

Thursday, September 23, 2021

MINUTES OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILILES
COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF
EDUCATION, held September 23, 2021, at Central High
School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:07 p.m. Present were
Chair Albert Benejan and member Joseph Sokolovic.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the minutes of the meetings
of May 27, 2021, and July 28, 2021. The motion was
seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on parent concern on
communication with staff and principals. Mr. Benejan said
he had heard a lot of complaints on this from parent leaders.
He noted the parent leaders are contributing their time
without pay. He said parents are his priority. He said
principals have told parents they cannot be in the buildings
or they are not allowed to order some items.

Mr. Benejan said Supt. Testani has indicated that PACs and
PTSOs should be left alone to do their job. Mr. Benejan said
he would never give up because his parents need him.

Herminio Planas, executive director of elementary education,
said when someone has an issue that is not resolved by a
principal the best thing to do is to contact one of the
executive directors: Dr. Jenkins, Dr. Morgan or himself. He
said concerns are responded to within 24 hours. He added
that we work for the public.

Mr. Benejan said he knows Mr. Planas and the executive directors are doing their jobs with special care, but we have people that don't care.

Carli Rocha-Reaes, director of school counseling/parent relationships, said it's important for parents to hear we are there for them by holding monthly roundtables with the superintendent. She said support is being provided by Lynn Stephens, community/family engagement coordinator, with help in creating action plans and budget.

Mr. Benejan said he objected to PACs being removed from rooms. He said he had visited seven schools to help with budgets. He said at one school \$2,000 of supplies were removed from a PAC room.

Mr. Sokolovic said this has been a problem through three superintendents. The only time there is progress is when it is linked to evaluations. He said there were schools with zero percent spending on parent engagement in the past. He suggested speaking to the superintendent about setting a metric in the principals' evaluation. He said if parents aren't engaged, students are not learning at home. He added parent engagement drives outcomes and student performance. He suggested there be professional development for principals about parent engagement.

The next agenda item was on parent involvement allocations. Mr. Benejan said a lot of times parents have problems with vendors due to slow payments by the board. Ms. Rocha-Reaes said the information in the packet showed the budget allocations for each school, which included significant increases. She said the process can create roadblocks when looking for vendors. She said she is working with Ms. Stephens to provide parents with the

popular and easily accessible vendors broken down by categories. She said Ms. Stephens will provide support in submitting budget and action plans into the portal on the website.

Mr. Benejan emphasized the parent engagement money is to be spent for the parents and to educate parents, and not to order a lot of food. He said he would be on top of this. Ms. Rocha-Reaes said the percentages of spending will be monitored so we're not scrambling to spend the money at the end.

The next agenda item was on the nutrition center and the wellness committee.

John Gerrity, director of food and nutrition, said the department lost over 50 employees between March 2020 and the beginning of the school year. Interviews for fulltime and part-time cafeteria workers have been ongoing. There are still vacancies to fill.

Mr. Gerrity said some schools have added an additional lunch period to create more distancing, which has created a little more labor expense.

Mr. Gerrity there are issues with supply chains in obtaining food and paper supplies.

Mr. Gerrity said the board had a wellness policy on its website, which is supposed to be reviewed by the wellness

committee. He said he will contact the superintendent to form a new wellness committee, which includes slots for parents.

Mr. Gerrity said before Covid the department reached out to try to provide supper meals for students involved in after-school activities.

The next agenda item was on PAC/PTSO updates.

Mr. Benejan expressed concern about the elections. Ms. Stephens said she has communicated with educators to make sure they are working on elections. She said several have said they are waiting until next week's open houses. Mr. Benejan said some of the lists of parent leaders contain outdated information and he would not tolerate it this year.

Mr. Benejan said communications with PAC and PTSO was very important.

Mr. Sokolovic said the parents had to meet us halfway. He noted there are often phone blasts and communications on social media and he often hears from some people that they did not hear about events or issues.

Mr. Benejan said he wanted to see the e-mail addresses of parent leaders are available so parents can communicate with them. He said in the past some parent leaders have wanted to keep their contact information private. He said such parents should be not the leaders.

Mr. Benejan said the District PAC bylaws have been approved and there now needs to be an election for the District PAC. He said officers have to be parents of district school children.

Mr. Sokolovic said when the District PAC is up and running it would make the jobs of Ms. Rocha-Reaes and Ms. Stephens much easier.

The next agenda item was on the School Governance Councils(SGC). Ms. Stephens said work was going on with the October 1st deadline coming up. Ms. Rocha-Reaes said the goal is to have an updated PAC/PTSO list and an updated SGC list for all the schools.

Mr. Sokolovic noted there were a lot of state mandates attached to SGCs.

The next agenda item was on the Parent Convention. Mr. Benejan said we now have \$27,000 available due to money from prior years. He said he has spoken to Supt. Testani about it. Mr. Planas said a committee needed to be formed.

Mr. Benejan urged parents contact him or Ms. Rocha-Reaes or Mr. Planas with their ideas about the convention.

The next agenda item was a bullying report. Dementred Young, director of social work, noted the terminology in Power School about victims is being changed to allegations. He said in the five weeks of school there have been five allegations, with the schools being Hooker, Cross, Blackham, and Harding. Two cases at Harding have been substantiated.

Mr. Benejan said he would e-mail Mr. Young about things to check on it. He said he believed Mr. Young would say, why did they never tell me about this.

The next agenda item was on assaults. Mr. Planas said the incidents were broken out by school. He said the number of fights or physical aggression was 103 last year, which involved 101 different people. He said 36 of the incidents were in classrooms; 20 in hallways; 11 in cafeterias; 11 in playgrounds; and 8 out of school, but on school grounds.

Mr. Planas said we're working diligently with these students so things do not grow. Ms. Rocha-Reaes noted there are ten additional guidance counselors and ten more social workers this year.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said physical aggression includes pushing someone.

The next agenda item was on the Bridgeport Caribe Youth Leaders. Ms. Rocha-Reaes said she and Ms. Stephens were working with Caribe primarily on tutoring. Caribe is building up tutors and the district is working on the referral process. Another program is Success 2.0 for seniors to be held at Central High.

The next agenda item was on Bridgeport Youth Lacrosse. Don Wilson, president of the organization, said it was a year-round program that provides after-school services in sports such as lacrosse, track and field, and soccer. He said he wanted to get information out to parents about the programs, which are low cost, to make it easier for kids to participate in sports. There are also yoga sessions for parents and kids. He said there is also mentoring, tutoring, SAT prep, and leadership development available.

Mr. Wilson said the organization has been active for 14 years. He noted lacrosse is a sport with a lot of college scholarships available. He said he would like to present to

the PACs and the schools to increase awareness of the opportunities. He said grants were received, which help with offering scholarships for participation.

Mr. Benejan said he would send Mr. Wilson's flyers to PAC leaders.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 6:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod