

Monday, January 6, 2020

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held January 6, 2020, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 a.m. Present were Chair Jessica Martinez, Vice President Hernan Illingworth, Secretary Bobbi Brown, John Weldon, Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, Chris Taylor, Albert Benejan and Joseph Lombard.

Acting Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Ms. Martinez said the special meeting was for discussion and/or possible action concerning the appointment, employment, performance evaluation, health or dismissal of Michael Testani as a public officer or employee of the Bridgeport Board of Education, pursuant to Sec.1-200(6)(A) of the Connecticut General Statutes.

Mr. Weldon moved *“to go into executive session to discuss the item as stated on the agenda, with such individuals in executive session being members of the Board of Education and Michael Testani.”*

The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor wished everyone a Happy Three Kings' Day. He complimented the work of the superintendent, Deborah Santacapita and Maria Valle for the event at Luis Marin School.

Ms. Martinez said the board was acting on the acting superintendent's request to be reviewed. She said the rubric was presented at the time Mr. Testani came on board.

Mr. Testani indicated he did not request the matter be held in public session.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was for community transparency. He asked the board to consider doing the presentation portion in public on the five items so the public has some idea of where we are.

Ms. Martinez suggested going into executive session and if Mr. Testani wants to present to the public what he presents there he could do so afterwards.

The motion was approved by a 7-2 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Martinez, Brown, Illingworth, Taylor, Allen, and Benejan. Voting in opposition were members Lombard and Sokolovic.

The executive session began at 6:35 p.m.

The board reconvened in public session at 8:12 p.m.

Mr. Weldon moved that *"the Bridgeport Board of Education enter into a three-year employment agreement, to commence July 1st, with Michael Testani for the position of superintendent of schools, and to use the terms and conditions of the agreement with Aresta Johnson, including those related to salary and benefits, with the only modification being no residency clause and a retention of the clause in his current contract related to performance of his spouse. And I further move that upon Mr. Testani's*

*acceptance and signing of that agreement that the chair be authorized to execute it.”*

Mr. Taylor seconded the motion.

Mr. Taylor moved an amendment: *“I don’t want to waive the residency requirement.”* He said if he’s going to be the superintendent in Bridgeport, he should live in Bridgeport. The amendment was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

Ms. Allen said she did not believe there should be a residency clause because the district had many superintendents that lived outside of the city and did the job that was necessary. She said Mr. Testani was right across the street in the next town.

Mr. Sokolovic questioned whether it was okay to teach our kids but not live near them. He said over \$200,000 in taxpayer money would be spent in another town. He said the residency requirement had been in place for quite a number of superintendents.

The amendment was defeated by a 6-3 vote. Voting in opposition were members Allen, Benejan, Illingworth, Lombard, Martinez, and Weldon. Voting in favor were members Sokolovic, Taylor, Brown.

Mr. Sokolovic we are doing a very big disservice to the citizens of Bridgeport on a Monday evening with six people in the room. He said the decision was made in a back room. He said a nationwide search was needed for a superintendent. He said such a search would include community forums, while community was not involved tonight.

Mr. Sokolovic said he had nothing against Mr. Testani and believed he was doing a great job. He said he could not tell from a six-month review if he's doing the best job of anybody in the country that's out there.

Mr. Taylor said he wholeheartedly supported the superintendent but he could not go along without the Bridgeport residency.

Mr. Testani said he had no problem with the provision in Dr. Johnson's contract that gave her one year to move to Bridgeport. He noted his stepdaughter would be graduate within that year and he could relocate.

Ms. Martinez said she believed that was ridiculous because of Mr. Testani's investment of time in Bridgeport and his many connections to the city while living in the neighboring town. She said it was about the children for her.

Mr. Weldon proposed an amendment "*to include the residency clause in the contract.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor.

The motion was approved by a 8-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Martinez, Lombard, Illingworth, Sokolovic, Taylor, Allen, and Benejan. Voting in opposition was Ms. Brown.

The main motion as amended was approved by a 7-2 vote.

Voting in favor were members Weldon, Martinez, Lombard, Illingworth, Taylor, Allen, and Benejan. Voting in opposition were members Brown and Sokolovic.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the board on January 13, 2020*