

Thursday, November 8, 2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held November 8, 2018, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:33 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic and Maria Pereira.

Superintendent Aresta L. Johnson, Ed.D, was present.

Ms. Pereira moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of October 24, 2018, with one edit. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic. The motion was unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira moved that Item 7 be considered next. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next item was discussion and possible action on community forums.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was a community forum yesterday that was sparsely attended. He said more strategies were needed.

Dr. Johnson said the forums were discussed at the administrative council meetings. She said there was a reminder to administrators to come out and support colleagues at the forums. She said Michael Testani did a great job leading the effort. She said a draft template was created for schools to send out. She said Principal Egri sent

the letters home with her students at Bryant School. She added Mr. Testani sent out countless reminders and e-mails of encouragement to get people to come out.

Dr. Johnson said because the first one was held at Bassick it was hoped that other administrators would be able to get an idea of the format and be prepared for future forums.

Mr. Testani said he was disappointed in the turnout by parents and staff. He noted the board gets pushback when budget season comes around and items are discussed in regard to cuts. He said this was an opportunity to begin the discussion and ask questions about the district's budget.

Mr. Testani said the next forum would be at Hooker School and he has requested the principal to inform parents about it at next week's report card conferences. He said principals have been advised to use phone blasts and social media to communicate with parents.

Mr. Testani said magnet schools, who pull students from all over the city, should be notifying parents of all the forums. He said he did not believe that was done. He noted the future forums will begin at 5:30, instead of 4:30. He said the later start would coincide with the dismissal of Lighthouse and perhaps be more convenient for parents.

Mr. Testani said he mentioned the forums to the organizations participating in the Working For a Better Bridgeport meeting. He said this would help spread word through faith-based organizations.

Mr. Sokolovic said he thought board members should reach out to the teachers' union. Dr. Johnson said it would be

helpful if board members reached out because City Council members are reaching out to their constituents.

Dr. Johnson said Mr. Langan mentioned City Council members were hesitant to come to the forums because they viewed it as a political situation. She said administrators had also mentioned the politics behind it as well.

Ms. Pereira said she would tell them to quit and get another job if they don't want to stand up and fight for their kids.

Mr. Testani said he was told at the meeting today at the government center that an audit of the board's finances was needed. He said he responded that such persons should tell us where to look because there's no money to hide.

Mr. Sokolovic said some City Council members are saying they're feeling like they're going to be attacked. Ms. Pereira said she was going to attack them at Thomas Hooker School. Mr. Sokolovic said that would tank the whole thing.

Ms. Pereira said the only way council members can be held accountable is at the polls. Mr. Sokolovic said we need the council members as partners. Ms. Pereira said she knew this inside and out compared to Mr. Sokolovic. Mr. Sokolovic said Ms. Pereira's methods of attacking over the previous years has not worked. Ms. Pereira noted the board had been underfunded for three decades.

Mr. Sokolovic said he wanted to work hand-in-hand with the City Council and he was sure that maybe six or seven other board members felt the same way.

Ms. Pereira noted she owned an entire district of the city and will drive people to the polls to oust people who will not fund

the public schools. She said years of presenting facts and data hasn't worked.

Ms. Pereira said as a board member she felt embarrassed; out of the 2,000 students contained at the four schools the forum was directed at only seven parents attended, and there were no Bassick parents there. She said that was a direct reflection on the principal.

Ms. Pereira noted she said previously it was critical to phone bank the forum.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said the Greater Bridgeport Latino Network and Generation Now had not been contacted. Ms. Pereira said she hates Faith Acts for Education and last year they created confusion by requesting \$4 million from the City council when the board needed \$11 million, but urged they be contacted.

Ms. Pereira urged groups such as Rev. Stallworth's IMA alliance, Make the Road, the Regional Business Council as well as the BEA, NAGE, AFSCME and the nurses' union be contacted.

Mr. Sokolovic urged Ms. Pereira reach out to the BEA due to her excellent relationship with the BEA. Ms. Pereira said it was different coming from the superintendent.

Ms. Pereira said holding the forum the day after Election Day was not a good idea. She urged a flyer be created in place of the letter sent home to the parents.

Ms. Pereira said the outside groups had large memberships and grassroots organizing abilities. She said the School Volunteer Association could be approached.

Ms. Pereira said the parent organizations for the schools were not present, including Mr. Benejan of Bassick. Mr. Testani said the absence of the PAC and SGC members was disappointing.

Ms. Pereira said the student presentations were too long and should be presented after the other speakers because the parents left after the students spoke. She urged voter registration be emphasized, including information about the ability to vote in primaries for those who will be 18 by November 5, 2019.

Dr. Johnson said Gail Janensch will be at the next few forums in regard to voter registration.

Ms. Pereira said all the principals should be prepared with a handout indicating the cuts they've taken over the last three years. She said the most prepared individual was the Curiale principal, while the Bassick principal was totally unprepared.

Dr. Johnson said the principals were informed of the approach to take. Ms. Pereira said the principals had to be held accountable.

Ms. Pereira said as a grassroots organizer she has learned that phone-banking works far better than e-mail blasts. Dr. Johnson said there were no employees on administrative leave available to make phone calls. Ms. Pereira suggested the School Volunteer Association(SVA). Mr. Testani said he did not know how the SVA would access telephone numbers.

Eric Alicea was recognized. He said Classical Studies parents did not receive any communications about the forum other than a notice on the wall in the office.

Dr. Johnson said it was possible to arrange bus transportation for future forums if the principals make that request.

Mr. Testani said the date was chosen because it was faculty meeting day and the teachers could have gone from the staff meetings to the forum. Ms. Pereira said it was good to have employees at such events, but more parents and students are needed.

Ms. Pereira said what happened yesterday cannot happen again.

Mr. Sokolovic said the content of the phone blasts might have to be a bit scary and warn against preventing cuts.

Dr. Johnson said she believed phone banking could be done. She noted some of the high schools have six to seven secretaries. She added she needed the help of the building principals to get people out.

Mr. Testani questioned how a principal could be held accountable for parents not attending a meeting that they sent out notices about. He noted only about 30 percent of parents attend report card conference.

Dr. Johnson said she would work on trying to improve the attendance through the strategies discussed tonight.

Mr. Sokolovic said a personal touch via phone calls from board members could be helpful.

Ms. Pereira said she wanted to work with the principal at Hooker School on the forum. She said she guaranteed there would be results. Mr. Testani said the forum would include Read, Hooker and Read. Harding will host a future forum to include Dunbar, Tisdale, and Hall.

Mr. Testani said the groups of schools were designed strategically because the school areas did not always coincide with City Council districts. Ms. Pereira said it was supposed to be by City Council district.

Ms. Pereira suggested a meeting be called of outside partners to unite them together in a room and explain the process and the needs of the district. She suggested Dr. Johnson reach out to the NAACP.

Dr. Johnson noted the Hooker principal was present at last night's forum to gather tips and strategy. Mr. Sokolovic suggested all the board members phone bank as they do in their elections. Dr. Johnson said she would bring the proposed flyer to the board meeting next week.

Ms. Pereira said she did not want to hear any excuses from people getting paid \$130,000 to \$150,000 why they don't have parents out at meetings.

Dr. Johnson said she told the principals she would give a broad overview of the district situation, but they need to say what was lost at the school level from budget cuts. Ms. Pereira said it was Dr. Johnson's job to hold the principals and assistant superintendents accountable.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would pick up on Mr. Testani's suggestion and draft a letter to come from the board on the forums.

There was a discussion regarding the Bassick PTSO's failure to attend the forum.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said he had not yet heard from the two City Council members from the district where the next forum will be held. Dr. Johnson said she announced the dates of the forums at the City Council meeting on Monday

The next agenda item was on the March for Education. No one was in attendance to present on it.

Dr. Johnson said there were concerns about vetting the organization and the purpose behind it. She said there are other programs that also use the schools.

Ms. Pereira moved to postpone the item. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on unifying Classical Studies Magnet Academy.

Mr. Sokolovic noted the school had been in two buildings for the last five years. He said the board needed to get the school in one building. He added some information about using the former Harding High had been received.

Ms. Pereira noted that the Bassick students would eventually relocate to the Harding building while the new Bassick is being built. She said her goal is to get Bridgeport Military Academy into a section of the former Harding. She added

that Alan Wallack told her that Bassick students could be moved as soon as a year and a half.

Ms. Pereira said Mayor Ganim promised to find a permanent home for Classical Studies, among other things.

Ms. Pereira said Harding is built for high school students and would not be as appropriate for Classical Studies as it would for BMA. She said the swing space can house up to 725 students and is suited for elementary schools. Classical Studies has about 525 students.

Mr. Alicea said pre-K 3 and 4 added another 50 students to the Classical Studies population.

There was a discussion of district schools that may be under-enrolled. Ms. Pereira said a cost analysis that considered closing Edison and Hall under Supt. Rabinowitz indicated there would be savings of only \$200,000.

Ms. Pereira said a new school was needed to replace Edison and Hall. She said John Ricci agreed with that suggestion.

Dasha Spell said parents at Classical Studies did their own research, including with a realtor, in the past. She noted the district was paying \$70,000 a year to rent a building that is not being kept up. Mr. Alicea said there were still problems with the boiler and the roof.

Ms. Pereira said the problem with finding a location to build a new school in the city is the need for remediation. She said Mr. Ricci had site maps for locations near the old Harvey Hubbell, but that fell through.

Ms. Pereira noted that this issue was being considered in the Students & Families Committee because it was taken out of the Facilities Committee.

Ms. Pereira said empty school buildings create opportunities for charter schools to move in.

Ms. Pereira said the next step would be to get John Ricci, director of public facilities, to the next meeting.

The next agenda item was on the elementary magnet school policy.

Ms. Pereira said board Policy 1312 indicates that the parents have the right to advocate to the Board of Education for any reason if they go through an administrative process and they're not satisfied. She said the magnet school policy should reflect this.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was going to be a one-to-one vote on the issue. Ms. Pereira said it was existing board policy. Mr. Sokolovic said the board can override other policies as we write a new policy. He said the issue would have to go to the full board.

Ms. Pereira said then we're just going to talk and talk and talk about it because board policy could not be violated. Mr. Sokolovic said he had already voted on the policy with the support of Mr. Walker. Ms. Pereira said policy could not be made that is contradicted by other policies.

Ms. Pereira read the policy which indicates parents have the right to take matters from the level of teachers to principals, and then to the assistant superintendent and the superintendent.

Mr. Sokolovic said there were two choices: to move it to the full board or continue it at the next meeting. He said he would not argue about something for a half hour that has already been decided.

Ms. Pereira said she was shocked by the behavior of Mr. Sokolovic and Mr. Walker. She said spoke to the superintendent after the previous vote.

Mr. Sokolovic said he had to leave the meeting and get his son home. He noted he liked the current magnet school policy in place. Ms. Pereira said Mr. Sokolovic was going to lose.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would take the item off the agenda of the full board meeting. Ms. Pereira said the agenda had already been distributed and she would go forward with the item as a first read.

Mr. Sokolovic left the meeting and there was no longer a quorum at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod