the parents will appreciate the experience at Kennedy Stadium where they can get closer to their children.

Ms. Allen said she was in support of saving money due to the financial chaos. She added she doesn't remember too much about being in high school and noted the students will go on to other graduations in the future.

Mr. Illingworth moved *"to utilize Kennedy Stadium field to hold the graduations and the Bernhard Center at UB if that's what BMA decides to do."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Illingworth, Martinez, Taylor, Bradley, Allen and Sokolovic. Ms. Pereira abstained.

NEW BUSINESS:

The next item was on adjustment of the 2017-18 district calendar in order to meet the minimum 180-day school-day requirement.

Dr. Johnson noted the district had a snow day yesterday. She said to meet the 180-day requirement the last day of school would have to be moved to June 22nd, which is also the date of graduation, except for Dunbar School. Dunbar was closed for burst pipes for a few days, so to meet the requirement their last day would have to be June 25th.

June 25th would also be the last day for teachers, who have 186 days per contract.

Mr. Taylor said there were concerns about employees having to report during April break. Dr. Johnson said this plan would preclude the need to cut into spring break.

Dr. Johnson said high schools will be taking final exams in the last week of school, which are half days.

Ms. Allen moved *“to adjust the 2017-2018 BPS calendar in order to meet the minimum 180-day school-day requirement for all students by (1) moving the last day of school to June 22nd for all students except Dunbar Elementary; (2) moving the last day of school to Monday, June 25th, 2018, for Dunbar Elementary students and all BPS teachers; and (3) modifying the last week of school to reflect one session days for the period of June 18th through June 25th, 2018.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolvoic and unanimously approved.

Ms. Martinez said she received calls from Rep. Christopher Rosario and quite a few parents about the last-minute of cancellation of school yesterday. She described it as a disaster because people were waiting for buses and many people were disappointed.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the board on April 23, 2018