

Thursday, December 20, 2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held December 20, 2018, 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 Ben Walker.

Mr. Walker moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of November 8, 2018. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on providing space for the March for Education Foundation. Timothy Cooper of the March for Education was present.

Mr. Cooper said there may be space available elsewhere, but the group is now really looking for a commitment from the schools to participate in the annual march. He said the march celebrating education had taken place for ten years.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was glad to hear the request for space was not being pushed because when the board makes an exception it opens the door to a lot of groups to make the same request. He said he was appreciative of the work Mr. Cooper was doing.

Mr. Cooper said the march began under the administration of Mayor Fabrizi and John Ramos. He said he would like to see the cheerleaders from the district return to participation.

Mr. Walker said he had seen the parade in the past and videos of it in other years. He said community, ground-based groups do a lot of good work. He suggested the group flesh out more what they want in terms of the district's participation. He added that cheerleaders and school bands might be looking for an opportunity to be visible in a parade such as this.

In response to a question, Mr. Cooper said the parade is held in September or October. He said there will probably be monthly meetings held at city hall. He asked if someone from the district could join in the meetings to help guide the district's participation. Mr. Walker suggested the assistant superintendents provide their e-mail addresses to Mr. Cooper for further communication.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested networking with other groups in the upcoming Males of Color forum. Mr. Walker suggested attending the community conversations being held by the board. Mr. Cooper noted Dr. Johnson was at one of the parades in the past.

The next agenda item was on the school PACs current spending and yearly action plans.

Assistant Superintendent Janet Brown-Clayton noted the report provided was printed on December 12th and there is an update available as of today. She said the goal for the principals was to have at least 50 percent spent, with the goal of 75 percent by February.

In response to a question, Ms. Brown-Clayton said 85 percent of her cohort of schools had spent over 50 percent.

Dr. Christiana Otuwa, assistant superintendent, said all the schools in her cohort are moving forward. The biggest issue is Batalla, where the PTSO person resigned. She said she has informed Fairchild Wheeler to encumber expenditures.

Mr. Walker noted last year the board didn't see the numbers until March and by seeing the numbers now there is time to make improvements.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said the PAC expenditures are monitored through a checklist in meetings with principals. She said the principals wanted to be good stewards of the PAC money. She highlighted the strong work at Cross School.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would be reluctant to see PAC money used for the board's community forums because that would not be in the spirit of parents' Title I initiatives. Dr. Otuwa and Ms. Brown-Clayton said they would look into the issue. Mr. Sokolovic said the board did not address the issue, but it could be viewed as the committee's opinion.

Mr. Walker said the expenditure of the money should be directed by the parent group.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to see the action plans and the staffing of the PACs for the schools that are underutilizing PAC money. Ms. Clayton-Clayton said she was working on PAC officer membership for the Parent Convention and could share it with the committee.

Mr. Sokolovic said the main thing is to make sure the money is spent and the parents are activated.

There was a discussion of the action plans at Barnum and Batalla Schools. Mr. Sokolovic suggested there be a standardized form for reporting. Dr. Otuwa said she agreed.

Mr. Walker said he saw good work in the action plans, however, the second step is to encumber the money to pay for the events. He said the money should be encumbered as soon as possible in the year even if it is intended to be spent later in the school year. He said this would make vendors happier because they can more easily have their invoices paid.

In response to a question, Ms. Brown-Clayton said she didn't know if there was training for new PAC presidents. Mr. Sokolovic noted Ms. Mason's position had been eliminated in the last round of budget cuts.

Eric Alicea was recognized. Mr. Alicea said when Jessica Martinez was the District PAC president the District PAC was torpedoed. He said this eliminated some of the glue that held the PACs together, and now the schools operate in silos. He said there was no training for new PAC presidents and almost none of them know what they're doing.

Mr. Sokolovic said he hoped to get the committee involved in reactivating the District PAC. Mr. Alicea said Supt. Rabinowitz reactivated the District PAC without board approval. Mr. Sokolovic said we had to do it right this time.

Mr. Walker said in the past the District PAC was looked at as something that was a thorn in the side. He said he did not believe Dr. Johnson felt that way.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would bring the item back to the committee, probably in February, to revisit the situation. Ms.

Brown-Clayton said she and Dr. Otuwa look at the issue monthly with the principals.

Mr. Walker said he was liking the progress he was seeing.

The next item was nutrition bids for soy and sun butter.

Vincent Esposito and John Garrity were present. Mr. Esposito said he was energized by the partnership with the committee and the necessity to rebid for the soy butter. He said it is a popular item with the children and there is potential for some savings.

Mr. Esposito said the district is paying about 82 cents per sandwich, and looking at the bid opening of January 10th to get more advantageous pricing. He said there are not that many vendors that can provide the product. Mr. Garrity said two were vendors identified, and one purchases from the other.

Mr. Garrity said the product is in great demand since the district went peanut-free. He said the soy butter sandwiches are served as an alternative to the featured entre of the day. He said he made sure that the two vendors were notified of the January 10th posting.

Mr. Sokolovic and Mr. Walker said no action was needed.

The last agenda item was on unifying Classical Studies Magnet Academy under one roof.

Alan Wallack reported that the Jewett Avenue site would have been ideal. He said Ms. Pereira floated the idea of moving BMA to Harding, but now Bassick will be moving

there. He said a proposed property on Bond Street, the old Dinan Center, is in bankruptcy and it will probably be awarded to a bidder. He said the Harvey Hubbell site on State Street was also purchased.

Mr. Wallack said a lot of the buildings in Bridgeport are five to six stories high, which would not be appropriate for a school.

In response to a question, Mr. Wallack said it is believed the owners are still getting paid their rent at the former Stop & Shop location on Madison Avenue to prevent another supermarket from opening in that location.

Mr. Wallack said there are only eight schools in the entire state, including Bassick, on the state construction priority list.

Mr. Walker said there had been some changes on the City Council. He said there might be more support for using the Catholic Center site as a school. He said he believed property values would go up if there was a school there.

Mr. Wallack said to move a school to Harding for one year and move them at the end of the year does not make financial sense because it costs about \$90,000 to move students from one building to another.

Mr. Walker said since the Jewett Avenue proposal was shot down, the district has looked for alternative locations that do not exist, which could be an argument for pursuing Jewett Avenue again.

Mr. Wallack said a 60,000 square foot building would be needed to accommodate the school.

Mr. Walker said if the district doesn't go into the Jewett Avenue property a charter school might. He said he would like to see the School Building Committee step up on Jewett Avenue. Mr. Sokolovic said he agreed. Mr. Wallack said he could put a second look at Jewett Avenue on the Building Committee's agenda.

Mr. Alicea noted four schools in Bridgeport are located close to liquor stores, so that is not a valid reasoning for opposing the Jewett Avenue site.

Mr. Sokolovic said the same City Council is trying to move a liquor store closer to a school.

Mr. Sokolovic said a lot of work would have to be done to accommodate Bassick students at the old Harding High. He said once Bassick gets its new building, the former Harding will be empty and in improved condition.

In response to a question, Mr. Wallack said the City Council's denial of the Jewett Avenue project prevented that site from being acquired.

Mr. Wallack noted Mr. Weldon was on the School Building Committee and said such requests always sound better from the board than from staff. The next meeting will be the third Thursday in January.

Mr. Wallack said the funding from the state could be another obstacle to the project, as well as the need to obtain city bonding.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested the use of the Lyon Terrace building be considered. Mr. Wallack noted the board occupies two floors of the building.

In response to a question, Mr. Wallack said the Whittier School building had not been used for years and has deteriorated. He said he believed a charter school cancelled plans to move into it once it learned of the condition.

Mr. Walker said every time we have this conversation it comes back to Jewett. He said from a city perspective he didn't see how someone could vote against it. He noted there were new leaders on the City Council.

Mr. Walker moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved. The meeting was adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the committee on January 17, 2019*