

Thursday, April 25 , 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April 25, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:55 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic and Hernan Illingworth. Board member Maria Pereira was present.

Mr. Illingworth moved to consider item numbers 3 and 4 on the agenda first. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Illingworth moved to consider item 5 after 4. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Nadira Clarke, director of grants, was present on the agenda item on grant procedures related to family engagement.

Ms. Clarke said the document before the committee was created by the chief financial officer to guide spending parent involvement funds. Priority Grant money is used for high schools and Title I is used for elementary schools. Each school is guaranteed a minimum of \$7 per student.

Ms. Clarke said Delores Mason used to guide the parents through the process and the creation of action plans.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke said the SGC and the PTSO person is supposed to upload the action plans with approval by the principal.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke said the P-10 is an internal document to place orders and it must be submitted by a district employee. She said the clerical submitting is certifying that the parent representative has gone over the plan with them.

Ms Pereira asked that Ms. Siegel adjust the procedure and require that the school retain a hard copy of a signed P-10 with the signature of the principal and the parent. She noted at Harding the parent is claiming the prompt was checked off without her knowledge. She asked why we are paying somebody to process forms when the procedures say school staff will handle it. She said the \$500 paid took away money that could have been spent on parent engagement.

Ms. Pereira said she questioned the expenditure of money on tee shirts from the Priority Grant. Ms. Clarke said the grant indicates it will be used for strengthen parent involvement in the education of children and parents and other community involvement in school and school district programs. She said this is very broad. Mr. Sokolovic said he could see how tee shirts would fit into the rules. Ms. Pereira said she disagreed.

Mr. Illingworth said it was questionable to spend that amount of money when only \$7 per student is provided to the parent organizations.

Mr. Sokolovic said a major red flag for him was the expenditure of the funds to a district employee. Ms Pereira said \$1,700 was spent on tee shirts out of a \$7,000 budget.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke said the purchase of basketball tee shirts was through another grant.

Mr. Sokolovic said he wanted to be clear there was not an attack on people or personnel here; it was an attack on process and to make sure some things don't happen going forward. He said every dollar that escapes from parent engagement and is not spent on engaging parents weakens the core mission of the committee and the board.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Coombs is a beloved teacher and she was not in any way disparaging him. In response to a question, Ms. Clarke said Mr. Coombs's company is an authorized vendor.

Ms. Clarke said the expenditures did not violate any city policies. She suggested a procedure not be created that her office cannot and should not police.

Ms. Pereira said a paper P-10 filed in each school was needed. She said that would protect everybody.

Mr. Sokolovic said Ms. Clarke needed the force of the board behind her with a clear directive.

Michael Testani, vice president of the BCAS, said Harding is the only school that has a print shop. He said all the schools in the district could access it. He suggested being careful about a decision that went against Mr. Coombs because his company provides a lot to the district for free; graduation ticket being an example.

Ms. Pereira said what the committee was looking to implement would add a level of protection to everyone. Mr. Testani said for jobs over \$1,000 the school would be required to get two other quotes.

Mr. Testani said from a BCAS point of view when personnel are eliminated through budget cuts there are effects to how jobs get done. He noted the cuts to home-school coordinators and Ms. Mason and the effect on parent engagement. He said administrators are bombarded with tasks that take time but do not add real value to the educational process.

Mr. Sokolovic said parents should order food themselves for events and not pay a paraprofessional to do so.

The next agenda was on parent engagement expenditures at Harding.

Ms. Pereira noted only extra large sizes of the 175 tee-shirts were ordered.

Dane Brown, principal of Harding High, said the 9th grade students went to the Connecticut Science Center on SAT testing day for a field trip. He said we try to incentivize parents to be part of the experience. He said the tee shirts help in monitoring student on the trip and helps make the parents feel part of the experience. He said the trip involved seven to eight buses, but he did not know how many parents went. He said the students who returned the permission slips received the tee shirts.

Ms. Pereira said she questioned how a tee shirt was going to impact a child's life compared to things like an amazing speaker. Mr. Sokolovic said he did not believe a student getting a tee shirt would fit into parent engagement.

In response to a question, Mr. Brown said parent engagement expenditures are discussed each month. He

noted Ms. Tracy had replaced Ms. Davis as PTSO president at Harding.

Mr. Sokolovic said if the expenses were authorized without the approval of Ms. Davis it could be considered electronic forgery. Mr. Testani said he would urge Mr. Brown not to answer questions about what happened at the time of the agreement to order or not order shirts and make it one word against another. He said we can't guess at what Ms. Davis would say.

Mr. Sokolovic said the issue had germinated from schools not spending their money properly or not spending it at all. He said parents are needed as partners in our schools.

Mr. Testani said he would suggest eliminating principals from parent organizations submitting P-10s. Mr. Sokolovic said that would fly in the face of grant language about consultation between administration and parents.

JoAnn Kennedy was recognized. She said she when she was the PTSO president at Bassick the parent would sign the forms, followed by the administrator. She said each school is supposed to have a MUNIS person to enter the expenditures. Ms. Pereira said that is not the current practice.

Mr. Sokolovic asked Mr. Testani to alert his members as to what is happening here and how to protect themselves in the future.

Ms Pereira and Mr. Sokolovic said they were not accusing Mr. Brown of anything. Mr. Sokolovic said it was a problem that the District PAC did not exist and there was not a district administrator in this area.

Ms. Pereira said she recommended that Ms. Clarke have a workshop with the parent leaders each year. Ms. Clarke said a document to follow already exists. She said financial management workshops are presented to principals in the summer, especially new principals. Ms. Pereira said the parents had to be trained as well, perhaps by a webinar.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested a video be created for PAC and PTSO presidents to watch. Ms. Clarke said she can work on that. She said she spends a good portion of the day meeting with principals using Microsoft Teams.

Ms. Pereira noted the person at Harding was submitting exactly five hours for every single invoice. She said it was unusual that it would be the same length of time on every occasion. She said an invoice was paid in September for the PTSO/SGC meeting and open house.

Mr. Brown said the PTSO meeting was held on the same night as the open house. He said Ms. Harris, who was previously home-school coordinator, is a paraprofessional and she has discontinued to operate in this way. He said the meetings are about two hours. Ms. Pereira said she didn't believe it was reasonable to spend three hours to set up a two-hour meeting.

Mr. Illingworth said he agreed to some extent with Ms. Pereira. He said what he was interested in was moving forward as a board and administration to tighten things up. He said it appeared no rule was broken and at the end of the day the administration paid the invoice.

Ms. Clarke said the action plans are developed to determine how money is spent. Mr. Sokolovic said the elimination of

the parent involvement administrator put everything in the hands of an assistant superintendent who has many other duties.

In response to a question, Tammy Bogdanyi said food is ordered by the PTSOs themselves at BMA and Bassick. Ms. Kennedy said she had always ordered food. Ms. Tracy said she believed she could handle the food and coordinate the events without help.

Mr. Sokolovic said policy was still needed for the other schools.

Ms. Bogdanyi noted Ms. Tracy was a new PTSO president who is still learning the process. She said there are people in the grants office assigned to every school and they can quickly inform parent leaders if a company is an approved vendor. She said she uses P-10 forms to protect herself.

Ms. Kennedy questioned spending so much money on food when the money could be used for trips, books or other things. Mr. Sokolovic said food is a major incentive for busy parents to come to parent events.

Ms. Pereira said parents have experience in arranging birthday parties for their children so they can use the same skills in understanding something like using vendors.

Ms. Pereira said Harding lost \$197 by not encumbering all its funds by April 3rd. Mr. Sokolovic said that was not a terrible percentage, but it could have been spent on pizza to draw parents in.

Ms. Pereira said Barnum School had failed to encumber \$1,658 and Batalla \$1,247.

Ms. Clarke said both Barnum and Batalla have additional grants that had parent involvement elements. Ms. Pereira said that money was intended to supplement their parent engagement and failure to spend the whole amount was not okay.

Ms. Clarke said change orders for expenditures are not allowed after April 3rd. She said this policy is used so the books can be closed at the end of the fiscal year.

Ms. Pereira said she was shocked that Multicultural Magnet is not using all their parent engagement money. Asst. Superintendent Janet Brown-Clayton said she had asked Multicultural several times, but she did not know the reason. Ms. Pereira also noted Marin did not spend all their money. Ms. Brown-Clayton said she thought the amount indicated for Blackham was a mistake because their percentage previously was higher.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said she will provide an answer on all schools that did not spend \$230 and above. Ms. Clarke said the report at the meeting was just run recently.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was more concerned with percentages than actual dollar amounts. He said he was glad to see there were only seven or eight schools in this category.

Mr. Sokolovic said some expenditures involve security costs. Ms. Bogdanyi and Ms. Pereira said security costs are not supposed to be paid through parent engagement. Ms. Clarke said she did not know if it was a mistake on the document or not. Mr. Sokolovic said he would provide information to Ms. Clarke about which schools had security costs in their expenditures

Ms. Bogdanyi discussed an issue at Bridgeport Military Academy where the parent leaders have to leave the building when staff members have left for the day. Ms. Pereira and Mr. Sokolovic asked Ms. Brown-Clayton to look into the matter

The next agenda item was an update on the Parent Convention on May 29th. Ms. Brown-Clayton said all but a few dollars have been spent or encumbered. She said there will be workshops on 504 plans and IEPs and how the state supports families with bilingual and ESL students. Other workshops will be on Internet safety, a math workshop with Mr. Planas, knowing laws and rights as parents, and Census 2020. She added there will be two sessions so parents can attend two different events and workshops.

In response to a question, Ms. Brown-Clayton said no one is being charged to attend the Parent Convention.

Ms. Bogdanyi said there would be a community award and two student awards. She said Dennis Bradley's law firm is providing a \$600 donation for the two students and purchase of plaques.

Ms. Bogdanyi said the committee decided to hire Nilda Barahona for decorating at a very low rate after she resigned from the committee.

Mr. Illingworth moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of March 28, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Illingworth moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved. The meeting was adjourned at 7:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the committee on May 16, 2019