

Wednesday, April 1, 2020

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE  
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April 1, 2020,  
by video and audio conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:21 p.m. Present were Vice Chair Hernan Illingworth, Secretary Bobbi Brown, Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, Albert Benejan, Chris Taylor, John Weldon, Jessica Martinez, and Joseph Lombard.

Acting Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Ms. Martinez moved to “*postpone the election of the BOE chair to the next in-person public meeting.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan.

Ms. Martinez said Mr. Illingworth was the most qualified person sitting on the board currently; he has been a longtime board member and has been a mentor to her. She said Mr. Illingworth was handling the position of interim chair as best as he can. She said there should not be a rush to choose a chair before there could be a public meeting and input from the public.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was ample opportunity to include the public in tonight’s hearing, but Mr. Illingworth chose not to include public comment in the agenda.

Mr. Weldon said the last time the board met it was decided to get a legal opinion. He said the city attorney responded that the board has a duty to elect a new chairman and should do so promptly by electronic means, particularly in consideration of bylaw 9220, which places limitation on the

vice chair's authority. Mr. Weldon said we could find ourselves in a bind if we do not take action. He said electronic meetings might have to continue into the future for months and there should be a fully functional chairman.

Ms. Martinez said she respected the opinions of the city attorney. She said the board's attorney's opinion would be more valuable because he is an expert in this area. She said the bylaws of the board can be suspended by a vote of the board.

Ms. Martine said Mr. Illingworth's heart is in the right place for the children. She said she would go with the decision of the team if the team decided to go with the opinion of the attorney.

Mr. Taylor moved to call the question. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

Mr. Illingworth urged the members speak only to the issue of postponement.

Mr. Sokolovic said we did not know when the next in-person meeting would take place because the virus's course was uncertain and the board could remain deadlocked for a year.

Mr. Taylor asked for a roll call vote. Mr. Illingworth said Mr. Sokolovic could finish his comments.

Mr. Taylor left the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was prepared to nominate Mr. Weldon to move forward. He said he didn't always agree with what Mr. Weldon has done, but he can move us forward. He said the board needs direction.

Mr. Lombard said if the board thinks it can function then it can function to take a vote on any issue. If the board can't take a vote on any issue, it shouldn't be functioning as a board. He said he believed all three offices of the board should be filled.

Ms. Martinez said what we do is for the parents and she wanted to hear from the public. She noted the stress everyone was operating under because of the virus. She said she was currently assisting her nephew with his 4th grade learning for hours each day. She said under the pandemic the board did not have to make major decisions because the person dealing with it is the superintendent, who is doing an amazing job.

Ms. Martinez said Mr. Weldon had failed previously as a leader. She requested there be public comment on Mr. Weldon. She noted the board had relieved a very good leader for stupid reasons.

The vote on the motion to postpone the election failed by a 4-4 vote. Voting in favor were members Martinez, Benejan, Illingworth, and Brown. Voting in opposition were members Sokolovic, Weldon, Allen, and Lombard.

Mr. Sokolovic nominated Mr. Weldon for chair of the board. Mr. Lombard seconded the nomination.

Ms. Martinez left the meeting.

There were no further nominations. Mr. Illingworth requested the board members send an e-mail confirming their vote to Rita Valle following the roll call. Ms. Allen said she would provide written confirmation.

The vote on the nomination was 4-1 in favor. Voting in favor were members Allen, Weldon, Sokolovic, and Lombard. Mr. Benejan was opposed. Mr. Illingworth and Ms. Brown abstained.

Mr. Weldon thanked those who voted for him and said he hoped to earn the support of those who did not vote for him going forward. He said he would be reaching out to everyone about how to move forward in these strange times.

Mr. Illingworth moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod