

Thursday, October 1, 2020

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held October 1, 2020, by video conference, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:10 p.m. Present were Chair Albert Benejan, and members of the committee Joe Sokolovic, and Bobbi Brown. Board member Sybil Allen was present.

Mr. Benejan noted he was streaming the meeting over Facebook Live because some parents have difficulty connecting to the district's website.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the committee's minutes of June 18, 2020. The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the Title I parent allocation budget.

Herminio Planas, executive director of elementary education, said Carli Rocha-Reaes would speak about the topic. Mr. Benejan noted Ms. Rocha-Reaes's father was an amazing principal of his sons' school in the past.

Ms. Rocha-Reaes said initially this year's allocation was set for \$7.00 per student, but it was later bumped up to \$8.73. She said she has been working with PAC/PTSO and school leaders to develop the school parent involvement plans. She said the plan looks for two academic goals, one behavioral goal, and one climate of partnership goal. She said it is a

little tricky during these times to find creative ways to spend the money at each school.

Ms. Rocha-Reaes said schools are able to purchase instructional materials, supplies and equipment to achieve one or more goals of furthering the parent involvement. She said once the plan is created by the parent group it is signed off by the president, who submits it electronically. When the plan is submitted, it is routed to the principal, who reviews it to make sure it was the agreed-upon plan. The principal gives a final approval and sends it to the grants office.

Mr. Benejan said the September 28th deadline was difficult for some of the parent leaders. Ms. Rocha-Reaes said she has been working with some of the parent organizations who have had difficulties. She said some schools have a plan for holding an election for PAC president and a future submission date.

Mr. Sokolovic asked there be a report at the next meeting on schools that still need to submit reports or hold elections.

In response to a question, Ms. Rocha-Reaes said she had been meeting through Teams with parent leaders and in some cases in-person.

Mr. Benejan said parents were confused because they are often being told they can't come to schools because of the virus, but he said Mr. Testani has said holding a short parent conference is allowable to discuss the action plans. He said he doesn't want to push the parents away. He said he appreciated Ms. Rocha-Reaes being in her position.

Ms. Rocha-Reaes said she has heard the parent leaders' frustration at being unable to meet. She said she has held

meetings online and that also include school administrators. She said two parent leaders had met her at her office at city hall. She said she believed working as a point person with the parents will help them get the answers they need.

Mr. Benejan said he greatly appreciated what Ms. Rocha-Reaes was saying and he was greatly relieved that he could refer parent leaders to her. He said the money spent had to be for the parents, not the schools or the students, even though helping the parents will also help their children.

Ms. Rocha-Reaes said she had heard from the parents that there were was too much money being spent on food rather than instructional resources and equipment to improve parent involvement.

Mr. Sokolovic said food should not be a major component but it was important because a lot of parents work multiple jobs and food helps attract parents to the events. Ms. Rocha-Reaes and Mr. Benejan said they agreed. Mr. Benejan said there was a problem because some PACs spent all their allocation on food.

In response to a question, Ms. Rocha-Reaes said it is up to PAC leaders and the school administrator to determine the resources needed for events, including food. Mr. Sokolovic asked if there could be a suggested allocation percentage, although the board cannot mandate how the money is spent.

Mr. Benejan said he has received comments on Facebook Live from PAC leaders who say the problem is the food is very expensive, with costs rising. He suggested when parent events are held the board members be invited to support them, although they will not be there to tell the parents what to do.

The next agenda item was on a COVID-19 workshop. Mr. Benejan said it was important for PAC leaders to have workshops for parents on the situation.

Herminio Planas, executive director of elementary education, said Mr. Testani indicated he would speak to Ms. Earley, the nursing director, to set up an online workshop. He said Mr. Testani indicated a lot of the parents tune into Facebook Live events, so that is a possibility. Mr. Planas said having people coming in and out of buildings interferes with cleaning of schools; also, the space might have to be large to hold a meeting at this time. He said online meetings are safer. He added there is a lot of information on the district's website, in both Spanish and English, which would answer many of the questions that would come up.

Mr. Benejan agreed the website was phenomenal, but a lot of parents are not adept at the internet or computers. He agreed that a good first step would be an internet event.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was finding that given security costs and custodial time it was probably not worth it to hold his committee meetings in person, which only one or two persons would attend anyway. He said he realized parent involvement was crucial, but there should probably be a pause on in-person events.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested the students could help their parents log onto the Teams platform to participate in virtual meetings.

Mr. Planas noted the district was following an opening plan, and part of it is to ensure minimizing the amount of people coming in and out of buildings.

Ms. Brown asked if Teams could also be used for breakout sessions. She said we have to be as creative as possible to help the parents adjust. Mr. Benejan said translation of materials was important.

The next agenda item was on the parent survey. Mr. Planas said 15,319 responses were received, of which 55 percent chose in-person instruction and 45 chose distance learning as of August 21st.

The next agenda item was on the PAC/PTSO budgets per school.

Ms. Rocha-Reaes said the per student allocation final amount is \$8.73, for a total of \$178,755 for all the schools for this school year, an increase of \$35,000 from last year. She said the allocation for each school has been provided to the committee, along with the percentage of money used at each school.

Mr. Benejan said last year there were a lot of expenditures at the last moment at the end of the year. He said he wanted to see money spent throughout the year and he told Mr. Testani the committee would be on top of this.

Ms. Rocha-Reaes said her role includes running reports on the expenditures.

Mr. Sokolovic said the board had four parents or ex-parents of public school students and parental involvement is a major portion of the district. He said the money has got to be spent. He said he believed the board will be watching the expenditures.

Dr. Selena Morgan, executive director of elementary education, asked if it was possible to hold parent meetings at another venue other than school buildings. Mr. Planas said he would look into that. Ms Brown suggested he also investigate whether food would be allowed into the other locations.

The next agenda item was on the parent convention. Mr. Benejan noted last year's convention could not be held because of the virus and whether one is possible this year is not known.

Mr. Sokolovic said the funds for the convention were in a district events line that could be spent on other initiatives. Mr. Planas said last year unspent money was rolled over in Title I. This year \$18,000 is allocated for the parent convention. Mr. Sokolovic said he did not want to see another large rollover this year. He suggested the District PAC members come up with a Plan B for the convention in case it is needed.

Mr. Benejan suggested looking at this in January or February. Mr. Planas said he was not sure of how often Title I money could be rolled over; Ms. Siegel would be able to answer that.

The next agenda item was on the District PAC and bylaws. Mr. Benejan said a District PAC was needed to help the parent leaders. He said he was the bilingual secretary in the District PAC in the past. He noted Supt. Testani was going to have a meeting with the PAC/PTSO leaders.

Mr. Sokolovic said he agreed a District PAC was needed and noted that wealthy districts have central parent bodies, which leads to stronger advocacy. He said before the

pandemic it seemed we were on the verge of reestablishing the District PAC. He said the bylaws needed to be presented to the parent leaders for their decision on whether they want to adopt them and form the District PAC. He suggested an agenda item that Supt. Testani call a meeting of the district parent leaders and report back on the results. He said after review of the proposed bylaws by the attorney they are basically there awaiting approval by the PAC members.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to add to the agenda for the superintendent to call together a meeting of the districtwide PAC president and PTSO presidents for the purpose of reviewing and approving and accepting the minutes [sic] and to decide whether or not they want to have a district PAC.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod