

Wednesday, June 26, 2019

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE  
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held June 26,  
2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport,  
Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. Present were  
Chair John Weldon, Secretary Joseph Sokolovic, Hernan  
Illingworth, Maria Pereira, Sybil Allen, and Chris Taylor.

The first agenda item was discussion and possible action on  
the 2019-20 University School special education contract.  
Mr. Weldon said this was an annual matter. He said he did  
not know why Mr. Di Donato was not here.

Mr. Taylor said Ms. Pereira scared him away. Ms. Pereira  
said he was out of order and lacked basic intelligence. Mr.  
Weldon said Mr. Taylor was out of order. Mr. Taylor said he  
was sorry.

Mr. Weldon said the contract was a renewal of last year's  
contract, which covers special education students who opt  
for this placement with their IEPs. He said the amount of the  
contract had been reduced by \$125,000.

Ms. Pereira said the contract did not go out to bid because  
bidding is not allowed for special services.

Mr. Taylor said he believed the item should be tabled  
because Mr. Di Donato and Dr. Johnson were not here. Ms.  
Pereira said Mr. Di Donato was present at a committee  
meeting that covered the matter.

Mr. Taylor moved to table the matter. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen.

The motion failed by a 3-3 vote. Voting in favor were members Taylor, Allen and Illingworth. Voting in opposition were members Pereira, Weldon and Sokolovic.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was supporting the contract because it was worked on extensively in committee with Mr. Di Donato and Dr. Johnson. He said the matter could have been handled Monday when the staff was present, but everybody was in a rush to get home. He said he believed the item had been vetted and was ready to go.

Ms. Pereira said the committee requested references to molestation insurance and background checks in the contract and the changes had been made.

Mr. Taylor objected to Ms. Pereira providing legal advice on contracts and insurance. He said he would vote against approval. Ms. Pereira said she did not offer any legal advice.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve the 2019-20 University School special education contract.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

Mr. Illingworth said like last year this came up at the very last meeting of the school year. He said it was narrowly approved last year. He said he was pleased the price went down.

Mr. Sokolovic said the administration was attempting to build an internal program, but after studying the numbers the costs might have been the same and then subsequently the University School reduced its price to meet the savings.

Ms. Pereira said 25 of the 27 returning children in The University School had already had an end-of-year PPT where they placed in the school, which complicated the potential of creating an in-house program. She added Dr. Johnson insisted that the contract contain professional development in the district's curriculum for the teachers in the program.

Mr. Taylor said it was not a coincidence that this was getting pushed to us at the end of the year.

The motion was approved by a 4-2 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Pereira, Illingworth and Sokolovic. Voting in opposition were members Taylor and Allen.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action to approve solicitation of commercial goods. John Gerrity, director of food and nutrition, was present.

Mr. Gerrity said the package was presented at the Students & Families Committee and he was requesting permission by the board to post commercial bids.

Mr. Taylor said Mr. Gerrity was here to handle his matters and others weren't. Ms. Pereira said he was also at Monday's meeting when the majority of the board got up and adjourned.

Mr. Sokolovic moved "*to approve the solicitation of commercial goods.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

In response to a question, Mr. Gerrity said no language in last year's bids has changed, including that the board will award the bids. He said only the dates were changed.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action to extend the contract with baked goods providers for one year.

Mr. Gerrity said the current contract for fresh baked goods is with Chaves Bakery. He said they performed well this year and they agreed to keep their current pricing for 2019-20. He requested approval to rollover the bid award from last year.

Mr. Illingworth said the matter was handled in the Students & Families Committee and the more he thinks about it the board had been very consistent in going out to bid for everything. He asked, why not go out to bid?

Mr. Gerrity said they were the lowest bidder last year and they are a local bakery. He said going out to bid again may result in higher prices. Mr. Weldon said it was possible that someone would come in lower.

In response to a question, Mr. Gerrity said he met with Vito Catalli, a sales rep of Chaves Bakery. Mr. Taylor said he did not want to cast aspersions, but Ms. Pereira had received sponsorships from Chaves and had interactions with Mr. Catalli. He said he drove Chaves's truck to several of Ms. Pereira's events. Ms. Pereira said she was never given cash; a box truck for a Christmas tree lighting was donated.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Taylor was out of line and said he was a dear friend of Kevin Muhammed, somebody with nine

sexual harassment convictions. Mr. Taylor said he doesn't have a single sexual harassment conviction.

Mr. Weldon said the discussion was about hotdog buns at this point.

Mr. Taylor said he would like to make a motion to throw Ms. Pereira off the board. Ms. Pereira said Mr. Taylor lived in Southport, Connecticut, and he should be thrown off the board.

Ms. Pereira said under the city charter and state statute a vendor can get up to three-year contract. Chaves had a one-year contract, and could be given up to two more years without violating the charter.

Mr. Weldon said it's more about if we're bidding everything else out, why would we treat this differently.

In response to a question, Mr. Gerrity said Mr. Wade was not able to hold his pricing, which is why we're going out to bid again for his contract. He said if Mr. Wade had agreed to holding the pricing he would have requested a rollover.

Mr. Weldon moved "*to go out to bid for baked goods.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and approved by a 4-2 vote.

Voting in favor were members Weldon, Taylor, Allen and Illingworth. Voting in opposition were members Pereira and Sokolovic.

The next agenda item was on the 2019-20 budget gap. Mr. Weldon said there was a letter transmitted to the mayor's office last Friday. He said he understood the mayor's office

said there would be a meeting with Dr. Johnson on this upcoming Friday.

Ms. Pereira said the board should deal with the \$5.5 million budget gap. Mr. Weldon said the meeting was less than 48 hours away and the board should see what the outcome of that meeting was. Ms. Pereira said we would not have a balanced budget by June 30th for the second year in a row.

In response to a question, Michael Testani said Dr. Johnson invited him to attend the meeting with her. He said she did not know if Ms. Siegel was attending or not.

The next agenda item was discussion regarding terms of employment of Michael J. Testani as acting superintendent. Mr. Weldon said the matter qualifies for executive session and Attorney Dugas was on his way to the meeting.

Ms. Pereira said the agenda on Monday referenced an interim superintendent, which is not a legal position. She said the current agenda refers to acting superintendent, which was not what the vote on Monday was.

Mr. Weldon said he spoke with the attorney and he did not think it was a substantive difference.

Mr. Illingworth moved to recess the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor and unanimously approved.

The meeting was recessed at 6:57 p.m. and reconvened at 7:25 p.m.

Mr. Weldon said the item on the terms of employment for Mr. Testani qualified for executive session.

Ms. Allen moved “*to go into executive session.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor.

Ms. Pereira said if there was no difference between interim and acting superintendent why was the wording changed for tonight’s meeting.

Attorney Floyd Dugas of Berchem Moses said he believed it was a question of form over substance because obviously we’re talking about filling in for the superintendent over the next year. He said under the statute there is a process for somebody who doesn’t possess a superintendent certification already to permit them to act. The title that the statute uses is acting.

He said he spoke to Mr. Weldon and suggested the term “acting superintendent” be used. He said it was form over substance and doesn’t make a substantive difference.

Ms. Pereira said the motion on Monday was regarding an interim superintendent. Atty. Dugas said in looking at the statute the state Department of Education recognized a pathway towards appointing somebody with the label of acting and he suggested changing the title.

In response to a question, Atty. Dugas said he looked at the statutes and made his own determination and did not confirm that with the state Department of Education.

The motion was approved by a 5-1 vote.

Voting in favor were members Taylor, Sokolovic, Weldon, Illingworth and Allen. Ms. Pereira was opposed

The executive session began at 7:30 p.m.

The board did not reconvene in public session.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the board on August 26, 2019*