

Thursday, July 23, 2020

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held July 23, 2020 at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut Bridgeport, Connecticut, and by audio conference.

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m. Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Hernan Illingworth, Secretary Bobbi Brown, Joseph Sokolovic, Joseph Lombard, Sybil Allen, and Albert Benejan. Jessica Martinez arrived subsequently as noted.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Weldon noted there was limited seating available at the meeting on a first-come/first served basis, but the meeting is available online.

John Gerrity, director of food and nutrition, said he was discussing the software package for point of sale, inventory, and production to replace the current product. He said after bidding Titan was selected because it was priced on modules that the district could select, resulting in a lower cost than the other two bidders.

Ms. Brown moved *“to approve award of a contract to Titan School Solutions to provide point of sale, inventory production software to the Bridgeport Public Schools Food and Nutrition Center.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on accepting construction documents for the partial roof replacement for Marin School. Mr. Weldon said the item was covered at the prior Facilities Committee meeting.

Supt. Testani said it was a continuation of work from prior to COVID-19, which included limited operations by state offices. The documents must be submitted to the state. Mr. Weldon said the documents were included in the board packets.

Mr. Illingworth moved *“to approve and accept construction for the partial roof replacement for Luis Munoz Marin School.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on approval of education specifications for the removal of underground storage tanks at several schools. Mr. Weldon said the item was covered at the prior Facilities Committee meeting.

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said he believed the bidding process for the job would occur after approval of the education specification.

Ms. Martinez joined the meeting.

Supt. Testani said Ms. Valle confirmed the bidding process had not taken place yet.

Ms. Allen moved *“to approve the educational specification for the removal of underground storage tanks for John F. Kennedy Campus, Read School, John Winthrop School, Wilbur Cross School, Park City Magnet School, and Columbus School for oil tank removal projects, Project*

*number 21054 for \$315,000 in revenue Line 44122; \$80,000 in Line 41006; total revenue: \$395,000, as approved in the BOE budget.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible approval to enter into a restricted donation agreement with the School Volunteer Association(SVA). Mr. Weldon said the item was referred to the board by the Contracts Committee.

Supt. Testani said the board had heard a lot about the SVA line being put back in the budget. He said Mr. Davies, the SVA president, offered to fund the salary of the director if the district would cover the salary of the clerical employee. He said the SVA will make monthly payments to cover the director’s salary for 2020-21 school year.

Ms. Martinez moved *“to approve the restricted donation agreement with the School Volunteer Association of Bridgeport, Incorporated, and authorize the superintendent to execute it.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

Mr. Weldon noted Ms. Hiller of the SVA had provided a copy of its annual report to board members.

The next agenda item was on modifying the 2020-21 student school year calendar.

Supt. Testani said the state Board of Education voted to reduce the mandatory school days from 180 to 177 provided the three days were used for COVID-19-related professional development. He said the time would be used prior to Labor Day with the school year for students beginning on the day after. The school year for staff will remain at 186. He said

staff will need to be ready to teach students in the new format. The additional time will also give time for more training of new staff on digital platforms.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said some schedules may have to be altered in buildings without air conditioning if the buildings are too hot.

Supt. Testani said there is a fiscal reward for the later start due to lower busing costs.

Mr. Illingworth moved “*to approve the modified school year 2020-21 student calendar as presented by the superintendent.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the 2020-21 district reopening plan.

Supt. Testani said there was a misconception that the district had the discretion not to open school. He said the plan has to be submitted to the state tomorrow and includes three parts: a full reopening, a hybrid, and remote learning. He said some colleagues in other districts released hybrid plans publicly, which are not currently approved for use.

Supt. Testani noted the plan includes the message to parents that if a child is sick they should be kept at home. He said four thousand thermometers that were donated are being distributed to families. He said frequent hand washing and hand sanitizing is expected, with time provided during the school day, along with the resources.

Supt. Testani said he believed every adult should be able to screen themselves in the morning. Faces coverings will be required and social distancing used when possible.

The superintendent said he speaks frequently with the city's new health director to get updates on what is happening in the community.

Supt. Testani said a lot of time has been spent on the hybrid model. He noted almost 9,000 responses had been received from the parent survey. He said whatever model is used it will be based on the needs of the district's families.

Supt. Testani discussed the protocol for how confirmed cases of the virus in a school will be handled, which could include short-term closures of buildings, classrooms or the entire district.

The superintendent displayed the great number of people who worked on the reopening task forces. He said a significant amount of time was contributed by the members. Membership included city officials, parents, administrators, and union representatives.

Supt. Testani there will have to be extensive work in adjusting collective bargaining agreements through MOUs. He said the social-emotional committee worked on the challenges after the lost time in the classroom.

The superintendent said it was hoped that more parents would be able to transport their children to school, particularly if they are given the opportunity for before-school care.

Supt. Testani said 1.5 million masks have been purchased through the budget and facilities purchased another 500,000. Four thousand disposable gowns and four thousand face shields have been bought. There are nine hundred sanitizer stations that have been ordered and will be delivered. Sanitary wipes in the amount of 70,000 90-count containers have been purchased, along three thousand Plexiglas shields.

The superintendent said the district was approaching a one-to-one status for students and devices. He said the final delivery of the Connecticut Partnership devices has been received, totaling about 5,000 for high school students. He said the mayor and the City Council provided funding to purchase 2,100 devices and the district provided another 2,000 tablets for young learners. There are discussion with the housing authority toward providing internet opportunities in housing complexes.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the plan includes the likelihood that a significant number of parents will opt out of in-person learning and will be able to access remote learning. He said the district learned it needs to do a better job in tracking student attendance. A one-page document on expectations will be provided based on the online credit recovery classes this summer.

Supt. Testani it could be some teachers would work strictly on remote learning; live-streaming classes is another option. He said he meets weekly with Fairfield County superintendents and has a weekly session with the Stamford superintendent.

The superintendent said there could be accommodations for staff as would be done under ADA. If leave is needed

through FMLA, employees will have that right. The expectation is that everyone who is healthy comes back to work.

Mr. Illingworth thanked the superintendent and task force for their work. He said checking students' temperatures is probably not feasible, but that does take place in many workplaces. The superintendent said there are discussions about taking the temperature of staff entering. He said the plan was developed based on consensus, not majority vote.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said an alternating model will have to be used if every child decides to come to school and it is not possible to socially distance in classrooms. He said this would probably be the case in any district in the state.

Mr. Illingworth urged there be a team that inspects every building before they are opened for students. He expressed his disappointment that the co-chairs for health and safety did not reach out to him via e-mail so he was unable to participate in the committee, even after the superintendent forwarded his e-mail to the chairs. Mr. Testani said minutes were not kept of the meetings and he apologized to Mr. Illingworth.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said Ms. Earley has come up with a strategy and plan to have a nurse at every school, every day. He noted every school has to have an isolation room and separate bathroom for anyone placed in that room.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani described how class participation works in online learning. He said he had heard complaints from the teachers' union about live streaming, but

he personally would welcome a parent observing a class remotely in order to be able to help their children. He said he believed taking attendance in remote learning should be as close to normal school as possible.

Mr. Weldon said it seemed the teacher is going to have to be that more diligent to engage a more diverse group of students, some of whom may be in the class on a remote basis.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the document will be placed on the website after the it is submitted to the state tomorrow. He said a city representative – Mr. Shamus – was needed to facilitate communications with the city, particularly with press releases.

Ms. Martinez said she had mixed emotions about the resumption of classes. She said in-person classes were important, but she was unsure how she felt as a parent on sending her son to school. She said she heard from a student who did no work, received no assessment, and passed the course. She said she was very appreciative of the hard work to create the plan.

The superintendent said he heard some teachers did not want to return to school, but the governor has ordered schools to open in the state. He said folks who work in health care, grocery stores and Home Depot have continued to work. He said our top priority should be our children.

Mr. Weldon said it was a scary time for everyone, but many of the elements in the plan are designed to keep everyone as healthy as possible.



Ms. Brown said she approved of the decision by the governor to give parents the choice as to what they feel is safe for their children. She noted a lot of parents are working more than one job, especially young parents. She urged the superintendent keep doing his weekly updates so parents feel like they have a direct line to him. Supt. Testani said he would continue the Facebook Live events for families, even though some naysayers have participated via comments.

Mr. Sokolovic thanked the reopening committee members. He said he believed there was 280 hours of meeting time at a minimum. He said board and the superintendent had to rebut misconceptions about the situation, which he described as insulting to people who did hard work and a very good job. He said every question asked by board members had been asked at the committee meetings. He noted the plan was just a framework that had to be submitted to the state and other work still remained to be done.

Mr. Sokolovic said taking the temperature of students entering a building would create a bottleneck and lead to less social distancing. He said since 53 percent of parents want their children to attend classes in person this will allow social distancing.

Supt. Testani said he taped a video that will go out announcing a hotline next week where parents can respond via telephone to the survey. He said the cutoff for responses may be by mid-August, at which point a default option will have to be selected for parents, probably remote learning.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was disturbed by seeing on social media and in the press that some parents don't care about their children's health. He said he was choosing to send his

child to school due to the importance of in-person learning. He said every precaution is being taken for health and safety. He said he believed Connecticut was the safest state in the country.

Mr. Sokolovic said some of the criticisms have an ulterior motive because they are looking for educational systems to fail and want to pick off students who are not happy with the system in place. He said there was an incorrect editorial that indicated the district was doing no work at all to prepare. He said he would like to move that Mr. Testani respond by enumerating what has been done.

Mr. Weldon said the superintendent had already started on that and would be bringing it to the board.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said parents can change their mind throughout the year on in-person vs. remote learning, but a week's notice would be requested at the elementary level.

The superintendent said the CIAC had sent out a survey around fall athletics. He said a football season may be ambitious. He said some extracurricular activities will provide opportunities for virtual participation as did take place during the closure.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said he did not believe the responses to the survey indicated reasons for not wanting their children to come to school other than feeling they were not safe. He said he respected parents' choice. He noted more frequent breaks may be needed for children to take off their masks outside. He said he had visited the camp at Rev. Moales's church where children were

comfortable and he noted there are sports camps and sports leagues starting up.

Mr. Illingworth said he agreed with Mr. Sokolovic about the need for a response to the op-ed piece that contained outrageous lies. He said the charge that we never gave professional development to teachers was a lie.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said if a child tests positive the protocol will be that of the health department, which may include contact tracing. He said there was a incident in Norwalk where summer school was closed for one week and then reopened safely. He said he was sure someone would test positive when school is reopened, although they may have contracted the virus somewhere other than school. He said the HR department has guided staff members very appropriately. He said if staff doesn't want to come back without any real reason, it sends a message to families that they shouldn't send their children to school.

Mr. Benejan said what the superintendent is going through is not easy and the board is trying to help him. Mr. Weldon said he believed the document that will be submitted to the state will respond to a lot of the questions and criticisms.

Supt. Testani said he agreed with Mr. Sokolovic that one critic is hoping public education fails for their own profit and gain.

Ms. Allen moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

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

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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