

Thursday, June 28, 2018

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE  
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held June 28,  
2018, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport,  
Connecticut

The meeting was called to order at 6:18 p.m.

Present were Vice President Hernan Illingworth, Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, Dennis Bradley and Maria Pereira. Chair John Weldon and Secretary Jessica Martinez arrived subsequently as noted.

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

The sole agenda item was the superintendent's evaluation.

Mr. Illingworth said the superintendent had decided not to go into executive session for this informational session.

Mr. Illingworth said Dr. Johnson would finish going through Tab 1 in the notebook.

Ms. Martinez arrived at the meeting.

Dr. Johnson asked if there were any questions about the mission and vision as it relates to the strategic plan.

Dr. Johnson said Tab 2 covers developing and implementing the district leadership theory of action that guides decision-making. She said the document talks about a broader stakeholder involvement.

Dr. Johnson said she serves on the board of the Bridgeport Higher Education Alliance, the board of The Workplace, Inc., the board of the Bridgeport Public Education Fund and on the BRBC. She said made a presentation to the BRBC earlier in the year about the district.

Dr. Johnson said she was invited to be the keynote speaker at the Rotary Club. She noted a newspaper clipping about groups advocating for resources at the City Council. She said he meets with Make the Road on a monthly basis, including once with the student group. She said the advanced manufacturing program at Bassick and the program at St. Vincent's were featured in a national magazine.

Dr. Johnson pointed to the Foundation for Excellence end of year report, which shows where funds that have been committed. She noted donations by the Bigelow Foundation and the Rotary Club.

Mr. Bradley said this was wonderful stuff. He suggested someone be a quasi-lobbyist for the board. Dr. Johnson said Av Harris has been a good resource at the capitol. Ms. Pereira said a previous board committee discussed possibly hiring a lobbyist in Hartford. She suggested asking the BRBC to fund a lobbyist for the district.

Ms. Pereira noted the district showed the most improvement in math scores in our DRG of cities such as Hartford and New Haven.

Dr. Johnson said on the accountability index we were number five among the biggest five districts two years ago and we've moved up to number two as of last year, second

only to New Haven.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said Life Bridge (formerly BCAC) is part of our social-emotional learning and part of the Tauck foundation grant. She said the grant would provide social-emotional learning for another five years. Dr. Johnson said she meets with RYASAP during race-ethnic disparity meetings and we look at the suspensions and disciplinary issues.

Mr. Bradley said it would be innovative and daring to have a relationship with some groups who have traditionally been viewed to be our foes such as Teach for America and the charter school movement. He said a lot of big donors donate to these causes and they impact our district. Dr. Johnson said she had had meetings and she did not view the district as foes or enemies of the charter schools.

Mr. Sokolovic said the foundation was not very well marketed. He suggested greater prominence on the district website. Dr. Johnson said that was a great point. She said postcards are being printed to promote the early college experience courses and the foundation information could be added.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested Dr. Johnson highlight the differences between the Bridgeport Public Education Fund and the district's foundation. Ms. Pereira said Faith Villegas is the new director of the Bridgeport Public Education Fund.

Dr. Johnson said highlights of Tab 3 were data and the root causes of data, along with stakeholder involvement, as well as the budget development process.

Dr. Johnson said there were four presentations on the

strategic plan and the graduation requirements. There were community forums to roll out the budget conversation, as well as a safety and security forum held at Batalla School.

Dr. Johnson said she doesn't believe the graduation rates get enough attention. In 2015-16, the district was at 67 percent, and in the next year it improved to 75 percent, a significant increase. She said this is something that flies under the radar.

Dr. Johnson said she typically asks for pass/failure rates for 9th graders in algebra and English because that is a metric to know if they're on track and where interventions are needed.

Dr. Johnson said there has been a slight increase in physical fitness scores, but she said we can do so much better in this area. She said there is data broken out by school and it is an opportunity for a quick win. She said it is a huge part of the district accountability score.

Ms. Pereira said it was crazy that Edison School did not have a gym, but had excellent results.

Dr. Johnson said the disciplinary numbers are broken out by school and grade. She said she noticed ISS has gone up and OSS is going down, which is a good thing because we don't want our kids out of school. She said we've made a decision to include pre-K to 2 data because such students should not be suspended at all. She said before any such suspension, the principal has to call the assistant superintendent.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said the district was fairly high in pre-K to 2 suspensions in the past. Following a

push at the state level and her conversations with BCAS, Dr. Johnson implemented the policy of notifying of assistant superintendents before suspensions and making sure the conduct fell into conduct that was violent or sexual. She said we had come a long way in one year by monitoring it.

Ms. Pereira said it was frightening that Skane had 115 pre-K students who are chronically absent. Dr. Johnson said the percentage of chronically absent students at Skane was 46.2. She noted most of the children are medically fragile.

Ms. Pereira said the chronic absentee rate at Bassick and Harding is pretty scary. Dr. Johnson said at the state level absenteeism is on the radar and it is a metric put in place to try to reduce the number. She said we might be one percent point higher than where we were last year.

Ms. Pereira noted Bassick had gotten significantly worse and Harding a little better. Ms Pereira said 53 percent of Bassick's population is chronically absent. Dr. Johnson said chronically absent is ten percent or 18 absences. Mr. Illingworth said Central went down ten percent.

In response to a question, Dr. Jonson said if a child is absent twenty or more days they would not be able to be promoted without an attendance appeal.

Dr. Johnson said she thought she had some good ideas why the Bassick rate went up, noting the school has significant challenges. She said with Power School there should be interventions at absences of two days, four days, six days and eight days. She said a random scan across the district shows those markers are not being completed as they should.

Ms. Pereira said before Dr. Johnson became superintendent the previous assistant superintendents gave every elementary school principals satisfactory evaluations. She said she knows Dr. Johnson believes in accountability. She said there are schools that didn't use their parent money and schools that don't have bullying reports. She said she hoped the principals are being held accountable. She said it's not possible that we have 32 principals with none of them needing improvement.

Dr. Johnson said administrator evaluations are not due until June 30th. The four categories are below standard, developing, accomplished and exemplary. So far everyone has not been ranked exemplary and as of yesterday there were none in the area of below standard and developing. She said she could provide the final amounts of principals in each category.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said the rubric used in principal evaluations is online and public information.

Ms. Pereira said she did not want to see people fired, but they need to know where they really are and their opportunities for improvement.

Dr. Johnson said it was not typical for a superintendent to be evaluated on eight categories, but she appreciated it as a baseline because she believes in growing professionally and improving.

Mr. Illingworth said he would like to see Dr. Johnson intervene in cases where principals need improvement. Mr. Sokolovic said accountability leads to follow up. Mr. Illingworth said he would like to see a very generic periodic report on accountability.

Ms. Martinez said it also benefits the board to understand what each director's scope of work is. She said she was surprised to learn exactly how much a particular director did. She said perhaps a director could present at a board retreat on their daily activities and what their scope of work looks like.

Ms. Pereira said at the Teaching & Learning meeting every instructional director made a presentation. She said it was an amazing meeting that lasted four and a half hours. She said she was stunned at how much they're trying to do with no resources and how much they have accomplished.

Dr. Johnsons said she would send to the board members the PowerPoint from that meeting and the draft minutes. Ms. Pereira said she wanted to use them in her evaluation.

Dr. Johnson said Tab 3 also includes information on the budget. Mr. Illingworth said he had heard enough about the budget recently.

Dr. Johnson said Tab 4 covered measurable goals, professional practice, student learning, and a districtwide improvement cycle which is embedded in the district plan. She said it is aimed at accountability at the school and classroom level.

Dr. Johnson noted the kindergarten students grew the most in math on iReady assessments. She said the SBAC data in red are the schools that did not show growth. She said using the data can lead to providing necessary supports. She noted that one school in this category, Cross, now had a SIG grant and \$300,000 has been allotted next year for interventions and support. She said there would be a new

principal in the school due to a retirement.

Ms. Pereira said the SBAC data showed a 3.4 percent increase in literacy over last year. Dr. Johnson said the SAT data would be available in the third or fourth week of July. Ms. Pereira asked Dr. Johnson to send SAT data to the board members as soon as it is available.

Mr. Sokolovic noted Park City Magnet's data showed a decline, which was unusual. He said it may be an outlier.

Mr. Illingworth noted some schools have made significant gains. He pointed to Classical Studies' gain in math. Dr. Johnson said Hooker, John Winthrop and Multicultural Magnet had strong improvements.

Dr. Johnson said the tab includes minutes from a meeting of the special education data team. She said there is a needs assessment form that was sent to principals as a survey, which resulted in how professional development was tailored.

Mr. Sokolovic said he had heard anecdotal reports that teachers were not happy with professional development and he suggested perhaps a survey be done of teachers. Dr. Johnson said there is an evaluation after professional development sessions. She said Dr. Santacapita oversees professional development.

Dr. Johnson said there is a professional development and evaluation committee that plans the professional development, they vet it with her and she meets with the BEA on the subject.

Dr. Johnson noted she presented teacher absentee data and



the costs associated.

Mr. Weldon arrived at the meeting.

Ms. Pereira said in September at Barnum School almost three percent of the teachers were absent. Dr. Johnson said the figures exclude FMLA, PD, PPT and SRBI absences.

Ms. Pereira said she would like to see a column added with the totals for the year by school.

Dr. Johnson said there is separate data on paraprofessionals. She said the paras at Barnum in September had a seven percent rate.

Ms. Pereira said Ms. Siegel instituted attendance policies when she came to the district, but she did not believe we've seen a difference. Dr. Johnson noted that figures escalated in November.

Mr. Illingworth said it seemed Cross had the highest absentee rate in September even though the district asked teachers to limit absences in that month.

Dr. Johnson said the teacher and para report goes out across the district every month to all the principals.

Ms. Pereira said it looked like the largest amount of absences for teachers is June, with May being the second highest.

Ms. Pereira said maybe the district should switch its months without subs to September, October and April. Dr. Johnson said we may want to revisit the September and May policies established by the board. She said BEA and BCAS have

come up with different suggestions in meetings that are viable.

Mr. Bradley said he felt like he had the pulse of the community through his campaigning and being involved politically. He said the feeling throughout the district is that Dr. Johnson is doing an outstanding job. He said he appreciated the hard work Dr. Johnson has done with the financing issues that we've had.

Ms. Martinez left the meeting.

Ms. Pereira said the board was going to rate Dr. Johnson in the rubrics with a score of 1, 2, 3 or 4. She said for ratings of 1, 2 or 4 the board members must write substantiating comments with examples that support the rating.

The board discussed their understanding of how the evaluation form is to be completed.

Ms. Pereira asked that she be copied on any requests from board members for additional information from the superintendent. She said it was best that if information comes to one board member it should come to all.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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