

Wednesday, January 16, 2019

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held December 16, 2019, at Black Rock School, 545 Brewster Street, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The purpose of the meeting was a community conversation. A quorum of the board was achieved at 5:59 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Secretary Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, Chris Taylor and Maria Pereira.

There was a question-and-answer session for City Council members Peter Spain and Christina Smith.

Ms. Smith said she cannot promise everything requested by the questioner, Tara Smiley, but she will do the best she can. She said the city budget is huge and last year she advocated for cuts in supplies and other areas not covered by union contracts.

Mr. Spain said he sees Ms. Smiley walk her class by his home office. He said he was willing to commit to a biweekly meeting with the parents' group at the school and anybody else who wants to come to discuss what adequately funding education means. He said he believed the schools were underfunded. He thanked Ms. Smiley for making a difference in students' lives.

The next questioner, a Black Rock parent, requested an audit to see where the money is actually going. He said money could be cut from the police.

The next parent speaker, Ms. Prendergast, a parent of three children, urged the preschool be kept in the school.

Nicole Cassidy, a Black Rock parent, said she liked the partnership because everyone needs to work together. She said the parents can't be at the scads of upcoming meetings about budgets and asked the board members and council members to keep parents' concerns in mind.

Albert Benejan, PTSO president at Bassick, thanked everyone for coming out. He asked the board and council members to work together for the best education for our kids. He urged the parents go to Hartford to fight for the best education for our kids.

Mr. Weldon said we do work together. He said there are a lot of moving parts with 20 council members, 9 board members, and 8 members of the state delegation, all with varying interests. He said we try to balance those interests so everybody gets something. He said it is a difficult process because resources are finite. He said while it is not always in the forefront, cooperative things are going on in the background. He said the board was attempting to arrange a meeting with the legislative delegation

Mr. Spain said he has pretty regular communications with board members. He said he has no adversarial relationship with anybody. He said the process of 16 to 18 meetings in the City Council in about thirty days during budget season is a difficult one. He said the effort should be kept going during the year with more honest leadership.

Mr. Testani said there are a lot of good things going on in the schools and some of those would now be showcased.

There was a performance by the Geraldine Claytor Magnet Academy drill team.

Principal Steve Cassidy of Black Rock School introduced Yousra Oukassi, an 8th grader in the school.

Ms. Oukassi said her introduction to the performing arts at the school was one of the things she held most dear. She said a production in the school helped make up her mind as to what she wanted to do in the future. She said she wanted future students to experience the bliss she did when she finally understood how her skills and talents could be aligned with the performing arts. She said it was important to fund arts in the school budget.

Mr. Cassidy noted one of Supt. Johnson's initiatives was anti-bullying. He introduced the Black Rock's 6th grade anti-bullying group to do a dramatic reading. The Drama Club later performed a song.

Mr. Testani thanked everyone for coming and thanked Black Rock School and Claytor Magnet Academy.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod