

Thursday, January 17, 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held January 17, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic and Hernan Illingworth. Board member Maria Pereira was present.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of December 20, 2018. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth. The motion was approved by a 1-0 vote. Mr. Sokolovic was in favor. Mr. Illingworth abstained.

The next item was discussion and possible action on committee's goals and an action plan for 2019.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to see continue improving parental involvement in the schools. He said he would like to work on reinstituting the District PAC. He said the local PACs and PTSOs have been floundering since the District PAC was disbanded. He said his vision for a new District PAC is a strong PAC that is inclusive and places no restrictions on what other organizations people can belong to, and to work together to advocate for our children before the board, the City Council and state representatives.

Mr. Illingworth said he agreed with Mr. Sokolovic's vision and goals. He said the biggest thing is providing support to parents. He noted some school leaders are very welcoming to parents, while there are some that plain don't want parent

leaders in their buildings. He said a mechanism for a check and balance needed to be created.

Albert Benejan said we need to work together to be welcoming to the parents. He said support from the board was needed for this.

Mr. Sokolovic said it was a chicken-and-the-egg situation because District PAC bylaws had to come from the parents on the District PAC, which doesn't exist right now. Ms. Pereira said the District PAC is made up of the president of every school PAC, along with the officers who went through a citywide election.

Mr. Sokolovic said he understood things broke down during the construction of new District PAC bylaws. Ms. Pereira said they were ratified by the members. Mr. Sokolovic said he saw one iteration where there was a lot of exclusionary language. Ms. Pereira said that was in the District PAC bylaws that were ratified with one negative vote and one abstention.

Mr. Illingworth said the bylaws need to come from the parents. He said a meeting of the PAC presidents at all schools could start discussion of creating bylaws, which should come completely from their process. He said the exclusions were problematic. He said if it wasn't for BCAC and the training they gave him he would not have been able to be a good, effective PAC president. He said there was a group that started to create personal issues in the bylaws and then it became a charter school thing. He said he objected to prohibiting district parents who may have one child in a charter school from being a PAC officer. He described it as a discrimination. He said it was all from Ms.

Pereira and the hatred she has towards the PAC from her personal agenda.

Mr. Sokolovic said we had to put the past aside and move forward. He said he didn't believe anyone present wanted to see such restrictions.

Ms. Pereira said she had nothing to do with the proposed bylaws. She said she did not attend a single meeting or communicate with anyone about the construction of the bylaws. She said the bylaws were created after an election where Excel Bridgeport was heavily involved. She said there was never a prohibition against being PAC president if the parent had another child in a charter school. She said it was a false allegation that she had anything to do with the creation of the bylaws.

Mr. Illingworth said his claim could be substantiated. Ms. Pereira said it could not and it was a blatant lie.

Angel Resto said it was a new day and we should move forward. He said to make the District PAC there had to be bylaws, which could be followed by an election.

Mr. Sokolovic said we can't make bylaws without a District PAC, and we have don't have a District PAC right now.

Mr. Illingworth said all the school PAC presidents should get together and start building bylaws. He said when the disbandment happened it was just the executive board that was disbanded and the school presidents were still supposed to meet. He said if a facilitator to the process was needed it should be an administrative staff member, not a board member.

Ms. Pereira suggested Nadira Clarke work in that capacity because she knows all the covenants of the Title I grant.

Dasha Spell, the PAC president at Classical Studies, said she agreed with the PAC presidents coming together to create bylaws. She said with the budget issues going on this was the perfect time to come together.

Assistant Superintendent Janet Brown-Clayton said she had two proposed dates for a meeting on the parent convention this year.

Mr. Illingworth said it was not appropriate for the board to try to micromanage the parent convention and things like the speakers. He said it should be parent-driven.

Mr. Sokolovic said realistically the District PAC would not be in place to plan the parent convention, although the meetings of the PAC presidents could also work on the parent convention.

Ms. Pereira said the last two speakers at the parent convention have been very problematic. Mr. Sokolovic said he believed it was up to the parents to decide on a speaker.

Tammy Bogdanyi said combining the bylaws and the parent convention at one meeting would be very confusing and should be treated as two separate issues.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said the parent convention was held May 30th last year.

In response to a question, Mr. Bogdanyi said she believed the first step should be to get all the PAC presidents and vice presidents together in a room. She said the bylaws

worked on previously could be presented at the meeting of the school PAC leaders.

Mr. Sokolovic noted there were some new state standards regarding grandparents and he wanted to be sure anything new would not be a violation of anything. He said having Ms. Clarke present was a good idea.

Ms. Bogdanyi said since the departure of Ms. Mason from the district she wasn't sure who the district point person for parent engagement was.

Mr. Sokolovic and Mr. Illingworth said there didn't appear to be an administrator responsible for this and noted the assistant superintendents had a lot on their plate.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested Ms. Brown-Clayton conduct a poll to find a good date for a meeting of the PAC presidents and to find out whether Ms. Clarke is able to help out.

The next agenda item was on the school climate survey.

Carrie Ramanauskas, the district's social-emotional learning coordinator, said the climate survey is broken up into three grade level bands(3-5, 6-8 and 9-12). She said in the beginning of each grade level report are various categories that students are surveyed on.

Ms. Ramanauskas said there were increases in every area in the Grade 3-5 survey. She said there were concerns about low numbers regarding peer relationships and sense of belonging. She said social-emotional learning is used to increase school climate. She had BCAC was the lead agency on the district's social-emotional learning initiative and is the fiduciary of the district's grant.

Ms. Ramanauskas said the report provided some of the questions in the survey. She said the concerns about peer relationships and a sense of belonging were consistent across all three grade-level bands. She said the core of restorative practices is to build positive relationships and repair harm when it's caused. Training was provided to address this.

In response to a question, Ms. Ramanauskas said students are surveyed twice a year.

Mr. Sokolovic noted there was a drop-off with regard to sense of belonging and caring adults at the high school level. Ms. Ramanauskas said she personally had attended common planning meetings and worked with teachers on how to embed social-emotional learning within their lesson plan design and academic instruction. She said high school students need to know they have someone they can go to to ask questions or go to when they're afraid or excited. She said we need to provide that as educators and adults in their lives.

Ms. Spell said we had to look at what's going on in the community – single parent homes or violence in kids' lives. Ms. Ramanauskas said recent training addressed adverse childhood experiences and is covered in the survey. She noted in all three grade bands students say the place they feel least safe is in the bathroom, while the place they feel most safe is the classroom.

Ms. Ramanauskas said principals and assistant principals receive school-based reports specific to their population.

Mr. Illingworth said he would like to see the individual school reports. Ms. Ramanauskas said the social-emotional survey is not meant to be evaluative, but is supposed to drive intervention and action, including targeted professional development and required resource materials.

Sean Duque said there is a lot of bullying going on. He said students should be able to feel safe in school.

Mr. Illingworth said it was important that the administration have access to the surveys and learn from them. He said schools needed to be given support and held accountable afterwards.

Ms. Ramanauskas said when the results were received in the spring they were available to Dr. Johnson and the assistant superintendents. She said there was a meeting in July after the spring data was received where professional development was planned for the first two quarters of the year, targeting support for areas of weakness. She described the trainings that were provided.

Ms. Ramanauskas noted the excellent data on student-teacher trust in classrooms. She said the responses say a lot about how hard the teachers are working.

Mr. Sokolovic said the data was too subjective to be used for accountability. Mr. Illingworth said we need to hold ourselves as a district accountable to look into the matters revealed by the survey.

Ms. Ramanauskas said she had spent hours upon hours providing targeted support in response to the results of the survey.

Ms. Ramanauskas said restorative practices training would take place on February 5-6, March 14-15, April 4-5, and May 2-3. She invited parents or board members to contact her to attend the training.

In response to a question, Ms. Ramanauskas said restorative practice consists of methods and interventions that work to prevent harm and conflict by creating a sense of belonging, safety and social responsibility within the school community, based on a philosophy intended to shift discipline responses and school environments from punitive to restorative. She said the focus is not on rules broken and punitive consequences, but on harm done and providing appropriate restorative consequences and the systems that are necessary to repair and support strong relationships among all school community members.

The next agenda item was a report on PAC membership and contact information by school. Mr. Sokolovic said the committee had received the report

Ms. Brown-Clayton said all school PACs had presidents, but they were not fully staffed.

Ms. Pereira said the PAC bylaws require every school to have a president, vice president and secretary, an optional bilingual secretary, and five members at large. She said about 40 percent of the schools did not have a vice president and a huge amount of schools did not have a secretary.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said a lot of the schools had to start from the beginning to create PAC officers. Ms. Pereira said the PAC officers are supposed to vote on how to use thousands of dollars of Title I money.



Mr. Sokolovic said he knew there were more members at Park City Magnet than listed on the document.

Ms. Bogdanyi said BMA had elections in November and there is a full board. Mr. Illingworth said the document did not appear to capture all of the membership in some schools.

Ms. Pereira said one of the biggest issues is that PAC officers should be elected annually, not for two-year terms, because constantly people are elected and peter out or their child graduates from the school. Mr. Sokolovic said the two-year term is good to capture parents and also for purposes of succession.

Ms. Pereira said under Title I, the local education association(LEA) has the right to participate in the drafting of the bylaws and the parents and the LEA vote to ratify those policies. She said about 14 years ago the Title I made a District PAC optional, not mandatory.

Mr. Sokolovic said the PAC data was a vast improvement over last year. Ms. Pereira said another column should be added for the number of members at large. She there should also be information on schools are holding monthly meetings.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said there were formatting issues with the document. She said Ms. Mason used to capture the information on PAC meetings, and she would work on gathering the data this year.

There was a discussion of the status of Ms. Davis of the PTSO at Harding High.

Mr. Benejan said training was needed for new PAC presidents. He said he had helped some PAC leaders who reached out to him. Mr. Sokolovic said the district lost that when Ms. Mason's position was eliminated. Ms. Brown-Clayton said she did not have any knowledge of the district being able to provide training for PAC presidents. Ms. Pereira said if it was about managing Title I funds and P-10s someone in Ms. Siegel's office could conduct that training. Mr. Sokolovic said training could be provided by webinars or online videos.

Ms. Pereira said training should be done at different times during the day due to the different commitments and schedules of parents.

Mr. Benejan said technology was good, but it is good to have meetings face-to-face and work things out.

Ms. Bogdanyi said before Power School many more parents came to report card conferences.

The next agenda item was a discussion and possible action on the parent engagement policy. Mr. Sokolovic said he hoped to come up with some ideas by the next meeting after the committee members read the parent engagement policies.

Ms. Pereira said when the board passed the parent engagement policy that was created by Excel Bridgeport they didn't check the community relations policy that was already in effect, and they conflicted with each other.

Mr. Sokolovic and Mr. Illingworth said the policy had to be revisited since it was created in 2013. Mr. Illingworth said he wanted assurance from the administration that we need

and will implement a parent engagement policy. He said for years the board had created policies that are not implemented.

Mr. Sokolovic said we had a superintendent that was very focused on student and family engagement. He said it was up to the board to make sure the policies follow state and federal laws.

Ms. Pereira noted in the Title I covenants principals have a say in how money is spent, but they have to do it in consultation with parents.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was told he was not entitled to a syllabus at his son's school, although the parent engagement policy indicates the opposite.

Ms. Pereira said the superintendent could direct principals to inform the PAC officers that it's highly recommended they attend the meeting to be convened by Ms. Brown-Clayton. Mr. Illingworth said it would be important for the superintendent to attend to show her support for the parents.

Mr. Sokolovic said as a parent he would like to attend the meeting without participating verbally. Ms. Pereira said an election process needed to be codified due to the constant problems with elections.

Ms. Bogdanyi said there is an election process in the draft bylaws provided to the committee.

Mr. Illingworth said to be realistic the support system that was in place when the parent center existed is no longer available for the PAC. The board would have to create

something so the entire onus was not on the assistant superintendents.

Ms. Pereira said that whatever is created should be reviewed by an attorney who understands education law to ensure there are no violations of Title I or state statutes.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to fund a position for assisting the PACs. Ms. Pereira said perhaps if funding is restored for the School Volunteer Association it could also become the mechanism to help the PACs. Ms. Pereira suggested Ms. Brown-Clayton discuss that issue with Dr. Johnson and Ms. Siegel.

Ms. Bogdanyi said the school volunteers were wonderful but may not have knowledge of Title I and what the PACs do. Mr. Sokolovic said something would have to be built from the ground up.

Mr. Benejan reported that Ms. Davis responded to his text that she was no longer the PTSO president for Harding High after resigning three months ago. He said this was a big issue in schools around who is using the Title I money in situations like this.

Ms. Pereira asked that the spreadsheets created by Ms. Brown-Clayton be dated as of the date of revision.

Ms. Bogdanyi suggested that principals be asked when the PAC election was held for the officers listed in the data.

Mr. Illingworth moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved. The meeting was adjourned at 7:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the committee on February 21, 2019*