

Thursday, November 19, 2020

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held November 19, 2020, by video conference, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:31 p.m. Present were Chair Albert Benejan, and members of the committee Joe Sokolovic and Bobbi Brown. Board member Jessica Martinez joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

Ms. Brown moved to approve the committee's minutes of October 1, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the PAC/PTSO response to the District PAC bylaws.

Carli Rocha-Reaes, director of school counseling and parent partnerships, said the bylaws were distributed to all PAC and PTSO leaders who attended a roundtable with the superintendent. She said she followed up with e-mails to the parent leaders and distributed copies to administrators. Mr. Benejan requested he be provided with the parent leaders' e-mail addresses so the committee could offer support. Ms. Rocha-Reaes said there would be another roundtable in December.

Mr. Benejan said he wanted to work with the parent leaders that want to move forward and would not wait for those who are lagging behind.

In response to a question, Ms. Rocha-Reaes said she would send a copy of the draft bylaws to the committee. Mr. Sokolovic said the quorum requirements in the bylaws should be looked at, so the work of the parents is not hindered if there is a shortage of parents attending a meeting.

The next agenda item was on bullying related to COVID-19. Herminio Planas, executive director of elementary education, said Mr. Young, the director of social work, indicated up to date there are no bullying reports that have been substantiated due to COVID-19 from the beginning of the year. In fact, there are no substantiated bullying reports in the district as a whole. He noted the legal definition of bullying is used by the district, which does not include one-time incidents.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said reports of bullying have been investigated. He said the legal definition of bullying includes anything that affects the process inside the school.

Mr. Sokolovic said it was important to collect precursor incidents to bullying. He said the district had been down this road before and he was disturbed about zero substantiations, which he did not believe was realistic in a district of our size.

Mr. Planas said cyber-bullying is considered as part of bullying.

The next agenda item was on PAC/PTSO parent action plans and budget.

Ms. Rocha-Reaes said parent involvement plans for all schools have been submitted with the exception of about four or five schools. There are some unusual circumstances and barriers in those schools, including the need to hold new elections.

Ms. Rocha-Reaes said she submitted a November summary report of how much money has been spent and the percentages of the total money. She said it is not unusual that not a lot of the money has been spent. The plan is to have at least 60 percent expended by January 1st; 70 percent by February 1st; 80 percent by March; and 100 percent by April.

Ms. Rocha-Reaes described a big outdoor event that was held at Tisdale School. Mr. Benejan said it was amazing.

Ms. Rocha-Reaes said there would be a district drive-through event this Saturday, as previously announced by Supt. Testani, with many resources available for parents.

In response to a question, Ms. Rocha-Reaes said the dollar amounts in the report refer to expended and encumbered funds. Mr. Sokolovic said he was frightened seeing schools with zero expenditures with the first marking period concluded.

Ms. Rocha-Reaes said she has shared a document with parent leaders about ideas for activities and expenditures, including those that work well at other schools.

The next agenda item was on the parent convention.

Mr. Benejan said \$9,000 was rolled over from last year and there is \$9,000 allocated this year. He said we need to use

the money as soon as possible, so a committee for the parent convention needs to be formed. He said hiring a speaker, as Mr. Testani has suggested, would cost a lot of money. Ms. Rocha-Reaes said she would speak to the superintendent and would be happy to start up a committee.

Mr. Benejan said a lot of the parent leaders have contacted him with ideas. He said the money belongs to the parents and needs to be spent on parents. Ms. Rocha-Reaes said the matter could be placed on the agenda of the next roundtable.

Mr. Sokolovic noted the expense of the food at the convention, but if the event is held online that expense will not be there. He said a backup plan to spend the money was needed. He said one option is parental training.

The next agenda item was on parent concerns on communications with schools.

Mr. Benejan said this was very important. He said parents have contacted him about not getting answers from principals, which he in turn has forwarded the matters to Supt. Testani. He said parents are very stressed with the pandemic situation and should not receive treatment that is not professional. He said he believed the superintendent had sent an e-mail urging parent concerns be responded to.

Mr. Planas said he believed there haven't been any issues we have been able to fix. He said as a executive director he gets calls about issues regarding computers and log-on issues. He said information like that can be accessed through executive directors if parents do not like the response of the principal. He said when issues come him things get taken care of right away. He said schools should

first be given a chance to solve the issue because sometimes parents escalate complaints quickly without giving schools time to resolve the issue.

Mr. Planas said there is help line on the district website where parents can contact the IT department directly.

Mr. Benejan said principals are supposed to know what to do and should answer the parents. He said he will tell parents in the future to contact the director if the principals do not answer the parents. He said he would like to see everyone work together to solve these problems.

Ms. Martinez joined the meeting.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said he was very proud of his principals and it is probably less than one percent of the time when he feels that they have not made the right decision. He said when he receives a call from a parent it is often because parents want things solved right away, although the situation may call for patience or time for the IT department fix the issue.

Mr. Planas said the phone number of the IT department hotline for parents is 203-275-1193.

Mr. Benejan said he understood no one is perfect. He said the IT department is doing an amazing job, despite a small staff.

Mr. Planas said the pandemic situation has made the work of principals more difficult. He said despite the virus he believed the district was moving in the right direction.

Mr. Benejan expressed his appreciation for everyone's work.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 6:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the committee on January 28, 2021*