

Monday, May 21, 2018

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 21, 2018, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon, Vice President Hernan Illingworth, Joseph Sokolovic, Ben Walker, Chris Taylor, Dennis Bradley, and Maria Pereira.

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

The sole agenda item was discussion and possible action on the 2018-19 budget gap plan.

Dr. Johnson said she had been meeting with Ms. Siegel for the past four Mondays. She said Ms. Siegel would take the board through the material provided.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said there is a standing meeting with the BEA tomorrow where the furlough day issue can be discussed.

Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, said the updated documents include the actions taken by the board on April 27th, which total about \$4.8 million in savings. She said there is confirmed additional revenue of \$1.8 million.

Ms. Siegel said there is another clerical vacancy in the district office that would not be filled. She noted the city Council has approved an additional \$1 million for the board. She added that according to the most recent information the state ECS has increased by \$250,000. Additionally, the state has approved a supplement to districts with displaced students

Ms. Siegel said a communication from state to the superintendent was received today indicating the Alliance portion of ECS is being calculated and that the information that has been released through

various sources may or may not be accurate. It is hoped the district's Alliance ECS grant will remain stable or be increased, but she expressed there should be a degree of caution because there is always a potential for change. The grand total of ECS increases is \$1.6 million.

Ms. Siegel said the state extended time model as it currently exists at Classical Studies Magnet will be ending in June. She said there will be net savings to the district of approximately \$200,000.

Ms. Siegel said there is a \$150,000 deduction in the Priority Grant extended school hours component(ESH). ESH grants were allocated to five schools in addition to Classical Studies. The ESH grant funds only voluntary extended school hours programs. K-2 teachers were funded \$150,000 for the voluntary grades. She said the teachers will not longer be in an extended time model. She said the superintendent has discussed redeploying the \$150,000 for a voluntary program at Classical Studies in Grades 3 to 6.

Ms. Siegel said the document has a third section on anticipated additional revenue. The federal grant for hurricane and disaster relief is being awarded for students from Puerto Rico and is applicable to expenditures in the 2017-18 school year. She said based on current estimates the grant will raise anywhere from \$460,000 to \$1 million. She said the funding is applicable to the 2017-18 year and the district will be able to transfer charges that currently exist. Some of the money will be spent on new services through the bilingual department.

Ms. Siegel said there are health insurance savings based on discussions with the board last week in connection with off-the-record discussions with BEA and BCAS.

Ms. Siegel said it was previously assumed Title II-A would end. There is now an understanding that the federal government will be continuing it, but the amount of the allocation is uncertain. She said Ms Clarke was told by the state office that it is reasonable, although not guaranteed, to project at 85 percent of the current level, which is \$850,000.

Ms. Siegel said the state magnet grant is based on per capita and enrollment as of October 1st. In 2017-18, there was a reduction of \$500,000 in the grant to the district. She said the latest information seems to indicate the statewide appropriation for magnet schools will increase. She said this is a positive development and it is realistic to project that, assuming enrollment stays stable, the \$500,000 will be reversed next year. She said she is conservatively projecting the amount at 60 percent, \$300,000.

Ms. Siegel said no increase in Title I funding is projected at this time despite preliminary information that is favorable.

Ms. Siegel said the grant total of the document section is \$4.1 million, leaving a budget gap of \$2.2 million.

The final section of the document includes pending potential actions. Ms. Siegel said furlough days are listed with a direct reference to professional development days. The furlough is restricted to BCAS and the BEA, for \$663,000, which is subject to negotiations.

Ms. Pereira said she believe Classical Studies had extended school hours(ESH) since they opened. She said a change in the ESH would be devastating to those families.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said the teachers in the ESH program had an MOU since the program started. She said the teachers have reached out to their union and no longer want to agree to an MOU. Ms. Pereira asked if it had to do with them being upset with us. Mr. Illingworth said they're upset with someone else.

Ms. Siegel said the K-2 program was always voluntary for students and mandated for Grades 3-8. This year the program was not mandated for Grades 7 and 8.

Ms. Siegel said we are exploring the possibility of an extended day program on a voluntary basis for Grades 3 to 6. Since funding would be limited, services would most likely be limited. If there was high demand, seats might have to be limited. She said a possible voluntary program might have teachers working 25 to 28 weeks for

two hours a day, probably three days a week. They would be paid the standard hourly rate, \$38.50 an hour. There are no union issues because the slots would be posted for any teacher to apply.

Ms. Siegel said all of the ESH grants require the participation of a community-based organization for services that are enriching and expansive for students.

Ms. Pereira asked if it was true the district had about 80 to 90 less students in magnet schools this year. Ms. Siegel said enrollment in magnet schools was lower on October 1, 2017, compared to October 1, 2016. Ms. Pereira noted there were 4,000 families on the waiting list for magnet schools.

Ms. Siegel said the reduction in enrollment includes a reduction in out-of-district enrollment. The statewide magnet school appropriation was reduced and the enrollment was lower than the prior year. Both factors contributed to the loss of \$500,000.

Ms. Siegel said there are four districts that have not paid magnet tuition to Bridgeport, and she said she is exploring next steps with Dr. Johnson.

Dr. Johnson said the districts have simply refused to pay despite Comm. Wentzel's ruling. She said she has been working with Shipman & Goodwin on the issue. Ms. Siegel said about \$900,000 is outstanding from the four districts, which is after taking into account the district not paying Trumbull for the invoice for the agriscience school. She said at this point Trumbull will owe us a few thousand dollars more than we owe them.

Ms. Pereira said from discussions with Mr. Peluchette she has been told the BEA feels slighted and insulted and she questioned whether the union was really considering the furlough.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said the professional development day before school opens that is proposed as a furlough day would not affect all employees unlike a regular school day. She noted paraprofessionals would not be working on days before the

students report. She said the professional development day would be lost, but not an instructional day.

Dr. Johnson said she would aggressively pursue the furlough days with BEA and BCAS.

Mr. Illingworth said he was deeply concerned as a former parent of Classical Studies. He said a lot of parents enroll their children in the school because of after-school enrichment. He said we need to do whatever we can to get both sides at the table to hammer out a deal like last year.

Ms. Siegel noted Classical Studies is an intradistrict magnet and it will not affect the state magnet grant.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said the grant for students displaced by the hurricanes is applicable only to 2017-18. She said we are required to demonstrate the services we provided to those students. Examples include special education, psychologists, social workers and ESL. The grant reimburses the district for services it has already paid. While the funding was expected, the district did not know the extra amount and when it would arrive. Some of the funds will now be spent on new materials to replenish materials that were used.

In response to a question, Elizabeth Maurer, manager of budget and financial reporting, said in the past the city asked and received furloughs from unions, but BEA and BCAS have never participated. Ms. Siegel said paraprofessionals have given furlough days, as have clericals and city supervisors. Ms. Maurer said NAGE did as well.

Mr. Illingworth said he was concerned about using the number listed for furloughs. Ms. Siegel said that is why it is listed as potential.

Mr. Illingworth said he was focused on classrooms and schools and said he believed the extra two or three million the district had should be used to bring back the paraprofessionals. Mr. Taylor said he liked the idea.

Ms. Siegel said we have to close a gap, and she noted an extra \$2.7 million for paraprofessionals would be needed while we are currently short \$2.2 million.

Ms. Siegel said when there has been a number of years with negative funding in an already under-resourced district it is very difficult to catch up. She said the collective focus should be on resolving the gap, keeping in mind the stresses and pressures in the budget such as utility costs and special education.

Dr. Johnson said the board could revisit initial items on the list such as assistant principals that it previously rejected. She said it was a tough conversation to have, but something has to give.

Mr. Illingworth said he believed there could be a lot more cuts in central office. He said he did not want to make those cuts, but we can and we must. He said he says the current cuts go more towards classrooms and schools.

Mr. Taylor asked if Ms. Siegel, who is highly compensated, had a budget solution the board could vote on. He said he feels like his time is being wasted by meeting after meeting without a solution.

Ms. Siegel said we are not presenting a final budget solution. She said she believed the intent of tonight's meeting was an open and candid discussion about possible strategies to close the gap.

Mr. Weldon said he believed the administration was getting a sense of where the board's priorities are. He said the administration would be better equipped to come back with a plan later in the week or next week because of other things being worked on.

Dr. Johnson said at some point decisions are going to have to be made.

Ms. Siegel said we should have final decisions in place by the end of May with the understanding that if new funding is identified items cut could be revisited.

Mr. Sokolovic said we have been presented with a plan, which was rejected. He said it's on us as a board to go through the budget and find the cuts

Mr. Taylor said he disagreed. Mr. Taylor left the meeting.

Ms. Siegel said she and the superintendent as the chief executive officer brings a plan to the board.

Mr. Walker said Ms. Siegel had done a brilliant job. He said he can feel Mr. Taylor's frustration because we are unable to reach a decision ourselves. He suggested revisiting the list for the items that the board voted against. He said the board was relying on Ms. Siegel to present us with some viable cuts that we can make a decision on.

Mr. Weldon said it seems we're in a very close range here. He said the gap could possibly be closed by consolidating two facilities. He asked that things of that nature be looked at.

Ms. Siegel said a number of events would be occurring over the next few weeks, including discussions with BCAS and BEA. If the furlough day is realized then the amount would be \$1.5 million. She said we will know more in the middle of June about grant allocations for 2018-19, such as Title I and the emergency aid grant.

Ms. Siegel said it's always beneficial to have a number of contingency measures. She said we have reached bare minimum this year. She added she has been warning about this for the last two years: There is nowhere else to cut. She added that if the board does want to cut assistant principals or modify the rules governing transportation, we're at a point where there is nothing left to cut and we're left to hope that the other things present positive outcomes, which they may.

Mr. Illingworth said he agreed we are down to the bare minimum. He said years back the board had to make devastating cuts to central office and directors were cut. He said the district did okay without the directors. He said he felt the board was getting a lot of pushback on keeping central office the way it is while things are being taken away from schools and teachers.

Mr. Sokolovic asked if the district could withhold the money it pays to the state for the arts program and Six to Six until the district receives the magnet tuition Ms. Siegel said unfortunately no; under state law if the district does not pay the tuition the state may withhold the tuition from the ECS payment. In the case of magnet school tuition, the law does not include an enforcement provision.

Mr. Illingworth left the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *"to revisit the vice assistant principals in budget cuts so we could at least get \$900,000."* He said this was something we could do right now. He said the motion was to remove the six vice principals.

The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

Mr. Bradley said there were a slew of proposals for cuts made. Ms. Pereira said the board received a document in response to all the questions raised.

Mr. Bradley said very minimal cuts had been made from the top. He said he did not understand why the payroll department could not be cut. If it cannot be privatized, the city should do it. Ms. Pereira said she was totally opposed because the city steals from us.

Ms. Siegel said the area the city should take over is nursing because nursing services are not part of education, although it is very important.

Ms. Pereira said nursing had always been under the city. In 2009, after the budget was approved Mayor Finch told the board the nurses were to come under the board's budget and the board had to find \$2 million to pay for it. She said in every other municipality nurses are paid for by the municipalities.

Ms. Pereira said in her nine years of involvement, the city had never done one good thing for the board. She said the retirement benefits administered by the payroll department should not be trusted to the city.



Ms. Pereira said students do not learn from assistant principals. Mr. Bradley said the superintendent told the board in the modern history of the district a negative evaluation has never been given to a principal. He said it was the job of the assistant superintendents to manage what is happening in the schools.

Ms. Pereira said last year Ms. Marshall and Ms. Newton gave all their principals a positive evaluation. She said Dr. Johnson gave negative evaluations when she was an assistant superintendent and a principal was moved out of Harding High.

Ms. Pereira said one employee could not supervise and evaluate the principals of 37 schools. She said Mr. Bradley had never run a large organization. Mr. Bradley said as a cadet he ran a large organization. Ms. Pereira said she managed \$26 million in sales with up to 55 employees, but needed assistance with evaluations due to the volume of work.

Mr. Bradley suggested the directors of departments could be cut. Ms. Pereira said the athletic director was eliminated as was the guidance director this year.

Mr. Bradley said there were no concessions being made at the top and significant cuts should be made. He said leadership starts at the bottom and the most important leaders are the ones that deal directly with the students.

Ms. Siegel said if six assistant principal positions are cut, individuals can go into the vacancies and the full savings are not achieved. If vacancies do not exist, the contract provision on reduction in force is applicable and there are bumping rights. In the first year an assistant principal demoted to teacher would have a salary \$1,000 less with further reductions in subsequent years.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said the projected savings of \$900,000 was made in December when we did not know what the attrition rate would be. She said right now three vacancies are projected. Due to reorganization in the district, there are already three

administrators in excess. She said retirements and resignation in the coming weeks are always possible.

Ms. Siegel said at this time she would count the savings of \$50,000 per position for six positions unless and until additional vacancies occur. She said \$300,000 would be saved this year and a much greater amount next year.

Ms. Siegel suggested that she go back and put additional items such as the assistant principals on the list. She said hopefully by the next board meeting there should be information on status of resolving the final gap.

Mr. Walker said the original budget gap plan called for eliminating assistant principals in schools with less than 500 principals. He moved an amendment that *"we strike the register of less than 500 and to give superintendent the authority to place assistant principals at the building where they're needed, not necessarily based on enrollment, but based on need."* The amendment was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

The motion was approved by a 3-1 vote. Voting favor were members Walker, Pereira and Sokolovic. Mr. Bradley was opposed. Mr. Weldon abstained.

Dr. Johnson said she realized schools came out to advocate for assistant principals, but it's not personal; it's a position. She said someone would have to pick up the responsibilities of the athletic director. She said the athletic directors at schools are already reaching to the BEA to be compensated. She noted the content directors had been here long enough to bump just about every assistant principal.

Ms. Pereira said she couldn't name a single assistant principal she ever had in school. Mr. Bradley said he knew who his assistant principal was.

Mr. Sokolovic noted closing or consolidating a school is still under discussion and has not been voted on. He said administrative cuts should precede closing schools. He said he likened the content directors to directors of a movie who tell everyone where to go. He

noted there were new reporting requirements going into effect at the state level which the director of social work will have to do.

Mr. Bradley said he visited every single school when he was chair and the teachers have no idea what the directors do. Ms. Pereira said they structure curriculum by forming a team of teachers. Mr. Bradley said the teachers are forming the curriculum.

Ms. Siegel suggested the board adjourn after the vote on this motion and she said she will add items to the plan and revisit the issue at the regular meeting.

Mr. Walker moved the question. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The motion was approved by a 3-2 vote. Voting in favor were members Walker, Pereira and Sokolovic. Mr. Bradley and Mr. Weldon were opposed.

Ms. Pereira noted the report the board received on sports. She said only 836 individual high school students participate in sports.

Mr. Bradley said he was opposed to pay for play.

Ms. Pereira said football was the most expensive sport at about \$866, volleyball and basketball are also expensive, with girls' basketball costing \$1,000. She suggested children who play sports pay \$100. She said in some suburbs students are paying a hundred percent of the cost.

Mr. Bradley suggested cuts at the top such as directors. He said he didn't know what the social work director did.

Dr. Johnson said if it was the kids or central office, let's look deeper at central office. She said she was opposed to a fee to play sports.

Ms. Pereira said the report indicated only seven students got full athletic scholarships, twelve received partial scholarships and one is playing amateur soccer.

Dr. Johnson said it was about more than scholarships, including keeping children safe and off the streets. She said she was a mom of an athlete from four years old to high school.

Ms. Pereira said the analysis presents the cut of nine security guards. She said the savings were \$532,373. She added the additional SROs would be funded by a grant.

Dr. Johnson noted the security guards have a great relationship with the students and have a closer connection with them than the SROs. Ms. Siegel said the SRO grant has a clause that prevents supplanting existing services. Ms. Pereira said she believed that provision only applied to SROs.

Mr. Sokolovic said he had concerns because SROs are police officers with arrest powers. He said replacing a security guard with a police officer would increase the likelihood of child being arrested for something they wouldn't be arrested for in an incident handled by a security guard.

Ms. Pereira said there were 74 security guards in the operating budget and nine in grants (seven at Fairchild Wheeler, one at Discovery Magnet and one at adult education.)

Mr. Bradley said many of the cuts were long overdue such as the academic coaches because there was poor academic progress. Ms. Pereira said our test scores had recently gone up.

Dr. Johnson said she would meet with the finance department and put together other recommendations for the next Regular Meeting. Ms. Siegel suggested the board set priorities in the event that additional funding is received such as through the grants.

Ms. Pereira said more specifics were needed on the cost to keep the Harding High building after the new school opens.

Mr. Bradley moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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