

Thursday, March 28, 2019 [Corrected]

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held March 28, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:38 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic and Hernan Illingworth. Board member Maria Pereira was present. Board member John Weldon arrived subsequently as noted.

Mr. Illingworth moved to approve the committee's minutes of February 21, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic. Corrections were noted. The motion was approved by a 1-0 vote. Voting in favor was Mr. Sokolovic. Mr. Illingworth abstained.

Asst. Superintendent Janet Brown-Clayton was present.

Mr. Illingworth moved that item "*number two be moved to six, and move number six to where number two is currently.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on Harding High P-10 expenditures. Mr. Sokolovic said he spoke with parents and heard troubling information after last month's meeting. He said he reported the matter to Dr. Johnson. He said there are two staff members at Harding being paid out of Title I funds. (Ms. Pereira noted at the high school level the grant is IDEA). He said there was a payment of \$510 to a person who order supplies and food. Ms. Brown-Clayton indicated that was approved in the action plan. She said Marlene

Siegel indicated it is allowable to pay someone to do work of the PTSO such as paperwork. She said it was after-school work when the employee was not on the clock.

Mr. Sokolovic said he could probably accept that expense, without liking it, but more controls were needed. He noted the expenditure of \$1,000 to Mr. Coombs, a district employee who owns a tee-shirt company. Ms. Brown-Clayton said that expense was not in the action plan or the budget plan. She said the tee shirts were part of student engagement activities.

Ms. Pereira noted the high school grant is from the Priority Grant. She said the purpose of the expenditures is to engage parents in their child's education.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said the budget plans of the parent organizations are approved by the grants office. The action plan is supposed to be created by the PTSO, the principal and staff members.

Mr. Sokolovic said most PAC and PTSO leaders handle ordering of food.

In response to a question, Ms. Brown-Clayton said Shavonne Davis was the PTSO president when this occurred. She said Crystal Anderson, the secretary at Harding, was submitting the P-10s electronically. There is a provision requiring the person submitting the P-10 to indicate it was an authorized expenditure by the PTSO president.

Ms. Pereira said the PTSO presidents are supposed to sign the P-10 form before they are electronically submitted.

Mr. Sokolovic said the secretary should have evidence of the approval of the PTSO president. Ms. Pereira said the evidence such as a signature protects whoever is submitting the electronic P-10.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed 35 percent of the budget was spent with staff members at Harding. He said he would like more information on what the tee shirts were for. He said it was more glaring because parents indicated they were not being consulted on the expenditures. He said more controls need to be in place. Ms. Pereira noted there was no board policy, but Ms. Siegel has regulations that cover the expenditures. Mr. Sokolovic said basic accounting controls were needed.

Ms. Pereira said the committee had asked for the PAC and PTSO action plans to be submitted. Mr. Sokolovic asked that Ms. Brown-Clayton provide those as soon as possible.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to hear from Mary Tracy, the current PTSO president at Harding. Ms. Brown-Clayton said Ms. Davis was no longer the president after November 30th. She said the P-10 for the tee shirts was submitted on December 4th.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said the tee-shirt expenditure was tied to family engagement.

Tammy Bogdanyi was recognized. She said in her PTSO the P-10 form is still filled out and then presented to the principal, who signs off on it, and then the secretary submits the form electronically.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed the procedure described by Ms. Bogdanyi was a best practice, notwithstanding the processes put in place by Ms. Siegel.

Ms. Pereira said she did not see how tee shirts drives parents to get engaged in their child's education. Mr. Sokolovic said the optics alone are very disturbing. He said, although encumbrances were not allowed after April 1, he did not want to face this problem next year.

In response to a question, Ms. Brown-Clayton said the principal was aware of the two expenditures in question.

Mr. Sokolovic said we need to know if it is allowable for a district employee to be on the list of approved vendors.

Ms. Bogdanyi said in all her years with PAC and PTSO if tee shirts were ever bought it had to come out of fundraiser money, not Title I or Priority funds.

Ms. Pereira asked that Nadira Clarke attend next month's meeting because of her knowledge of the covenants of the grants.

Ms. Pereira noted she provided information that Ms. Martinez incorrectly stated that nobody but parents could make a decision on how to spend money.

Albert Benejan was recognized. He said he had been using P-10s at Bassick for four years. He said he sits down with his PTSO officers before money is spent.

Mr. Sokolovic and Ms. Pereira said there needs to be a requirement for a counter-signature.

Ms. Pereira said it is a problem that the district lost home-school coordinators, Ms. Pavlich, and Ms. Mason.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to send a clear signal that the committee is not looking to eliminate the P-10s because it is a best practice. He said he would like to see Harding's action plan, the invoices relating to the tee shirt expenditure, and the time pertaining to the \$510 that was spent. He said the situation was not passing the smell test.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said Harding did not have a current action plan submitted. She said the plan submitted on December 4th included activities from the previous school year.

Ms. Pereira said the situation was very suspicious

Mr. Sokolovic asked to receive all paperwork and documentation from Harding High for the committee for review, including P-10s, invoices, and time sheets. Ms. Brown-Clayton said she would submit the information electronically and bring paperwork to the meeting. Mr. Illingworth asked that Ms. Clarke attend the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic asked Ms. Brown-Clayton to send the action plans, but he believed a deep look would be required at the Harding situation.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action on a parent engagement policy.

Mr. Sokolovic said he did not believe it would be too difficult to put curriculum or a syllabus online so parents can easily view them.

Mr. Sokolovic said as a parent he had never been provided by a yearlong academic syllabus and the curriculum plan called for the policy. He said this was one of the reasons he ran for the board. He said he could understand how it would be cumbersome to do a syllabus each quarter. He suggested building principals be consulted about what should be in place. He said he consults the Connecticut pacing guide, but many parents do not know what their children are supposed to know at the end of each grade.

Maria Ramos, a parent of a Fairchild Wheeler student, said the syllabus was very beneficial in her case in understanding the concepts her son learns. Ms. Pereira noted Power School lists every homework assignment, but all teachers are not using it consistently. Ms. Ramos said she never received a syllabus before her son went to high school. Mr. Sokolovic noted each concept of mathematics builds on another and students who fall behind have difficulty catching up.

Ms. Bogdanyi said at Bridgeport Military Academy when her children were there each parent was provided a syllabus to be signed and submitted back to the school.

Ms. Pereira said she hated it when the board makes policy and they are just words on a piece of paper, without being implemented.

Mr. Sokolovic said he hears colloquially that parents don't help their children. He said parents can't help their kids if they're not armed with the information of what the students needs to know. He said it may not have to be a syllabus; it could be access to the pacing guide.

Ms. Pereira said under federal Title I laws there cannot be changes to the parent engagement policy unless parents are involved in it and agree to it.

Mr. Illingworth said parents should have access to the full curriculum if they request it, however, the syllabus should definitely be provided. He said there's no one in the district really monitoring parent engagement. He said he knows the assistant superintendents are trying to do it, but they have a lot of other duties. He said the district really needed a person solely focused on parent engagement.

Ms. Pereira said the policy had not been followed even when the district had home-school coordinators, Ms. Mason, and Ms. Pavlich.

Mr. Sokolovic said this would be a work in progress for some time.

Mr. Sokolovic said a parent engagement calendar and tracker did not exist.

In response to a question, Ms. Brown-Clayton said teachers enter attendance in Power School.

Ms. Pereira said she just learned that Hooker School has not had a School Governance Committee(SGC) meeting the entire year. She said that is not the exception, but is prevalent throughout the district. Ms. Bogdanyi said Bridgeport Military Academy did not have an SGC. Ms. Pereira said it was not optional because it was a state statute. She said it is required that the SGC participate in interviews for administrators.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would put SGC item on the next agenda.

Ms. Pereira objected to the provision that encourages the PAC/PTSO president to run for a seat on the SGC.

There was further discussion of the existing parent engagement policy. References to home-school coordinators and the Parent Center should be removed.

The next agenda item was an update on the Parent Convention.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said she had been working with Mr. Benejan and Ms. Bogdanyi. The convention will be held at Housatonic Community College on May 29th. Ms. Bogdanyi distributed a document with proposed expenditures.

In response to a question, Ms. Bogdanyi said Ms. Graham and the Harding choir could not perform due to a conflicting commitment.

Ms. Pereira suggested including information about immigration due to undocumented parents' fear of ICE.

Mr. Illingworth said Juliemar Ortiz, a Bassick graduate who works for the lieutenant governor, will be the keynote speaker on empowering parent leadership. Ms. Bogdanyi said she is not charging for speaking. She said presenters at the workshops are also appearing free of charge.

In response to a question, Ms. Bogdanyi and Mr. Benejan said there was a workshop with an immigration attorney at last year's convention.



Mr. Weldon arrived at the meeting.

Ms. Pereira said it looked like about \$7,000 was encumbered. Ms. Bogdanyi said there is about \$1500 left, and there will be giveaways to parents for \$994, expenses for a decorator, and the purchase of two plaques.

Regarding the next agenda item, Ms. Pereira said the committee's minutes indicated Mr. Sokolovic wanted an updated list of parent organizations. She said she asked that a revision date be put on each version.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said the meeting between with Dr. Johnson and parents would take place after the meetings about the Parent Convention were concluded.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said she would be updating the parent information, including a column with the number of meetings. Ms. Pereira said the committee asked that columns be added indicating the total number of meetings and activities. She said she was concerned that schools are not even having a monthly meeting.

Mr. Benejan said when he e-mails PAC presidents the e-mails often come back as undeliverable or the persons tell him their children are no longer in the district.

Mr. Sokolovic said we had to make sure we don't just have SGCs or PACs on paper.

Ms. Pereira suggested Ms. Brown-Clayton require principals to give her an updated list of PAC members, PTSO members and SGC members monthly. She said that could be quickly updated every month. Mr. Sokolovic said she

believed people had to realize this is a board very focused on parent engagement, and which is very serious about how dollars are spent. He said we could hold people accountable for not giving parents the opportunity to participate.

Ms. Bogdanyi said she can help with the updated listing because she has obtained many corrected e-mail addresses and phone numbers. She said she was concerned because employees of the board were listed as being part of PACs or PTSOs. Ms. Pereira said board employees can be a member, but not an officer making decisions on spending money. She said this had been the case since 2010.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action on reinstituting student representatives bylaws into the 9000 series with possible revisions.

Mr. Sokolovic said Policy 9020 would be the new policy number. He read proposed wording on student representatives. He said it included suggestions provided by Mr. Weldon.

Mr. Sokolovic read the first paragraph: "The Bridgeport Board of Education recognizes the importance of maintaining open communication with the student body. Being cognizant to student interest in the affairs of the board and also of the board's interest in knowing the opinions of those under its charge, it is vitally necessary that the lines of communication between the two groups be as open and effective as possible."

Mr. Illingworth moved "*to approve paragraph 1.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The second paragraph described the election process for student representatives. Mr. Sokolovic urged the elections be held in November. He said September was too close to the beginning of the school year and he did not want to burden the staff. He said if the students are elected in November it will coincide with the term of the board members.

Ms. Pereira said she didn't believe the student representatives should be elected by the students because it would become a popularity contest, and not someone who understand the commitment of coming to board meetings. She said the way it has been done is students submit a letter of interest to the principal, who then selects the representatives. She said elections should take place in September because many students switch schools.

Mr. Sokolovic said he supported students electing the representatives. He said the board members are basically elected via a popularity election as well. He said it would be a great way to teach children about civic obligations. He said it would avoid the problem of student representatives regurgitating information given them by their principals.

Mr. Weldon said he didn't think having elected representatives would stop the student from reading off the information given to them by the principal.

Mr. Illingworth said he supported electing the student representatives. He said it works in other districts. He urged the representatives be elected early in the school year.

There was a discussion of whether the student representatives should be limited to juniors and seniors or

not. Mr. Weldon and Mr. Illingworth said they supported holding the election in September.

Mr. Sokolovic summarized the results of the discussion of the provisions as follows:

“The student body of each high school shall elect one student and an alternate(s) to represent that school as a non-voting member of the Board of Education. Such election shall be schoolwide and take place by the last day in September, with the student receiving the most votes being the primary student representative, and with the remaining alternates serving in descending order.

“Student representatives shall be seated immediately after the election.

“Student representatives shall remain in office until the next election unless school disenrollment or resignation occurs.

“If the primary student representative, for any reason, cannot fulfill their duties the alternate shall serve in rank order in their stead.

“A new alternate shall be selected by the building administrator for the remainder of the term as needed.”

The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic summarized the result of further discussion of subsequent provisions:

“The student representatives may participate in all public meetings(regular, special, committee) as non-voting members of the Board of Education. Students may not

participate in, or attend, any meeting, or portion of a meeting, that is closed to the public.

“The student representatives may speak on any issue on the agenda or motion before the board and may also recommend resolutions and motions for the board’s consideration.

“Students will also report on matters of interest and school happenings once quarterly.

“The students shall receive copies of all meeting agendas, minutes, and other information that are made available to board members.

“Students shall not be provided with any information that is not otherwise available to the public under the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act.”

Mr. Weldon and Mr. Sokolovic said the intent is to give the students an opportunity to speak on the issues before the board.

There was agreement on this wording: “The student members shall communicate with their respective student bodies the essence of the pertinent issues before the board via their respective student councils.”

Ms. Pereira asked why the board members can give committee reports, but the students can’t give reports. Mr. Sokolovic said the students are not full board members.

Mr. Illingworth moved “*to refer the revised 9020 policy to the full board for consideration.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the committee on April 25, 2019*