

Wednesday, January 23, 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF the SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held January 23, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. Present were Chair John Weldon, Secretary Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, Ben Walker, and Maria Pereira. Vice President Jessica Martinez arrived subsequently as noted.

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

There was a discussion of what items to handle first.

Ms. Martinez arrived at the meeting.

Ms. Allen moved that item 6 be handled next. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was discussion of the Bridgeport Military Academy field trip to Italy.

Brianne Bresky, teacher at Bridgeport Military Academy, was present. Mr. Walker said the proposed trip is April 6 to 13. He said Ms. Bresky presented all the required documents for the trip. He said the trip has the approval of the school's principal. He said fourteen sophomores and juniors, with two chaperones, would travel to Rome and Florence and study the history and architecture of those two places. Education First Educational Tours is providing the trip plans. The cost is \$3,335 per person.

Mr. Walker said the Teaching & Learning Committee was concerned that the students would miss a week of school. He said Ms. Bresky indicated the trip was planned in anticipation of spring break coinciding with the trip dates. Later, spring break was moved to the second week of April.

Mr. Walker moved “*that we approve the Bridgeport Military Academy’s international field trip to Italy for April 6th, 2019, through April 23, 2019.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

Ms. Pereira noted the trip would impact costs for substitute teacher coverage.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she did not believe the scheduling was done in bad faith because the week of spring break was altered. Ms. Bresky said Principal Soares brought this issue to the attention of Dr. Otuwa. She added that she almost never misses school and creates a need for substitute coverage. She said that quite frequently BMA staff cover for each other.

Ms. Bresky noted that Fairchild Wheeler’s trip to Brazil occurred during school weeks and included multiple teacher chaperones.

In response to a question, Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, said the cost for a substitute teacher is \$119.25 per day. She said if the trip was approved she will discuss the expense with the principal and the superintendent.

Mr. Walker said he believed he received an e-mail in which Ms. Soares indicated some of the classroom coverage would be handled by other teachers in the school.

The motion was unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira moved to move Item 8, discussion and possible action of BCAS contract for the period of 2019 to 2022, next on the agenda. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

Mr. Walker moved to amend the motion to move up item 7. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira noted the BCAS contract had been discussed in public previously.

Ms. Pereira expressed concern that some positions were being moved from a lower tier into a higher tier. Ms. Siegel said she believed the positions were already in the higher tier. She said the director of social studies position was held in Group 3 because it was not likely to be filled in the near future.

Ms. Pereira noted there were savings in longevity pay for those hired after September 1, 2019. She said the projected savings in health insurance were only \$10,000, \$4,500 on dental insurance, \$15,000 on retirement/sick leave payout and \$13,200 on longevity bonuses. She said it was hard to swallow that the contract will cost \$600,000 with only \$43,000 of savings.

Ms. Siegel said the removal of longevity for new hires is a major accomplishment, which will set the stage for future contract negotiations. She said the impact regarding new members will take effect over the coming decade and she described it as a first step.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said ten-month assistant principals will be established through attrition when employees leave the position and the board will attain the full savings. She said under the current contract the move of an assistant principal to ten months would only save \$1,000.

Dr. Johnson noted sick time accumulation is now capped at 220 days for BCAS members.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said there are five steps in each group; the BEA contract has fifteen steps.

Mr. Walker said step increases lead to additional pay. He said with fifteen steps a teacher would be at the highest level within fifteen years of starting their career, and would only receive an increase when there is a pay increase across the board. He said it discourages teachers from staying in a district when they reach the maximum level. He said longevity pay is designed to assuage that.

Ms. Siegel said most districts in contractual negotiations are moving to eliminate longevity because it is solely based on seniority and not aligned to performance.

Mr. Walker moved “*to approve the BCAS contract for the period of 2019 to 2022.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible acceptance of the Fairchild Wheeler campus.

John Ricci, director of public facilities, said the items needing correction were reduced to eight. He provided a document to the board members. Robert Hedman was also present.

Mr. Weldon noted the document indicated the repairs should take place by the end of April break.

Mr. Walker moved “*to accept Fairchild Wheeler Campus.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

Ms. Pereira said her biggest concern was the roof. She noted the school was the most expensive school ever built in the state.

In response to a question, Mr. Ricci said standard practice in the industry is a one-year warranty on many items. Ms. Pereira noted there were major HVAC issues at Roosevelt School, which cost \$70 million, as well as Barnum and Waltersville. Mr. Ricci said all the HVAC problems date back to original construction and are being corrected. Ms. Pereira said the board had spent a lot of money on outside contractors to address the issues. Mr. Hedman said generally HVAC warranties are one year, with extended warranties on certain items. He said the warranties cover labor and materials.

In response to a question, Mr. Hedman said there should be no cost for the roof issues. He said the board would have to pay to clean the weep holes. He said he was trying to work with the contractor on gaskets for the patio door; if there is a cost, there are funds under a grant. Ms. Pereira said Barnum and Waltersville had the same problem with leaks at emergency doors.

Mr. Hedman said the exterior ceiling tiles will be handled by the board’s facilities department. He said the complaint about the tiles came from Mr. Lipp, a principal at Fairchild Wheeler. Mr. Hedman said the guardrail at the main entrance will be fixed by the facilities department.

Mr. Hedman said further investigation is needed about a so-called shifted column enclosure. He said settlement cracks will be repaired by the board's facilities department. Ms. Pereira noted the same thing happened at Barnum and Waltersville and it turned out to be nothing. Mr. Walker said the sealing will prevent water from getting inside the cracks. Mr. Hedman said they were interior settlement cracks. He said shrinkage cracks under floor tiles are cosmetic in nature and of no hazard, which may be a cost the board has to absorb.

Mr. Hedman said he has a call into the manufacturer of the IT closet air-conditioning unit. He said there was an extended warranty for the unit, which would apply unless it is a design flaw by the architect. Mr. Walker said he learned on the building tour that the unit might only need to be reprogrammed by an HVAC person.

Mr. Hedman said there was still money in the grant. Mr. Ricci said if money can be found in the grant it will be used.

Mr. Hedman said the board's facilities department installed emergency exhaust so that the rooms will not overheat and will never go over 78 degrees. Mr. Sokolovic said on the board's walk-through he thought the system was turning on and off repeatedly. He said his concern was the very expensive equipment would eventually fail.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to amend the motion to approve the acceptance of the Fairchild Wheeler School with the understanding that these eight items will be repaired and addressed as committed by Director of Public Facilities John Ricci by April 2019."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

Mr. Ricci said he could live with the timeline. He said he would return to the board if there was an issue.

Mr. Weldon said the expense to the board seemed minimal.

Ms. Pereira referred the matter to the Facilities Committee for its May meeting with a presentation by Mr. Ricci and his staff.

The amendment was unanimously approved.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next item was a budget update. Ms. Siegel said she was requesting the board to approve a budget increase of \$21.8 million. Ms. Siegel said the amount has three components: \$15 million for essential needs/non-discretionary costs; \$3 million for the restoration of one kindergarten paraprofessional for every two classes; and \$3.8 million for discretionary services.

Ms. Siegel said the documents included an explanation of the \$15 million for non-discretionary costs, which includes collective bargaining and health insurance. She said the health insurance growth for the Connecticut Partnership is 7.5 percent. She said she was disappointed to hear it was that high; it had been hoped that it would be in the 3 to 5 percent range. The growth rate translates to \$2.6 million.

Ms. Siegel said the state ECS supplement for displaced students, \$222,810, may or may not be continued according to the state's announcement.

Ms. Siegel said there are significant challenges in special education, with the increased costs compressing the available resources for general education. She said out-of-district expenses for 408 students are rising. There are increases for special education transportation, paraprofessional services, and occupational therapy services.

Ms. Siegel said as of January 2, 2019, 16.94 percent of district enrollment is categorized as special education.

Ms. Siegel said the negotiated proposed rate table for the contract with We Transport will lead to growth in transportation expenses.

Ms. Siegel said the last group of board employees will transition into the Connecticut Partnership on March 1st.

Ms. Siegel said there are currently twenty vacant teaching positions being filled by substitutes because certified staff were not able to be identified for the positions.

Ms. Siegel said health insurance claims from the previous insurance plan roll into the Internal Service Fund(ISF). She said at this time she is anticipating there may be sufficient funds in the ISF to cover the future claims. She said if money has to be added there is an arrangement with Mr. Flatto that the maximum contribution would be \$1 million in the current year and \$1 million in the new year. Ms. Siegel said if the district did not have to add the \$1 million, the money can be removed from the ISF.

Ms. Siegel said the expiration of the Preschool Development Grant is included in the document at the level of \$550,000.



Ms. Siegel said curriculum renewal is being looked in literacy and math, with negotiations going on with vendors to obtain something affordable.

Ms. Siegel said there is a document for the budget gap impact analysis, which includes the budget gaps faced by the district since 2016-17, totaling \$53 million over four years.

Ms. Pereira said our requests are so large because the city doesn't give us reasonable percentage increases each year.

Ms. Siegel said the table indicated the 2015-16 year had 2.45 percent increase. In 2016-17, the budget was negative .45 percent; in 2017-18, a .06 percent increase; and in 2018-19, a 1.36 percent increase. She said if the district received a \$15 million increase for 2019-20 it would amount to a 6 percent increase. She said while \$15 million is a relatively high number in the context of the budget history it is reasonable.

Ms. Siegel said she has started to examine various actions that could be incorporated into a budget gap plan. She said there are few areas left to touch after the major reductions that have occurred in recent years.

Ms. Siegel said according to what was released by the state Bridgeport should be scheduled to receive an increase of \$2.6 million in state funding, which was not a final commitment.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said it was anticipated the moving costs for the Parent Center would be incurred in the current year.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said the cost of bringing back the School Volunteer Association would be \$170,000. Ms. Pereira said there was a discussion in committee asking whether the volunteer association could serve as a liaison for the PACs as part of their duties.

Ms. Pereira moved *“that we pass the budget request for 2019-20 at \$21.8 million.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker.

There was a discussion of meeting with the legislative delegation. Mr. Weldon said Ms. Pereira was the only member who replied to his inquiry. Mr. Weldon suggested it be held on a Saturday.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was a contract with the Cardinal Sheehan Center for Columbus School. Ms. Siegel said the start date would be January 28th if approved by the board. The total amount is \$39,063.04. She said the program operates on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays with the Sheehan Center providing 25 Tier III students various activities. She said the program will be funded by the Columbus Commissioner’s Network budget.

Mr. Walker moved *“that we approve the contract with the Sheehan Center through the Commissioner’s Network funding.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said there are additional programs for students in the other tiers in the Commissioner’s Network funding.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was an exception to the district's transportation policies regarding special education pupils.

Mr. Walker said in December Betty Lizardo spoke to the board about the difficulties she was having with transportation for her special needs son. He said after her presentation at the committee meeting, the Teaching & Learning Committee found her concerns to be valid. The student rides a specially equipped bus that does not follow a regular route. He said Ms. Lizardo requested that her son be transported from a daycare location so she would not have to provide additional child care at home for the transportation process.

Mr. Walker said according to the board policy special education students will be judged on an individual basis regarding transportation. He said after discussion with Mr. Laffitte the committee said it would be hazardous for Ms. Lizardo's son to be picked up at his residence as supervision cannot be guaranteed. He said the adjustment would not cost the district any money or make the bus route longer.

Mr. Walker said Ms. Lizarado agreed to sign a waiver of liability to indemnify the district by this action.

Mr. Walker moved that *"we approve the exception in the board's transportation policy in the case of Betty Lizardo, providing that Ms. Lizardo agrees to the terms of indemnification in the liability waiver, and that transportation for her son be provided to his certified daycare provider."* Ms. Martinez seconded the motion.

Ms. Allen asked if granting the request would open a Pandora's Box regarding other parents. Mr. Walker said the

precedent was only set to the extent it was a special needs students and involved zero cost to the district. He said he would be in favor of an exception in the future if he was presented with a similar situation.

Ms. Pereira said she believed the board should just vote to suspend the regulation because it was not a hazardous situation. She moved to suspend the regulation number 1 under “reside” prohibiting any drop-off or pickup from daycare, nurseries, babysitters and place of work. Mr. Walker said this was a case where the child could not supervise himself alone, which was a hazard.

Ms. Pereira said the student goes to ACES in an out-of-district placement. She said special education students must be accompanied to and from buses by an adult.

Mr. Sokolovic said Mr. Walker’s approach narrows the exception.

Ms. Pereira amendment was not seconded.

The motion was approved by a 5-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Sokolovic, Martinez, Walker, Weldon and Allen. Ms. Pereira abstained.

Mr. Sokolovic left the meeting.

The next item was a discussion and approval of an MOU with the BEA regarding high school athletic directors for the 2018-19 school year.

Ms. Pereira moved *“to go into executive session with the superintendent regarding the MOU with BEA regarding high*

*school athletic directors for 2018-19.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

The executive session began at 8:00 p.m.

The board reconvened in public session at 8:09 p.m.

Ms. Pereira moved “*to approve the MOU with the BEA regarding high school athletic directors for 2018-19.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the board on February 11, 2019*