

Thursday, June 16, 2022

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held June 16, 2022, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 7:22 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown*, Secretary Joseph Lombard, Joseph Sokolovic, Christine Baptiste-Perez, Albert Benejan, Erika Castillo, and Michael Maccarone*. Sybil Allen arrived subsequently as noted.
(*remote participation)

The first agenda item was the superintendent evaluation workshop/discussion with Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE).

Patrice McCarthy, deputy director of CABE, was present.

Mr. Weldon said members wanted to get a sense of what is typical around this subject. He said the evaluation tool agreed to last year was sent to Ms. McCarthy.

Ms. McCarthy referenced C.G.S, 10-157 on evaluation of superintendents, which are required annually, based on mutually agreed guidelines. She noted that was a collaborative process as the board and the superintendent are viewed as a leadership team.

Ms. McCarthy said the board's evaluation tool was compared to a model document created by CABE and the CAPSS (the superintendents' organization), and they are

very much compatible. She said the board's tool is a comprehensive instrument that hits on all the key areas.

Ms. McCarthy said typically the individual board members would complete an instrument, which would then be compiled into a comprehensive document.

In response to a question about new board members, Ms. McCarthy said the instrument looks at the superintendent's performance in the past year under the mutually agreed criteria.

Ms. McCarthy said the CAFE website contains the model document that was created.

In response to a question about the size of school districts, Ms. McCarthy said she was willing to survey the instruments used in larger districts. Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she was interested in comparing apples to apples.

Mr. Weldon said he sought to obtain evaluation information and instruments from Stamford, Hartford, New Haven, and Waterbury. The only response was from Hartford, with the board chair indicating they use the model instrument created by CAFE. Hartford does not use numeric scoring, but descriptors.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez suggested CAFE reach out to obtain instruments from the other large districts.

In response to a question about academic achievement, Ms. McCarthy said significant measurements could be included. Mr. Lombard said the language in the board's tool is pretty general.

Mr. Benejan asked about a contract provision requiring Supt. Testani to live in Bridgeport. Ms. McCarthy said there is no requirement in Connecticut law that a superintendent live in the community they serve in. Mr. Weldon said Ms. McCarthy is not here to analyze the superintendent's contract.

Mr. Sokolovic asked if violating a material portion of a contract would be fair game for an evaluation. Ms. McCarthy said she would identify the contract and the evaluation as two separate issues.

In response to a question, Ms. McCarthy said an evaluation is one factor that districts do consider when they are deciding whether to extend a contract or not.

Mr. Maccarone said as a brand-new member of five months, he was not too sure how new members could do an evaluation of the superintendent.

Ms. Allen arrived at the meeting.

Mr. Weldon said in the past some brand-new board members just withdrew from the process.

Ms. McCarthy said this is a common concern for those new to a board, and it is very much a personal decision.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was in the same situation in his first year on the board. He noted there are a lot of items in the evaluation that require information or data, so the board member could choose specific areas to evaluate.

Mr. Weldon said the numeric values lead to averages, but if board member does not rate in a specific area, it would not impact the numeric score.

Mr. Weldon said Supt. Testani has already said that he would not agree to any modification to the agreed-upon document because he has worked for the entire year with the understanding that this would be the tool to be used. He said the superintendent is putting together a presentation that will be ready by June 21st. Mr. Weldon said we're locked into this tool at this time.

In response to a question, Ms. McCarthy said in the absence of an agreement to change the evaluation instrument, then the existing document stays in place.

Mr. Lombard said the contract indicates the board shall adopt an evaluation format within 90 days of the commencement of each year of this agreement.

There was a discussion of future scheduling of the evaluation process. Mr. Maccarone suggested the board meet to go over their evaluations after the superintendent's presentation.

Tuesday, June 28th was suggested as the date for a follow-up meeting.

Mr. Maccarone said board members need to be able to support their evaluations if they're different from others. He recounted an article in the *Connecticut Post* last year where board members were quoted.

The next item was the Chairman's report.

Mr. Weldon said Mr. Sokolovic sent very aggressive, unprofessional, and offensive e-mails over the weekend. He said he heard from other board members who did not

appreciate being included in all this. He said a similar incident happened about nine months ago but let it go.

Mr. Weldon said if this happened in private industry or the nonprofit sector, there would be consequences for an employee, but since Mr. Sokolovic is an elected official those are not options. He said he was going to take unilateral measures under his authority and relieve Mr. Sokolovic of his committee assignments.

Mr. Weldon said the Educational, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee will be chaired by Ms. Castillo, with members Ms. Brown and Mr. Weldon. The Finance Committee will be chaired by Ms. Baptiste-Perez, with Mr. Maccarone and Ms. Brown as members. The Teaching & Learning Committee will be chaired by Ms. Baptiste-Perez, with members Ms. Castillo and Mr. Lombard.

Mr. Weldon said it is not an easy decision, but we all need to be mindful of the way we treat each other, whether in person or through e-mail.

Mr. Sokolovic said Mr. Weldon was in violation of state law. He said he deserved a public hearing and a trial in front of the whole board. Mr. Weldon said a special meeting could be scheduled for that purpose.

Mr. Weldon said the board needs to set its own goals and objectives, and he will try to get a session together in the next two to four weeks.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the board on August 29, 2022