

Tuesday, February 5, 2019

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held February 5,
2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport,
Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:40 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Jessica
Martinez, Hernan Illingworth, Ben Walker, Chris Taylor, Sybil
Allen and Maria Pereira.

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

The only agenda item was discussion and possible action
concerning community conversations.

Ms. Martinez moved to “*cancel all remaining scheduled
community conversations related to the 2019-20 budget, and
to have a portion of the superintendent’s evaluation related
to them be based on her work towards the ones that were
held thus far.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen.

Ms. Pereira raised a point of order that once a vote is taken
by the board a two-thirds vote was needed to approve a
motion to rescind.

Ms. Allen noted the community conversations were part of
Dr. Johnson’s goals. Mr. Weldon said he believed the
motion covered that.

Ms. Martinez said as Finance Committee chair she

recognized the forums had amazing attendance and that she was a firm believer in getting the community out and informed. She said her sole issue was that information isn't being disseminated, the board was not cohesive and was viewed as dysfunctional by community leaders.

Ms. Martinez said some board members are harming relationships within the city by calling certain people out. She said she did not see it as beneficial if we're going to harm the effort to get more money from the city by continuing to hurt relationships. She said the work done on the forums so far had been incredible as evidenced by the hundreds who attended. She said she wanted to be able to get the community to the City Council and Hartford.

Mr. Walker said this was Mr. Weldon's third attempt to quash the First Amendment rights of board members, particularly Ms. Pereira. He said if a position is honest it can withstand minority opinions. He said we see in government attempts to quash First Amendment rights from President Trump to this small body.

Mr. Walker said the collateral damage included Mr. Weldon's contention that the superintendent's communication skills were lacking. He noted the superintendent did exactly what the board wanted her to do with the forums.

Mr. Walker said the children of the district and the board's reputation were also collateral damage. He said if we cannot give a true and honest message through the superintendent and her staff about the budget then we cannot expect our constituents to demand the City Council to give us the money we need. He said we are skimming almost as low as the boycott.

Ms. Pereira said she was the only board member who attended all four forums. She said it was merely stating a fact to point out Mayor Ganim proposed three straight budget without a extra dollar for education. She added he would not be reelected with the FBI in city hall every other day.

Ms. Pereira said the superintendent got her goals and objectives three months late because of Mr. Weldon. She said it was not a coincidence that tomorrow's forum, which was proposed to be cancelled, was in the district of City Council president Aidee Nieves, who is an employee of Achievement First.

Ms. Pereira said it was never bad to give parents, staff and the children information. She added that she would distribute flyers for parents at the schools where it was proposed to cancel the forums with the names of City Council persons, their contact information and voting records.

Mr. Illingworth said the original intent of the forums was different, but they became political because board members could not stay out of the limelight. He said educating the parents is a wonderful idea, but board members promoting their personal agendas turned it into a political circus. He added the superintendent did everything the board asked her to do. He asked that the superintendent comment.

Ms. Martinez noted the board could evaluate the superintendent on the four community forums that were held. Ms. Pereira said the superintendent's goals and objectives could not be changed seven months into the school year.

Dr. Johnson said it was her understanding that the forums would not include any bashing of herself, the mayor and the

City Council. She noted she and the principals put a lot of work into the forums and she asked this be honored and respected.

Dr. Johnson said the minutes of meetings around her goals referred to separate neighborhood forums for City Council members and community forums as a different entity. She said it would not be fair to hold her accountable for these goals if the forums are going to be stopped.

Ms. Pereira asked Dr. Johnson to give an example of someone bashing her or the mayor or City Council at one of the forums. Dr. Johnson said she did not want to get into specifics.

Mr. Taylor moved to call the question. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

Mr. Walker said this was an example of stopping our right to be able to speak. Ms. Pereira said a motion to rescind was necessary.

Mr. Weldon said the motion was modifying, not rescinding.

The vote on Ms. Martinez's motion was 5 to 2 in favor. Voting in favor of members Weldon, Illingworth, Martinez, Allen and Taylor. Ms. Pereira and Mr. Walker were opposed.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 6:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod