

Monday, July 2, 2018

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE  
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held July 2, 2018,  
at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport,  
Connecticut

The meeting was called to order at 7:15 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice President Hernan Illingworth, Joseph Sokolovic, Dennis Bradley, Chris Taylor, Sybil Allen, and Maria Pereira.

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

Mr. Weldon noted it was the second special meeting held today.

Mr. Illingworth moved *"to move up number 2 to number 1."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor and unanimously approved.

The agenda item was on the expelled program RFP.

Asst. Superintendent Christiana Otuwa said the RFP is designed to get the best-qualified candidate to care for our kids who are expelled.

Dr. Otuwa noted expelled students will need at least four hours of instruction according to a recently passed state law.

Dr. Otuwa said it is hoped the RFP will go out on July 10th

and be submitted back to us for review on July 24th. She said the evaluation of the bids will be completed by July 30th.

Dr. Otuwa said previously students who were expelled had to have PPTs. Now they have to receive individual learning plans(ILP), which are to be monitored every quarter.

Ms. Pereira said page 5 of the RFP should be phrased to indicate the planning and placement team “will or must” determine the placement of the student, not “should,” due to federal law.

Ms. Pereira said it should be clear the IEP receives precedence over the ILP in the RFP.

Ms. Pereira noted on page 7 the screening protocol calls for asking for the resume of every staff member and proof that they’ve been a U.S. residence for one year, gone through a state and federal fingerprint check, a criminal background check that they must pass, and a judicial court search. She said the sentence should read “The search should not reveal any crime or civil judgments or actions that would preclude employment in the Bridgeport Public School district.” She said similar wording should apply to a DCF search.

Mt. Taylor asked the provision indicating the employee must pass a criminal background check be cleared up from possible ambiguity. Dr. Otuwa said she would look into that. Mr. Taylor described it as open-ended; noting he had a criminal record and knows what a criminal background check was.

Mr. Weldon said a more detailed description was needed. Ms Pereira said we had procedures in place for employment

in the Bridgeport Public School district.

Mr. Taylor asked what civil action would preclude employment in the district. He questioned whether a credit card default would qualify.

Mr. Taylor said he believed the city charter changed to a three-year look-back. He asked at what point did it hold less weight. He said any conviction is turning out to be a life sentence in Connecticut. He said he experiences it every day with his convictions. He asked at what point the debt to society has been paid.

Dr. Otuwa said she would investigate the look-back issue as well.

Mr. Taylor said other than that he was fine with the rest of the document.

Mr. Bradley said he disagreed with Ms. Pereira that there should be the same requirements as for district employees because the students in the expelled program are the poster children of the school-to-prison pipeline, many of whom have serious behavioral issues. He said Socrates said you learn a lot more from someone who does it the wrong way than someone who does it the right way.

Mr. Bradley said excluding people who did something bad to children, people in the school who have an experience of doing things the wrong way could make a contribution to the education of the students.

Mr. Bradley said he had an issue with the U.S. residency requirement for a year. He said once someone had obtained their right to work in the country and had gone through the immigration process, why would we disqualify people who

had not been here for a year.

Ms. Pereira said a substitute teacher in the district who lived in the country for four weeks ended up committing sexual acts with children in a classroom. She said a background check of such an employee would only cover the four weeks.

Ms. Pereira said our obligation is to students, not adults. She said the contract would transfer the students' files to the vendor, with no board employee monitoring them. She said an incident where someone used parent phone numbers to sexually harass women would make the district incredibly liable. She said we paid an exorbitant price for what happened a year and a half ago at Harding.

Ms. Pereira said if we can't hire someone to be a staff member of the board, why should there be less stringent standards for someone who will have the children off of district property and with no supervision on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. Bradley said a student can profit from someone who's had a negative experience. He said young people at risk can profit from being exposed to that type of person. He said it should be looked at on a case-by-case basis. He objected to a foreign phobia because of one incident. He said most crime in the country is committed by U.S. citizens. He said as an immigration lawyer he knew that criminal background checks could be provided from countries where the person has lived. He said it seemed discriminatory to treat people from other countries like this.

Ms. Pereira said she didn't have a problem with ex-offenders speaking to students, but not entrusting someone involved in crimes of a sexual nature or violence with the full care of

students.

Mr. Sokolovic said we should err on the side of the children. He said he was all for second chances as he had been the beneficiary of such second chances. He said the expelled students are especially vulnerable and there should be more controls in place to protect them. He said the starting point should be the district's hiring practices for teachers and educators.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she would check with human resources on the parameters for hiring district employees.

Dr. Johnson noted the document was sent to the city attorney, who responded with recommendations.

Dr. Otuwa said she was hearing the board say that Items 1, 3 and 4 needed to be looked at. Mr. Weldon said there needed to be clearer definitions in those areas.

Mr. Taylor asked if the policy on hiring could be submitted via e-mail to the board.

Ms. Pereira noted the Me Too movement was going on in the country, where women are standing up to sexual harassment by men. She said anyone sexually harassing employees, staff and parents shouldn't even be considered to be entrusted with our students.

Mr. Taylor said this was getting a little personal.

Ms. Pereira said she had faced sexual harassment in her lifetime and she was sure Ms. Allen has. She said women are not tolerating it. She said some of the most powerful

people in the world have fallen such as Bill Cosby and Bill O'Reilly.

Ms. Pereira said on page 8 the provision indicating the vendor cannot assign service to third parties without written notice to the Board of Education should require approval for the board.

Dr. Otuwa said the lawyer made a lot of changes in the RFP in the legal terms. Ms. Pereira said we shouldn't be handed the document as the meeting is starting.

There was a discussion of what language had been changed in the current iteration of the document.

Mr. Taylor said this is our summer time and his time is valuable. He said you guys make a lot and I don't, and it's not cool.

Dr. Johnson said the RFP was shared with the city attorney on Friday and the information just came back from the attorney today.

Ms. Pereira said a huge section on representation and warranties was eliminated. She said it was not acceptable that we were getting this at the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic said this is why we can't rush through these things.

Ms. Pereira asked why Mr. Pires sent the RFP to the board members before the attorney looked at it.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to table the item until we have time to pursue the document properly. There was a discussion of

when to pick up the matter again.

Ms. Pereira said the document provided did not include red lines so the board could see what had been deleted. She said she reads everything we get. Mr. Taylor said they wasted her time because they took it out.

Mr. Sokolovic moved "*to table until Monday, July 9th, at 6:00 o'clock.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor and approved by a 6-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Illingworth, Sokolovic, Taylor, Pereira and Allen. Mr. Bradley abstained.

Ms. Pereira requested a redlined document from the administration.

Mr. Taylor said Ms. Pereira is a Harding High graduate and she's running circles around Dr. Otuwa. He said he doesn't mean to be mean, but that shows how good the Bridgeport school system was back in 1980. She said this was absolutely unacceptable. He said loved Dr. Otuwa; he said Dr. Otuwa was a great person.

Ms. Pereira asked Mr. Taylor not to put her in that.

Mr. Taylor said it was a indisputable fact and for Dr. Johnson to let that continue is really questionable.

Mr. Sokolovic and Mr. Taylor left the meeting.

Mr. Illingworth moved the board "*go into executive session in order to discuss the BCAS negotiations.*" Invited to participate were the board members and Dr. Johnson.

The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously

approved.

The executive session began at 7:56 p.m.

The board reconvened in public session at 8:19 p.m.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod