

Friday, November 16, 2018

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held November 16, 2018, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:13 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Hernan Illingworth, Joseph Sokolovic, Ben Walker and Maria Pereira. Sybil Allen arrived subsequently as noted.

Supt. Aresta L. Johnson, Ed.D, was present.

The two agenda items were the superintendent's goals and objectives and the board's goals and objectives.

Mr. Weldon said the board had a document with three domains and some focus areas within the domains on the superintendent's goals and objectives.

Mr. Weldon said he believed the reference to neighborhood and community forums should be separate by a slash. Mr. Walker agreed.

Ms. Pereira said the neighborhood forums were about the ten city council districts, while the community forums were the usual events conducted by the superintendent.

Dr. Johnson said she would like to see the slash used in the sentence under bullets 1 and 2.

Dr. Johnson said she had concern about a reference to the mayor, City council and legislative delegation. She said she had not had a meeting with the mayor regarding the budget. She said if that was an expectation it was going to be a challenge because she can only ask for such a meeting. Mr. Weldon said the provision was about recruiting students, parents and staff to lobby the three entities.

Dr. Johnson said she would like to have a definition of success so it's not so subjective. Mr. Sokolovic said as someone who tries to drag parents into meetings in his son's school you cannot always be successful.

Mr. Weldon suggested use of the phrase "actively works to recruit students, parents," because it is something that can be illustrated. Dr. Johnson suggested defining what the efforts should be, such as phone blasts, flyers. Ms. Pereira said the end result is what should be measured. She said she recently came from a meeting where the goal is to get one hundred people to come to the Hooker School forum.

Mr. Weldon noted different areas of the city are more likely to have larger numbers attend forums.

Ms. Pereira said the recent forum at Bassick was not successful because it was poorly attended.

Dr. Johnson said we all have our own definitions of words such as "success" and "actively." She said she would like a firm understanding.

Ms. Pereira suggested "as evidenced by attendance by students, parents, community members and staff at the community forums and during the appropriation process." She said this was a big part of the discussion in Dr.

Johnson's evaluation.

Mr. Illingworth suggested striking bullet 3 because there is no real way to measure it. He said a lot of the effort was the job of the board in lobbying city officials or the legislative delegation.

Mr. Illingworth suggested the phone blasts about the forum be recorded by Dr. Johnson personally.

Mr. Sokolovic said in his son's school the teachers gave out notices in the report card conferences. Ms. Pereira said that's where the superintendent has to establish those expectations of principals.

Mr. Walker said there should be measurable efforts. He recommended: "implement strategies to recruit students, parents, staff." He said the strategies could be measured. Mr. Sokolovic said he agreed.

Ms. Pereira said the phrase was too critical to strike out.

Dr. Johnson said accountability with principals can only go so far. She said she held a conference call with principals that she described as tough about efforts to get greater attendance at the forums.

Mr. Weldon and Mr. Illingworth expressed skepticism about holding the superintendent accountable if, despite all efforts, there is a low attendance at forums.

Dr. Johnson said she needed a clear understanding as to what the provision means to the board. She said she did not have a sense of comfort that all board members know what "implement strategies" is going to look like.

Mr. Walker said he would use a fishing analogy; that you can be out fishing, but if the fish aren't biting there is no bait to throw that will be successful. He's said there's a certain amount of apathy that you just can't get past.

Mr. Walker noted that only about two-thirds of his wife's kindergarten students come to report card conferences. Ms. Pereira said if a principal can't get 25 people to attend a forum that is very scary. She said classroom teachers could help in making phone calls to parents about forums.

Dr. Johnson said there has been a conference call with principals, the flyers have been improved, and staff on administrative leave have been doing phone banking.

Dr. Johnson said her objection to the phrase "implement strategies" was based on a lack of trust that emotions won't change with the nine-member board. She said she did not want a loose standard, which would put her at a disadvantage.

Mr. Sokolovic pointed to low voter turnout in the city, with less than 50 percent of the electorate voting in the election which included President Trump and a sad celebration of a 38 percent turnout.

Ms. Pereira said as someone who has done grassroots organizing for nine years she believed it could be done.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she did not agree the first forum was a learning experience. She expected more parents, but she also expected a low turnout because it was left at the building level.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said the assistant superintendents were part of the conference calls, but she was not going to leave her evaluation in the hands of anyone.

Ms. Pereira suggested the language: "Implement multiple strategies to recruit students, parents, staff and the community at large to lobby our City Council, mayor, and legislative delegation for adequate financial resources for 2019-20." Dr. Johnson said she was happy with that wording.

Mr. Illingworth said he was not sure. Ms. Pereira said there seemed to be a majority for the language.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she did not have an issue with the goal of ensuring PAC and PTSO parent engagement funds are expended in a timely and effective manner. Mr. Sokolovic noted the issue would be discussed in the next Students & Families meeting.

Concerning Domain Three, Ms. Pereira said the goals were good and the superintendent had done a lot of work around them already. Dr. Johnson said she had reservations about "ensuring accurate reporting."

Mr. Sokolovic suggested a provision for corrective action in dealing with inaccurate reporting. He said we don't want to drive overinflated or underinflated numbers in the area of bullying.

Mr. Illingworth said the current reporting procedures could be revised if there are problems. Mr. Sokolovic said the accurate number of bullying incidents was not knowable.

Ms. Pereira said we know bullying occurs every day in every school. She said it was not possibly accurate when some schools reported no bullying incidents. She added Dr. Johnson knew for a fact that a bullying incident occurred at a school that reported no bullying incidents. She said this is what she meant by accurate reporting.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Young should look at the bullying reporting on a monthly basis. Dr. Johnson noted the assistant superintendents and Mr. Young received the bullying reports.

Mr. Walker suggested calling for reporting bullying incidents on a monthly basis, particularly since the annual reports are shockingly low. Ms. Pereira said the administration already does that.

Dr. Johnson said she wouldn't be comfortable with just reviewing bullying and saying her work was done.

Mr. Walker said when there were issues with special education it was helpful for the board to hear a monthly report. He said the same thing could be done with Mr. Young and bullying at the committee level.

Dr. Johnson said she was pretty much okay with bullet point 3. She suggested language in bullet 1 "providing training to all certified staff to ensure proper reporting of bullying incidences are reflected in monthly reports." She suggested in bullet 2 "provide training to all certified staff to ensure proper inquiries are made into bullying allegations and substantiated when appropriate."

Dr. Johnson suggested bullet 3 use the word "educate" as a

verb.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson agreed that the response to board member inquiries should be spelled out.

Ms. Pereira suggested the superintendent have 48 hours to respond to an e-mail unless a board member informs her it is urgent. Dr. Johnson said she preferred a call or text message for urgent matters. She said she wanted to be sure the time was calculated in business days, not holidays.

Mr. Weldon suggested the language: response to board members within 48 district business hours unless such communication is flagged as urgent.

Dr. Johnson said she believed requests made at the board meetings do not apply to the 48 hours because oftentimes it may take a week or two to research the information.

Mr. Weldon suggested substituting “acknowledging” for “response” and using “Acknowledging board member communications within 48 district business hours unless such communication is flagged as urgent.”

Mr. Illingworth questioned why it would take 48 hours to acknowledge an e-mail. Mr. Sokolovic noted the superintendent had about 2,000 employees and 22,000 students to deal with, with only two assistant superintendents.

Ms. Pereira and Dr. Johnson reviewed the wording of first bullet in Domain 3: “Provide training to all certified staff to ensure proper reporting of bullying incidences are reflected in monthly reports.”

Ms. Pereira said the second bullet would be, “Provide training to all certified staff to ensure proper inquiries are made into bullying allegations and substantiated when appropriate.”

The only change to third bullet was “educate.”

It was decided to remove the phrase “unless such communication is flagged as urgent.”

Ms. Pereira moved to approve “*Dr. Aresta Johnson’s 2018 goals and objectives as edited at tonight’s meeting, which will be placed on the next regular board meeting agenda for approval.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on board goals and objectives.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Weldon’s draft had a lot of language about committees that she did not agree with.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “*to recess the special meeting for the purposes of conducting the Personnel Committee meeting.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

The meeting was recessed at 6:25 p.m.

The meeting was reconvened at 7:45 p.m.

Ms. Pereira said the goals could not be implemented at the committee level as stated in the document because it is all about things the superintendent and her staff would do.

Ms. Pereira said the superintendent’s goals and objectives



should be public on the district's website. She said the same should be the case with the board's when they are approved.

Ms. Pereira said she would send out the revisions which were discussed and the document would be put before the full board

Ms. Allen moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod