

Thursday, January 16, 2020

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held January 16, 2020, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic and Bobbi Brown. Albert Benejan arrived subsequently as noted.

Ms. Brown moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of October 24, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and approved by a 1-0 vote. Voting in favor was Mr. Sokolovic. Ms. Brown abstained.

The next agenda item was on the goals of the committee for the current school year. Mr. Sokolovic said he wanted to emphasize parent engagement and involvement. He said he hoped to see all the PACs fully staffed and fully engaged with their principals. He said good strides were made last year, but there is still a long way to go.

The next agenda item was on student discipline and arrest data.

Herminio Planas, executive director of elementary education, discussed the data presented. He said there have been 29 total expulsions so far this year. Mr. Sokolovic requested the year-to-date totals for last year as well. Mr. Planas said the data for 2019-20 is divided by race and gender.

Mr. Sokolovic asked if the data could be presented to highlight disparities and outliers.

Mr. Planas said gains have been made in high school chronic absenteeism. He noted disciplinary actions increase chronic absenteeism, so trends are favorable.

Mr. Sokolovic said a recurring theme on the committee would be arrest data and the PAC spending.

JoAnn Kennedy was recognized. She asked if the percentage of the students presented for expulsion who were eventually expelled was available. Mr. Planas said he did not have that information and the decisions on expulsions are made by an independent officer.

Mr. Sokolovic requested the data be provided on expulsion referral rate versus actual expulsions. He also requested the data from last year.

Mr. Benejan arrived at the meeting.

The next agenda item was PTSO/PAC leadership and vacancies.

Mr. Planas said the data provided is updated through December 31st. New data through yesterday indicates the vast majority of schools now have PAC leadership, with mainly community members missing.

Mr. Benejan explained how the schools PACs were formed. He emphasized it is the responsibility of the parents to lead the PAC, not the building administrators. He described how the PAC budget is created and the role of the action plans.

Mr. Planas said he was working on getting working e-mails and addresses for the PAC officers. He noted they have the right not to share that information.

Mr. Sokolovic said this effort began last year due to unspent funds that were available to PACs at some schools.

Mr. Sokolovic welcomed parent leaders from Geraldine Claytor Magnet Academy. Myriah Kwak, PAC president, and Leola Young, PAC vice president, were present.

Ms. Kwak said she believed there was no PAC money allocated to the school. She said the principal indicated the budget set by the prior president could not be changed.

Mr. Benejan said the PAC leaders contacted him and he met with them. Ms. Kwak said the principal indicated he was in charge of the PAC money. Ms. Young said she had no knowledge of the expenditures that had been made.

In response to a question, Ms. Kwak said the PAC election was in October.

Nadira Clarke, grants director, said the P-10s for expenditures at Claytor were submitted in October and November. The purchases were for food. Ms. Young said she did not know about the purchases. Ms. Kwak said a turkey bingo was held in November, but there was only a small amount of food available.

Mr. Planas said he would speak to Dr. Morgan, who supervises Claytor School, and have her contact the PAC leaders.

Ms. Kwak said she feels like the PAC has no voice or a say in what goes on. Mr. Planas said he would be following up. Mr. Benejan said principals should know the parents control the PAC budget.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke said there were still technology issues preventing a planned video seminar for PAC leaders. She said she would check with Mr. Testani and look into it.

Angel Resto was recognized. He said he had received a call from the Central PTSO president who indicated there were problems with her budget and office space.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested a districtwide e-mail to all principals indicating what is going on is not acceptable. Ms. Clarke said principals were notified at the beginning of the school year that plans needed to be completed, along with a timeline. She said there is a workbook available to principals and PAC leaders.

Mr. Planas said this topic would be discussed at the next meeting with principals.

Mr. Benejan said he has met with many PAC leaders at their schools with the permission of Mr. Testani. He said we need to support the parents.

Mr. Sokolovic said Dr. Johnson included parent participation in her evaluation of principals, and the board included parent engagement in Dr. Johnson's evaluation. He noted the report indicated seven schools had made no expenditures.

Ms. Young said a PAC event would be held tomorrow at Claytor School. She said the principal indicated there was no money available for refreshments.

Ms. Clarke indicated there was a timeline necessary for placing orders and making expenditures. She added there were requirements for getting quotes on products to be purchased.

Tammy Bogdanyi said Bassick and BMA were going through similar problems with the purchasing process, which has been changed. Ms. Clarke described the process that should be used, which includes the vendor sending an invoice to the central office in the case of non-food items.

Mr. Benejan described the process of gathering quotes for expenditures and the subsequent steps PACs have to take. He said training was needed for the PAC leaders.

Mr. Benejan questioned whether some of the listed PAC leaders on the list were actually active and participating in the school. He noted members at large have to be parents. Mr. Sokolovic pointed out another school that seemed to lack officers.

Mr. Benejan said he notified Mr. Testani about a school where the principal was trying to do a PAC election without the participation of the PAC and parents.

In response to a question, Ms. Bogdanyi described how to fill the vacancies that occur in the PACs. She said the executive board can appoint someone to fill vacancy until the next election.

Mr. Planas said he did not recall principals receiving professional development in the PAC area. He said he would bring the issue to the district core leadership.

Mr. Sokolovic noted Blackham's PAC was extremely active.

Mr. Sokolovic said Mr. Testani would be having a meeting with PAC presidents on January 22nd where District PAC bylaws would be discussed. He added the bylaws belong to the parents and it would not be a decision of the board.

Mr. Benejan said that the board had to support the parents. Mr. Sokolovic said he looked forward to a dialogue back and forth between the board and the parents.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke said a meet-and-greet session would not be eligible for expenditures because it would not include an academic or educational component. There was a discussion of how to incorporate other elements into such an event.

Ms. Brown moved that the meeting be adjourned. The notion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved. The meeting was adjourned at 7:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod