

Thursday, May 6, 2021

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 6, 2021, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown, Secretary Joseph Lombard, Sosimo Fabian, Jessica Martinez, Albert Benejan. Chris Taylor and Sybil Allen joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

The sole agenda item was discussion and possible action concerning adoption of the hearing officer's recommendation regarding Gladys Walker-Jones.

In response to an inquiry, no board members indicated they were interested in discussing this beyond what was done on May 3rd.

Atty. Susan Nelson and Ms. Walker-Jones were present.

Mr. Weldon noted it was Ms. Walker-Jones's right to request a public meeting, but no board members indicated a desire to go into executive session.

Mr. Taylor joined the meeting.

Mr. Weldon said when we last met we gave the opportunity to Ms. Walker-Jones to decide if she had an interest in simply submitting resignation.

Atty. Floyd Dugas of Berchem Moses, representing the district, said Atty. Nelson conveyed to him Ms. Walker-Jones did not want to take advantage of the ability of resign. Atty. Nelson confirmed this and noted her client would apply for disability and she had concerns about the effect of resignation on the application.

Ms. Martinez asked for a summary of the matter.

Atty. Dugas said the short summary was the superintendent initiated a termination proceeding and Ms. Walker-Jones requested a hearing before an independent hearing officer. Hearings took place over an extended period of time, the hearing officer rendered a decision, including findings of fact and a recommendation to terminate. The board must accept the findings of fact, but does not have to accept the recommendation. He said Ms. Walker-Jones is a principal who has been with the district for about twenty years.

Mr. Taylor said the matter was discussed at length last time and said he would like to move to terminate.

Ms. Allen joined the meeting.

Mr. Weldon said there are very specific motions that would have to be used.

In response to a question, Atty. Dugas said Atty. Nelson is with the firm that represents the union; in a technical sense, the union is not involved because termination of a certified staff member is governed by a statute, not the collective bargaining unit. He said Ms. Walker-Jones had been represented by very able counsel throughout the process.

Ms. Martinez said she had concerns about great amount of absenteeism and its connection to a disability.

In response to a question, Atty. Dugas said the disability issue and the absenteeism were tied together. He said the inability to show up for work is really the crux of the problem.

Mr. Taylor moved that “*the findings, conclusions, recommendations and reasoning of the hearing officer, Gerald T. Weiner, be and hereby are adopted in toto by the Board of Education and that the employment of Gladys Walker-Jones be and is hereby terminated effective immediately.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan.

The motion was approved by a 8-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Brown, Allen, Benejan, Martinez, Taylor, Fabian, and Lombard.

Mr. Taylor moved that “*the board attorney and the board chairman prepare a written decision on behalf of the board incorporating the board’s motion to adopt the findings, conclusions, recommendations and reasoning of the hearing officer.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard.

The motion was approved by a 8-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Brown, Allen, Benejan, Martinez, Taylor, Fabian, and Lombard.

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

The meeting was adjourned at about 6:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the board on May 24, 2021*