

Tuesday, June 21, 2022

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held June 21, 2022, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m.

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

(*remote participation)

Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

The sole agenda item was discussion and possible action concerning the employment, performance or evaluation of Michael Testani as a public officer or employee of the Bridgeport Board of Education. Mr. Weldon said the item qualified for executive session. Upon inquiry, no board member requested an executive session.

Ms. Allen arrived at the meeting. She noted she was not receiving agendas and notices of meetings. She said she was disturbed by this situation.

Supt. Testani distributed a package to board members. He said he would go through a PowerPoint presentation on highlights.

Supt. Testani highlighted the increase in enrollment from 2021 to the end of this school year. There was a significant increase in students who received services from an IEP and

an increase in English language learners. He said average daily attendance has increased, although last year's attendance was based on virtual attendance.

The superintendent provided a sample of work associated with the district's commitment to improving the academic and social-emotional growth of students. He discussed family engagement, culturally responsive classrooms, restorative discipline, a district plan to increase the ratio of ethnic and linguistic diversity of staff, and strategic planning initiatives to promote equity and a social conscience.

Supt. Testani discussed the relationship with the board. He said he believed a positive and professional work relationship has been established. He said he had worked hard to maintain open and transparent communication with the board, while promptly responding to requests.

The superintendent described communications to the school community and working with collective bargaining groups to support the reopening plan.

Mr. Benejan and Ms. Baptiste-Perez arrived at the meeting.

Supt. Testani said he sends weekly email correspondence to staff to recognize their hard work and dedication. He said this year the administrative council meetings were focused on high-quality instruction and improvement in science. Small principal group cohorts have been formed to improve support for building administration.

The superintendent described the hiring practices and procedures to increase the diversity of staff and the emphasis on creative leadership.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said he received many e-mails directly from staff and said he did not believe there should be layers between himself and teachers.

The superintendent said a lot of professional development has been provided to administrators. Work on diversity, equity and inclusion has continued with Dr. Derrick Gay. He said the teacher residency program with Sacred Heart university will be expanded. There are also partnerships with UConn and SCSU to address teacher shortages.

Supt. Testani said every special education teacher was required to participate in quality IEP training. There was a two-day retreat in August with the Partners for Educational Leadership, which will be repeated this year. He described professional development with Hill for Literacy. Clerical staff received professional development on diversity, equity and inclusion.

The superintendent described parent engagement efforts, which were a greater need after the pandemic. He said Parent Square was introduced, which improved two-way communications, along with the welcome center at Central High for parents new to Bridgeport from outside of the country. He described the parent leader team use of Teams, parent roundtables, and student roundtables. He said the use of social media and billboards helped raised community awareness.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said in the cross-endorsement program for teacher shortage areas the teachers have expenses paid and a bump in their step level as long as they stay in the shortage area for a minimum period of time.

The superintendent said the teacher leader program gives an extra layer of support within buildings.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the special education training was specific to quality IEP writing. He said the special education review will provide a roadmap for what the district should be focusing on.

The superintendent described the district attendance team, including the supports that have been developed in attendance. He also described the new website design, which will be much more helpful to parents and students.

Supt. Testani said there is a home-visiting model to support student and parent engagement. He said the support system on attendance has provided opportunities that would normally not exist. He said the folder distributed to the board included mention of quarterly community events, and distribution of coats, meal kits, and toys. He said the SEL coordinator position (Lynn Stephens) has improved engagement around social and emotional learning.

The superintendent described connections to community resources, including a collaborative with the city on ARP/ESSER funds. He said Lighthouse is an important component. He said the district worked with the Bridgeport Public Education Fund to increase mentors and tutors for students.

Supt. Testani said one of the things he was most proud of was the kickoff of the Fame Academy, which provides performing and visual arts for students after school at Harding High. He said work with RYASAP on restorative practice intervention has been expanded. He said in-school suspension programs have been eliminated. The partnership

with Bridgeport Caribe Youth Leaders provided tutoring, mentoring, athletic programs, and college and career readiness.

The superintendent said the mission is grounded in continuous improvement throughout the district.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said he would not be highlighting initiatives if he wasn't instrumental in the development or the creation of the program. He described how he transformed the monthly administrative council meetings and created the technology team.

Supt. Testani described the creation of the data warehouse to create a centralized platform to access data.

In response to a question, the superintendent said the technology team was created right before the pandemic because of the need to have consistency across the district.

In academics, Supt. Testani said K-8 DIBELS, the literacy assessment tool, results showed improvement at every grade level from the beginning of the year, except for Grade 7. He described other increases in the assessment. He said Hill for Literacy had a major impact.

In response to a question, the superintendent said the advances could be large because they started low, but also there was the impact of Into Math and getting everyone back to in-person learning.

In response to a question about goals for growth, Supt. Testani said it is hard to say a certain percentage will be hit due many factors including the transient population and students moving in and out of the district. He said this year

was about getting a baseline of where students were and trying to show growth throughout the year.

In response to a question, the superintendent said he could not compare the district's growth to our DRG due to possible difference in assessments. He said comparing attendance rates to other districts was valid due to mandates to attend school. He said SBAC data was common to other districts, although there was no testing in 2020 and last year's testing was based on a smaller number of students.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said growth was important, but a student could grow and remain behind his grade level. The superintendent said the data indicated that 35 percent of kindergarten students were at or above grade level at the end of the year. Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she would like the data for all levels.

Supt. Testani discussed some cohort data that showed increases from the same students in higher grades. He said HMH data for Grades 2 to 8 indicated the amount of students two or more years below grade level was reduced by 16 percent by the end of the year. The number of students approaching grade level and beyond grade level also went up.

The superintendent said Grade 8 participated in the PSAT for the first time in over seven years, which was important data to collect. He said 45 percent of 22 schools participating performed over the state average overall score in reading; nine schools performed over the state average in math.

Supt. Testani said the sister assessment to DIBELS will be used next year for K-1 math. He said the district slightly

improved on the average total score in math on SAT, while the state average decreased. The reading and writing SAT scores increased by 7 percent, with the state decreasing. He said the introduction of pre-algebra will be helpful in math. He said Central High saw the greatest growth.

The superintendent said this was first year of using Footsteps to Brilliance for pre-K students, with 53,100 books read since December.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said he would send an updated copy of the presentation with the SAT data for all high schools.

The superintendent noted the chronic absenteeism data was favorable compared to other districts. He said if he had to predict, that will have a positive impact on academic achievement. He said the ELL chronic absentee rate is significantly lower than the state average.

Supt. Testani said in 2018-19, before the pandemic, there were 2,810 out-of-school suspensions and 3,298 in-school suspensions. He said a reduction started with the emphasis placed and monitoring of numbers during his tenure. This year in-school suspension was eliminated, and positions were transformed into restorative practice specialists.

Mr. Benejan said the PACs and PTSOs would like more workshops for parents. He said administrators had to work more with parents. He said the board members were elected by parents. The superintendent said more training for parent leaders is being considered. Mr. Benejan said he believed some administrators were ignoring Mr. Testani's e-mails.

Mr. Sokolovic expressed concern about receiving the superintendent's written presentation only at this meeting. He noted he had to score the superintendent's performance. In response to a question, the superintendent said he does not evaluate principals. He said the executive directors had not completed all the principal evaluations; the deadline is June 30th. Mr. Sokolovic asked to see the evaluations when they are completed, potentially with redacted names, due to the metric on evaluating staff and holding staff accountable.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said principal groups met monthly in cohorts. Topics discussed included special education, chronic absenteeism, and planning for the next school years.

Mr. Sokolovic requested access to school climate survey data. The superintendent said they part of the evaluation of principals, not the superintendent. He said he could provide data, although some schools may have low parent response rates. Mr. Sokolovic said he likes to make his decisions on data. The superintendent said such specific data should have been asked for in advance.

Mr. Weldon suggested board members send a request for follow-up data that they want. Mr. Sokolovic said there should be data that is relevant to the evaluation lines.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said he sits on the boards of the Bridgeport Public Education Fund and the Fields of Dream Foundation. He said the district was recognized for advocacy and support of students in Bridgeport. He said his presentation includes the coat and toy drives that were undertaken.

The superintendent said he hoped that the process is being looked at and conducted fairly. He said he did not recall superintendent evaluations prior to his tenure being like this. He said he was not being evaluated compared to Hartford or New Haven; he was striving to be better. He said we are not only battling educational barriers, but socio-economic factors beyond the control of the schools.

In response to a question, the superintendent said he could answer follow-up questions by board members as quickly as possible, with the answers provided to all board members. He said the resources the district has, or the lack thereof, has to be considered in relation to Hartford, for example.

The superintendent noted the advocacy he engaged in with the board for more resources, but no one came to a meeting. He said it was not a reflection of himself or the Finance Committee. Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she thought it was.

Mr. Weldon suggested reconvening in a week with initial reviews and the board talking about them. In response to a question about principal evaluations, Supt. Testani said if they are not completed, he has to hold the executive directors accountable.

Mr. Weldon asked board members give him numeric scores by the end of the day on Monday, so he can compile them into a spreadsheet. The next meeting will cover a conversation about the scores and to receive any follow-up information. Friday will be the deadline to send questions to the superintendent. He said the final evaluation will include written comments.

Mr. Benejan said Mr. Testani may be stressed by the length of the process. He said Mr. Testani was not certified when

he became superintendent, but we voted for him because we trusted him. He said Mr. Testani did his classes and then did an amazing job during the pandemic. He said he knows Mr. Testani is here because he wants to be with us and because he cares about students and parents. He said the superintendent changed a lot when the schools were a mess. He said Mr. Testani had done an amazing job.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the board on August 29, 2022