

Thursday, February 18, 2021

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held February 18, 2021, by video conference, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:08 p.m. Present were Chair Albert Benejan, and members of the committee Joe Sokolovic and Bobbi Brown.

Mr. Benejan said he wanted to indicate for the record information about the new District PAC. He said all PAC/PTSO leaders received an e-mail about a meeting to be held on January 26, 2021 after Supt. Testani's roundtable where Mr. Benejan would discuss the draft bylaws. He said the parent leaders vote to reestablish the District PAC and approved the bylaws.

Mr. Benejan said the motion to reinstate the District PAC was made by the representative from Bassick High and seconded by Classical Studies. Voting in favor were Bassick, Classical Studies, Read, Central High, Barnum and Hall. Edison was in opposition. Fairchild Wheeler and Hallen abstained. The motion to approve the draft bylaws for the District PAC was made by the Bassick representative and seconded by Barnum School. Voting in favor were Classical Studies, Read, Central, Hall, and Fairchild Wheeler. Edison abstained.

Mr. Benejan said if the District PAC would be a place where parent leaders could get answers or help.

Mr. Benejan voted against reestablishing the District PAC. Fairchild Wheeler and Hallen School abstained.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the committee's minutes of January 28, 2021. The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

Herminio Planas, executive director of elementary education, said the administration had no information in regard to the Columbus survey of parents on naming the school.

Mr. Planas said he would follow up with Mr. Weldon and Supt. Testani. Mr. Sokolovic said he hoped the board could bypass all this and vote to change the name.

The next agenda item was on the number of in-school students

Mr. Planas said the committee received the complete list by school. There are 10,767 students in-school, or 56 percent of the population. Distant learners are 8,219, or 44 percent. The total of students is 18,986.

Mr. Planas said Black Rock had 79 percent of their population in-school, while Discovery has 70 percent. Mr. Benejan said Batalla had a big amount, as well. Mr. Planas said Blackham had 64 percent. Johnson School has 69 percent.

Mr. Planas said the district had a low rate of positive cases and it was safe for students to come in person and we're taking every possible precaution. He said all the high schools are working hard to increase their numbers, but it is difficult to convince people.

Mr. Planas said the high school with the most in-person was Harding with almost 50 percent.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said there was no number for on students who are unaccounted for. H said we are working diligently to make sure everyone is accounted for. He said it is possible to track the location of students when they are online. He said sometimes students sign on in other states or countries. He said calls have been to various locations to follow up.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to know exactly how many are unaccounted for because some students may have transferred without letting us know.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said there is an average of between 14 and 15 students in each classroom, although some have much less. He said that is the maximum due to the space to position the students.

The next agenda item was a PAC and PTSO update. Carli Rocha Reaes, , said since last month there has been a significant increase in the PAC?PTSO rate, but it's not where we want it to be. As of yesterday, elementary and middle schools have spent 52.2 percent of their allocations and high schools are up to 41.7 percent. She noted the deadline was April 1.

Ms. Rocha Reaes said there are five schools with zero percent and two schools with an extremely low percentage. There will be focus on those schools. She said the administrators have been made aware of these figures.

Ms. Rocha Reaes said she submitted the list of PAC/PTSO from each buildings.

Mr. Benejan said he would meet soon with Central High, which is listed as zero spending, and help them to make the expenditures.

Mr. Benejan said he questioned how some schools could spend money if there was no PAC in existence. He said he was not happy with this if the principal is using the money. Ms. Rocha Reaes said here information is each school has a PAC, so she would check on that.

Mr. Benejan said he did not want the state to think that Bridgeport was not doing its job. Ms. Rocha Reaes said she had been meeting individually with PAC and PTSO leaders to help them with the budget.

Mr. Sokolovic asked if the committee could receive a report on PAC/PTSO meetings so support could be given to those school that are not meeting. He said meetings, along with minutes, could be posted on the website.

Mr. Benejan said he did not want to have a rush to spend the money at the last minute. He said parent leaders often get frustrated when their spending requests are rejected. He said if the expenditures there not made for the staff or the school, and not parents, he will not be happy.

The next agenda items were on bullying, Dementred Young, director of social work, displayed a slide with substantiated bullying cases. There have been four cases substitutes so far from the beginning of the school year until now. There have been fourteen allegations of bullying.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said the state does not collect information whether it was cyber-bullying or in-person

bullying. He said he could drill down into the data and determine that.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said the data is not broken down by race or ethnicity, but could be obtained from data management. Ms. Brown said she would like to obtain that information. Mr. Young noted two of the substantiated cases were of protected class, if they are bullied with regard to race, sex or gender.

Mr. Sokolovic said as part of the diversity efforts we're trying to foment a culture across in the district in reporting and data collection to include race and ethnicity.

Mr. Young said the fight and physical altercation data was given to him by the superintendent's office.

Mr. Planas said the figures provided to the committee are the latest data and the figures on the screen was data up to three weeks ago.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said he did not know if the fights in the data at Madison School were involved in the bullying allegations.

Mr. Sokolovic requested comparison to last year on the amount of fighting. Mr. Young said he could obtain the data from data management. Mr. Sokolovic said if he wondered if the ratio of 47 altercations to 14 bullying complaints was plausible.

Mr. Young noted the definition of bullying has changed slightly to include physical assaults that cause hospital visits or a disturbance to the building can be considered a one-time incident of bullying.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said he could determine with data management if there was a direct line between bullying incidents and the physical altercations.

Mr. Planas said it was important to note the numbers also include physical aggression, so it doesn't have to be a fight per se. He said it took a long time to develop the chart because there were about 135 incidents to look at. He said the numbers are way down from last year due to the pandemic situation.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to thank Madison School for effective reporting of the 15 incidents. He said he was skeptical of schools reporting zero incidents because the students do not vary from school to school.

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

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

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod