

Thursday, February 20 , 2020

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held February 20, 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 Albert Benejan, Joseph Sokolovic, and Bobbi Brown.

Ms. Brown moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of January 16, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and approved by a 2-0 vote. Voting in favor were Ms. Brown and Mr. Sokolovic. Mr. Benejan abstained.

The next agenda was on the Multicultural Magnet School(MCM) recycling program. Kelly Brown, art teacher at MCM, was present. Mr. Benejan noted he met with her recently.

Ms. Kelly Brown said there was concern that the district schools are not recycling any longer. She said in 2013 the district implemented a single-stream recycling program that separated out glass, plastic, metal, and cardboard. She said somewhere along the line the contract was changed, possibly to save money. She said only cardboard is currently being recycled.

Ms. Kelly Brown said a Green Team of students at MCM was formed. The students then made a presentation to the committee like that used at the school to instruct children about environmental issues. MCM students London Diaz,

Ruhama Choudhury and Devin Pettway described various types of pollution, including water, air and land, and global warming. Ms. Diaz said humans were causing climate change so it is up to them to help solve it.

Ms. Choudhury spoke about the length of time it takes for things to decompose, asthma, frequent extreme weather events, and melting glaciers,. The students said extreme weather will cause famines and riots, and the death of animals such as has occurred recently in Australia. Recent floods in Venice were also described.

Ms. Diaz described the types of recycling that are possible. She said the young students are very passionate about wanting to help.

Mr. Benejan said it was an excellent presentation.

In response to a question, Ms. Kelly Brown explained the concept of greenhouse gases, which makes the Earth warmer.

Mr. Benejan said he would transmit the information gathered to Mr. Weldon, the chair of the Contracts committee. He said he always believes the parents, the students, and the staff are his first priority.

Mr. Sokolovic thanked the students for their presentation and urged them to keep fighting. He noted there are costs associated with recycling so the future contract was uncertain.

The next agenda item was on the School Volunteer Association(SVA). Mr. Benejan noted he had previously met with the representatives.

Present were Anne Gribbon, coordinator of volunteer services for the district and executive director of the nonprofit School Volunteer Association of Bridgeport; Ed Davies, long-term volunteer and president of the SVA; and Marge Hiller, long-term SVA board member and chair of the strategic planning committee.

Ms. Gribbon said the SVA had existed for over 52 years to promote volunteerism in the schools. She said the partnership has worked with the district paying the salaries of the school volunteer office and the SVA raising the funding for the programs. She said the annual read aloud day includes volunteers for 650 classrooms, which is every pre-K to 6th class. Hardcover books are read and donated to the classroom libraries.

Ms. Gribbon noted the volunteers gain a more positive view of the Bridgeport schools, which leads to advocacy. She described it as great public relations. She said over 300 volunteers, who work under the direction of teachers, are tutoring students, and about a hundred mentors work with children for an hour each week. She said some mentors stay with their students for many years. A scholarship has been established for students who stay with their mentors through high school.

Ms. Gribbon said the SVA office has established partnerships with businesses and community organizations that lead to support for schools. She said all of these activities takes place with only two staff members, 34 board members, and about 800 volunteers per year.

Ms. Hiller described the SVA's new board member, Amy Marshall, a former district principal, and her project to

identify the value of the services provided by the SVA volunteers, which totals almost \$1 million. She said the amount needed from the district to fund the SVA office is only one tenth of one percent of the district's budget, or \$176,000.

Mr. Davies said two years ago the SVA positions were eliminated from the budget. The SVA board decided that it was such an emergency that it committed all of its cash reserves to fund a single year of the office. He said additional fundraising was launched and the funding of the SVA office was able to be extended for the current year as well.

Mr. Davies said he understood the difficult budgetary issues and believes the best-case scenario would be for the board to receive additional money from the city and state and make the first priority for expenditures beyond what is needed for survivable to be the volunteer office.

Ms. Hiller noted she provided the committee with the annual report of the SVA.

Mr. Benejan said the SVA does an amazing job. He said he had heard from a lot of parents in support of the volunteers. He said he would speak to Ms. Martinez, the chair of the Finance Committee, about the matter.

Mr. Sokolovic said when the budget had to be cut one of the most heart-breaking cuts he had to vote for was the SVA. He said the budget is such that disgusting choices had to be made.

In response to a question, Mr. Davies said the SVA would continue to reach out to the City Council and use advocacy efforts with state legislators.

Mr. Benejan said he believed the new board wanted what was best for our kids, and he would not give up.

The next agenda item was on the District PAC bylaws.

Mr. Sokolovic said the bylaws had been drafted, with very minor changes suggested by legal review. He noted the bylaws were for the parents to approve, not the board.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was concerned because the draft suggested the nominating committee had the right to deny anybody the right to run. He suggested a bullet point indicating anyone can run. He added that the board could only suggest, not dictate to the parents.

The next agenda item was the PAC and PTSO update. Herminio Planas, executive director of elementary education, was present.

Mr. Benejan said he indicated to Mr. Testani that he would like to see more contact information available for the PAC leaders. He said he would like this information so he could contact the leaders and review how the PACs are functioning. Rosa Velez, the PTSO secretary from Central High, reached out to him for assistance with PTSO procedures.

Ms. Velez described how Mr. Benejan assisted her and she now has a computer and a phone line for the PTSO office.

Mr. Benejan said he wanted to remember that the same way the board does its job for free that the PAC leaders do theirs for free.

Ms. Velez said she needed further information on what the parent leaders are allowed to spend the money on. She said she would like to see more money spent on kids.

Mr. Planas suggested contacting Dr. Victor Black, who supervises the high schools, if Ms. Rosa does not get a response from her school.

Mr. Sokolovic noted students directly benefit from their parents' involvement in the schools. He said math or science nights are valuable in teaching parents how to help their children with the material.

Mr. Planas said money is not supposed to be raised with Title I funding. He said a parent talent show would be permissible because it involves the arts. He noted money obtained by fundraising by parents had to be deposited into an account controlled by the principal.

JoAnn Kennedy said Delores Mason created a booklet on fundraising guidelines for parent organizations that should be at the schools.

Mr. Benejan said some parent leaders were reluctant to provide their contact information because they have received harassing communications. Mr. Sokolovic said he can't see how someone could be a parent leader and have their contact information hidden. Ms. Brown suggested the parent leaders indicate a preferred method of contact. Mr. Benejan said he would like to work out a solution with Mr. Testani.

There was a discussion of the possible use of a district e-mail address for the parent leaders.

Mr. Benejan said he wanted the parent leaders to know the board supports them.

Mr. Benejan noted that Bassick had teachers listed in the PTSO list. He also pointed out that information seemed to be missing for Columbus School. Mr. Planas said he would look into that. Mr. Sokolovic suggested an inquiry into the expenditures made by the Columbus PAC since no leaders were designated.

In response to a question, Angel Resto said there is not a PAC organization at Bridgeport Learning Center because the students come from many different schools and the parent funding is provided to those schools.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said he was constantly updating the list of parent leaders.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was glad to see greater expenditures by the PACs. He said he was worried that Hall School had spent all its funds already. Mr. Planas said, after the last committee meeting, the administration sent out notices to principals emphasizing the importance of PAC expenditures and the fact that it belongs to the parents. They were told activities later in the year could be paid for or encumbered in advance.

The next agenda item was on PLTI. Diana Planas was present. Mr. Benejan said he was trained in PLTI in 2009. Ms. Brown noted her mom was trained in PLTI.

Ms. Planas said even people who are not parents but are involved with students are encouraged to receive PLTI training. She said in July interviews will begin for those who have applied to receive the training. She said recruitment was marketed through the principals. She said she would like to use the PACs to market also. She added that recruiting began even earlier this year and she would like to have PLTI representation at the parent convention.

Ms. Planas said she started with 18 participants in the current training, but it has dipped to 13. She said there have been over 300 PLTI graduates.

In response to a question, Ms. Planas said the training takes place for three hours on Tuesday evenings. There are classes for the children of the trainees during the sessions.

Mr. Benejan said he recalled how Ms. Planas spoke to parents at Columbus School and the valuable advice she gave, which led to his project.

Mr. Benejan said he would ask Mr. Testani to send the PLTI application forms to the principals.

The next agenda item was on the parent convention. Mr. Benejan said he had chaired the parent convention for two years in a row. He said it is usually held in May.

Mr. Benejan said he has discussed with Mr. Testani how to convene the parent leaders to plan for the convention. He said the budget for the convention is \$9,000 again.

Mr. Benejan said he hoped the convention could be held at Housatonic Community College again because it is very cheap.

Ms. Brown moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved. The meeting was adjourned at 7:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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