

Wednesday, July 28, 2021

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held July 28, 2021, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:32 p.m. Present were members Chair Albert Benejan and Bobbi Brown. Board member Jessica Martinez arrived subsequently as noted.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Ms. Brown moved to table approval of the committee's minutes of May 27, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the Bridgeport Caribe Youth Leaders(BCYL) funding proposal. John Torres, executive director, was present.

In response to a question, Mr. Benejan said in a collaboration he wanted to see the best education for the kids in the district. Ms. Brown said the biggest thing she looks for is opportunities to learn outside schools and to have that learning match what students are learning in the school.

Mr. Torres said he believed BCYL was in alignment with these visions. He said the organization started in 2003 as a baseball league, but it responded to parents and young people requesting other programs. It was expanded to other sports and education.

Mr. Torres said during Covid the gap in families being served was discovered. He said he spoke to Supt. Testani about what was needed and the steps included working with donors to get Chrome Books and holding virtual meetings with parents. He described the use of a survey to target work by tutors. He also described the success of an interactive program used by tutors.

Mr. Torres said BCYL has distributed close to \$20,000 in food/grocery cards and provided rental assistance.

Mr. Torres said BCYL's math and reading tutoring and SAT prep are held at the University of Bridgeport.

Mr. Torres said the proposal includes training on resume writing, interview skills, and digital success. Seniors in high school will be targeted with trade assessment preparation for those not interested in college.

Mr. Torres also described the approach to teaching coding for gaming. The proposal is to do this at one school in the fall (Claytor) and then move it up to three schools in the winter and spring. In the second year there will be five schools, and in the third year to as many as seven schools. He said Fairfield University and Sacred Heart University will soon be offering scholarships in e-sports.

Ms. Martinez arrived at the meeting.

Mr. Torres said he believed BCYL could reduce the expense structure currently being paid for middle school sports.

Supt. Testani said every child in Grades 6 to 8 will have opportunities to play through intramurals.

Mr. Torres said BCYL scholarship program has produced 22 college graduates and 15 of them are first-time college graduates in the family.

Mr. Torres said BCYL has received a grant from Major League Baseball, including a consultant, to track feedback from the kids in the program.

Supt. Testani said the district will look to track attendance and grades and behavior at the school level of students involved in any collaboration program with the district. He said the district can't provide all the programming that is needed even if teachers are paid for such duties. He said developing community partnerships is critical. He said he was most impressed with the accountability level with parents involved in BCYL.

The superintendent said he gets proposals sent to him quite often, but not with the level of detail that BCYL provided.

In response to a question, Mr. Torres said the program began with his brother in honor of their father, who passed away at a young age, by creating a baseball league that subsequently grew much larger. He said the educational programs are growing because of the improvement the parents see in children.

Ms. Brown said providing support to parents during this Covid period is very crucial.

Mr. Torres said BCYL would be doing in-school tutoring. An assessment would be used to measure soft skills such as confidence level, attendance, and engagement.

Ms. Martinez said she was a product of the BCYL, which is where her parent leadership skills began. She said BCYL was about the whole family, not just the children. She described the skills she acquired.

Supt. Testani said the biggest thing is to expose kids to new programs. He said once students are engaged the other things just happen. He said he received a lot of unsolicited calls about how BCYL could help the district, but with the influx of federal dollars there are now many more offers. He said the approach from Mr. Torres was superior because it was more about how they can help us.

Mr. Benejan said he was impressed by the collaborators and funders that BCYL has. Mr. Torres said he was very blessed by the backing from national organizations.

Mr. Benejan noted the budget numbers had been provided to the committee. Mr. Torres said the objective is to reach 5,000 kids over three years, which breaks down to \$329 per student. He said BCYL is not looking to come out of this with a surplus.

Supt. Testani said the per-hour payments in the proposal are lower than what the district would have to pay a teacher, which would be a minimum of \$38.50.

Ms. Brown asked whether action was time-sensitive. Mr. Torres said BCYL had to recruit staff and personnel. He noted the budget includes a special education teacher to assist students and tutors.

There was a discussion of holding a special meeting of the board or further discussion at the committee level.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said he would expect the board to evaluate the collaboration at the end of the year as to whether it wishes to go forward. He said Mr. Torres providing quarterly reports to the committee would be important.

There was a discussion of when to schedule the next meeting. Ms. Martinez said she would like to see this approved before the end of her tenure as a board member. Mr. Benejan said he knew Mr. Sokolovic wanted to ask some questions.

Mr. Torres said he wanted to begin the in-school tutoring on October 11th to run through June, which is the volunteer component. The first fall cohort of Saturday tutoring would begin in September. He said the sooner the better for board approval.

Ms. Brown urged the matter be pushed to the full board. The superintendent said it would great to have the program in place when back-to-school nights are held.

Ms. Brown moved *“to push this to the full board for review.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

Ms. Brown moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

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

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the committee on September 23, 2021