

Thursday, June 16, 2022

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held June 16, 2022, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. Present were members Chair Albert Benejan and Bobbi Brown\*. Board member Joe Sokolovic was present. Committee member Erika Castillo arrived subsequently noted. (\*remote participation).

Ms. Brown moved to approval of the committee's minutes of April 28, 2022. The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

The next agenda items on principals and PACs, BCYL update, a chess tournament, lacrosse, the talent show, and the district parent handbook were tabled.

The next agenda item was on a special education advisory council

Carli Rocha-Reaes, director of school counseling, said one of the special education supervisors suggested to the superintendent the idea of putting together an advisory group of parents to provide feedback. She said a parent also suggested a workshop be held on special education.

Ms. Rocha-Reaes said this perhaps this could be a component of the District PAC to provide feedback on how parents can be supported. Mr. Benejan said in the past the

District PAC had a person, Angel Resto, who took the lead on special education.

Ms. Brown and Mr. Sokolovic said they were in support of the suggestion.

Ms. Castillo arrived at the meeting.

The next agenda item on student grades and promotions was tabled.

The next agenda item was a comprehensive bullying report.

Dementred Young, director of social work/interim executive director of specialized instruction, was present. His first slide showed substantiated 25 bullying cases across the district at 12 schools, with the most at Dunbar and Harding. He said the names of the students are provided to the state.

Ms. Brown said there was a school mentioned by parents and students at a Regular Meeting that was not noted in the report. Mr. Benejan said he would inform Mr. Young about that school later so there can be an investigation.

Mr. Sokolovic said he commended the two schools for the most cases for their reporting. He said it is hard to tell people sometimes something is wrong in your building. Mr. Young said when bullying is seen at a school there is professional development provided. He said professional development is also provided at schools with no incidents officially reported despite anecdotal complaints.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said the largest schools with zero substantiated incidents were Batalla and Bassick. Mr. Sokolovic said it is possible children are having

issues at the schools and are not telling anybody about it. He said schools with zero reports are much more concerning to him than schools with large numbers. He said he can't believe there are zero incidents at a large school no matter how good the school climate is.

In response to a question, Mr. Young discussed a hypothetical situation where a teacher did not take action on reported bullying. Mandated reporting would apply to a situation where a student was being abused by an adult.

Mr. Benejan described an incident when a bullied student took his own life.

Mr. Young said there were 121 bullying allegations for the school year, with 27 schools reporting incidents. The most reports were at Johnson and Hooker Schools.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said there is a grant provided to each school on bullying related activities such as pep rallies and buddy benches.

Lynn Stephens, community/family engagement coordinator, said she oversees the restorative practices facilitators, and they work at eleven schools to repair harm between students or staff.

Mr. Young provided a breakdown by race and ethnicity. The substantiated cases included 11 Hispanic students and 14 African American students. He said the racial breakdown in the city is 29.8 percent African American and 56.25 Hispanic students. He said he would check to see if professional development was needed in this area.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said there is not a racial breakdown of the survivors of bullying. He said he would look into obtaining that information without breaking confidentiality.

Mr. Young said he used the 2019-20 school year, before Covid, as a comparison to the current school year. In that year, there were 35 cases of substantiated bullying and 141 cases of allegations.

Mr. Sokolovic said the board members emphasized in the past that it was unacceptable for large schools to have zero reported incidents. He said the pressure brought by board members led to having no schools with zero incidents reported. Mr. Young said he believed the initial board comments were in 2017-18. Mr. Sokolovic said perhaps the staff had suffered a summer slide during Covid.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said once an incident is identified a lot of services are provided to prevent something catastrophic. He said he would address later an individual case mentioned by board members. Mr. Benejan said he did not want parents who come to the board with complaints to feel they are ignored.

Mr. Young said sometimes the outcome of investigations cannot be revealed because the perpetrators also have confidentiality rights. Creative ways are used to let parents know there was a consequence.

Ms. Brown said we have to make sure we emphasize to parents that there is a process involved and it is going to take some time.

The next agenda items were on the wellness committee's annual report, the local school wellness policy triennial assessment, and an update to the district wellness policy.

John Garrity, director of food and nutrition, was present, along with Dawn Postolowski of the nutrition center, the point person on the project.

Ms. Postolowski thanked the wellness committee for their contributions. She said federal law requires the local education agency or school district to develop a local wellness policy to promote the health of students and address child obesity. The goals must include nutrition education, physical activity, nutrition guidelines for foods available, implementation measurements, and involving parents and students, the school board, and administrators. An annual progress report is required to the superintendent and the board.

Ms. Postolowski said in the 2021-22 school year the district served free meals to all students via the USDA Community Eligibility Provision. She described the benefits of the program. She also described the at-risk supper program and Lighthouse Program component. She said a fresh fruit and vegetable grant was awarded to 28 schools this year, for a total of \$899,262.

Ms. Postolowski said the district participates in the healthy food certification. She said the Connecticut standards exceed the USDA's standards, which focuses on moderating portion sizes, eliminating trans fats and increasing the consumption of more nutrient-rich foods.

Ms. Postolowski said the district participated in summer feeding throughout June, July, and August of 2021, at 26

schools and 27 community sites, with free breakfast and lunch to all children 18 and under. She said 181,415 meals were provided. USDA waivers were used last year to offer grab-and-go feedings. It is projected there will be 60 sites for service this summer.

Ms. Postolowski said the wellness policy is posted for teachers and parents. She said initiatives for 2022-23 are to increase community partnerships and develop a three-year strategic plan.

Ms. Postolowski said the triennial assessment is federally required, and required to be posted to the website, along with notification to the state Department of Education.

Ms. Postolowski said the assessment was conducted using a quantitative assessment tool. The district's policy is compared to a model policy to identify strengths and areas for growth. She displayed a slide with the six different areas of policy.

Ms. Postolowski described some results, including the need to update some of the written policies.

Ms. Postolowski said she learned elementary students are getting 20 minutes of recess on full school days to get physical activity. She said she heard a lot of good anecdotal information that teachers are implementing a lot of movement breaks in classrooms.

Ms. Postolowski displayed a slide with the areas where policy language would be updated. She said the topics under opportunities for growth would be addressed by the district wellness committee in the next school year. She said staff wellness would likely be included.

In response to a question, Ms. Postolowski said board approval is not needed to post the material on the website, but we wanted to make the board aware of what it is and what it means.

Ms. Castillo moved “*to bring to the full board the changes for the district wellness policies.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved,

Ms. Brown thanked the nutrition department for their efforts to make food available in the city, especially during school breaks.

Mr. Benejan said today was the last meeting of the school year and he thanked everyone present.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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