

Friday, June 14, 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held June 14, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:02 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic and Hernan Illingworth. Board member Maria Pereira was present.

Mr. Illingworth moved approval of the minutes of May 16, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was an end-of-the-year update on social-emotional learning. Carrie Ramanauskas, social-emotional learner coordinator for the district, was present. She invited board members or anyone present to the social-learning trainings taking place during the summer. She said there is RULER online training for those with BOE e-mail addresses.

In response to a question, Ms. Ramanauskas said she would be willing to train the board in adverse childhood experiences, RULER and restorative justice. Ms. Pereira said she was in favor of the board attending such training. Mr. Sokolovic said he would consider moving the matter to the full board.

Ms. Ramanauskas said the ACEs training covers adverse childhood experiences and the effect trauma has on the developing brain. She recommended a TED talk by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris on the subject.

Ms. Pereira asked Mr. Sokolovic to consider inviting Ms. Ramanauskas to speak to the board at the June 24th meeting. Ms. Ramanauskas said she was available.

In response to a question, Ms. Ramanauskas said for next year money is budgeted for translation of materials.

Ms. Ramanauskas gave the board examples of newsletters on social-emotional learning. She said a funder from Lone Pine provided books and other items for student ambassadors.

Ms. Pereira said she has read about the success of mediation and yoga in schools nationally. Ms. Ramanauskas said expansion of meditation and yoga in the district, currently used at Columbus, Discovery, Central High and Curiale, is being looked at. She said the males of color group at Harding is also using yoga and meditation. She added grants were being pursued. She said often people are impatient when social-emotional learning programs are instituted and they expect to see results quickly, which is not realistic.

Ms. Pereira suggested piloting a program in schools with high numbers of suspensions, either ISS and OSS. Ms. Ramanauskas described rooms at Central and Harding that are used to refocus students. She said Harding collects data on the use of the room.

Ms. Ramanauskas described the walk-throughs that the student ambassadors in high school provided for new students.

In response to a question, Michael Testani, director of adult education, said home rooms in high school were eliminated. Ms. Ramanauskas said home rooms used to be used for attendance, but attendance is now taken in every class. Mr. Testani described some of the attendance issues related to home rooms. Ms. Pereira suggested the time previously allocated for home room be used for meditation. Ms. Ramanauskas said some elementary schools start the day in that fashion.

Ms. Ramanauskas said RULER was rolled out in the district as a pilot and expanded into 8th grade, and high school was brought on later and is now playing catch-up. She said some people questioned why results were not seen sooner. She added we now have access to the online RULER platform which provides training. She said the videos were created by Yale Center for Social-Emotional Intelligence and the district negotiated free access, which usually costs about a thousand dollars per school.

Ms. Pereira suggesting approaching the Dalio Foundation for something in this area. She noted it would be funding high schools only.

In response to a question, Ms. Ramanauskas said she was a department of one now that a part-time SEL facilitator will no longer be budgeted.

In response to a question, Ms. Ramanauskas said she believed there was a correlation at Bryant School between being named a blue ribbon school and the use of social-emotional learning, in addition to the literacy background of Principal Victoria Egri.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action to approve the extension of the current bread bid award for one additional year.

John Gerrity of the nutrition department was present. He said Chaves Bakery was the current bread and bakery supplier. He said the company agreed to extend its pricing for one additional year. He said after canvassing nutrition employees in the schools everyone seemed pleased with the product. He requested a one-year extension.

Mr. Sokolovic noted the district already had the option of going to a second and a third year without going out to bid.

Mr. Illingworth moved *“to approve the extension of the current bread bid award for one additional year with Chaves Bakery.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action to approve the posting of commercial bids.

In response to a question, Mr. Gerrity said there were no changes in the boilerplate language in the bid specifications from last year. He said the language that indicates the board awards the bid is still in the specifications.

In response to a question, Mr. Gerrity said there was a discussion with Mr. Wade, the dairy provider, who indicated his prices have risen so he was unwilling to roll over pricing into next year.

In response to a question, Mr. Gerrity said there were no issues regarding late deliveries with the prior provider from

New Jersey. Ms. Pereira noted the Wade bid was about \$50,000 more expensive last year.

Ms. Pereira suggested listing the bids jointly as commercial bids for the full board.

Mr. Illingworth moved *“to approve the posting of the commercial bids as presented by Mr. Gerrity this evening.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic indicated Mr. Wilson, who wanted to present on lacrosse, was stuck in New York and could not make it to the meeting. He said he met with Mr. Wilson, who made a very nice proposal. He said he explained the district was not in a position to make an additional expenditure. Ms. Pereira said he seemed like an amazing guy. Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to take the matter up at a meeting in August.

The next agenda item was renewing the MOU between buildON and the district.

Amina Brown, the program director for buildON in Bridgeport, said she reached out to Dr. Johnson’s office and was referred to the assistant superintendents. She said she had not received a response regarding a new MOU.

Ms. Brown said it took from November to March to get an MOU to get into Bassick and into Harding for the first time. She gave the committee a copy of the current MOU.

In response to a question, Ms. Brown said all the buildON employees go through background checks and there is insurance with the district named as insured. Ms. Pereira

noted the board was now requiring molestation insurance for outside vendors.

Ms. Brown said there are two staff at Central, one staff member at Harding, and a person will have to be hired for Bassick.

Ms. Pereira said she could not read the 11-page MOU and approve it right now.

Mr. Illingworth said he was a big fan of buildON, particularly after his daughter's participation when she was at Central, but unfortunately it has to go through the administration first.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested putting the matter on the board's agenda for June 24th, since it could always be tabled.

In response to a question, Ms. Brown said there were no costs to the district for buildON. She said buildON has been in the district for about twelve years.

Ms. Brown said there were some difficulties getting into Bassick earlier this year. She said Dr. Raiola had some reservations about extracurricular activities, and the program began at Bassick in March. She said Dr. Raiola's concerns had been allayed.

Ms. Brown said buildON works with teachers to help supplement curriculum and putting service into the curriculum. She described activities with the Nature Conservancy, Harborview Senior Residency Center, and work with the special needs population of students. She said at heart we are an after-school organization.

In response to a question, Ms. Brown said when she contacted the superintendent's office she indicated there was some urgency because she wanted to be ready to start when school started.

Mr. Sokolovic said he e-mailed Dr. Johnson during the period her father passed away and it likely got lost. He said he would contact Dr. Johnson again. Ms. Pereira said she would like to see the insurance documents that were requested presented.

Ms. Pereira said no organization should be cutting deals with building principals. She said that was not a shot at buildON. She said the written agreement and contract should be with the board. Ms. Brown said she agreed.

Ms. Pereira said the previous MOU likely didn't come to the board because there is no financial component. She said under state law the board is in charge of all school buildings.

The last agenda item was suspension data. It was noted no staff were present.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested the committee discuss what it wanted to do with the data, particularly when it indicated disproportionate results. He said when it is put like someone is doing something wrong defenses go up and the problems would not get solved. He said when he discussed institutional discrimination it did not have to do with a person and their conscious thoughts. He said the conversations had to be handled delicately and gingerly.

Ms. Pereira said this was a major national topic. She said it is a red flag when the suspension rate of black males is 66

percent in a school where they make up 15 percent of a school.

Ms. Pereira said she believed the Males of Color Committee should be looking at this and creating policies. Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to see professional development pushed at the Males of Color Committee.

JoAnn Kennedy was recognized. She said she had brought things up at the Males of Color Committee and the discussions were getting more in depth. She noted the white paper draft was being created by the committee.

Ms. Pereira said as of the date of this report there were 21 expulsions in the entire district, with six at Bassick, eight at Central and three at Harding. She said she was impressed with Harding's results. She said suspensions were a more serious problem than expulsions.

Mr. Sokolovic said he worried about attacking it in the wrong manner. He said it was easy to fix this by just not suspending anybody.

Ms. Pereira said she was looking forward to the end-of-the-year report on how many students were deselected from magnet schools.

Mr. Illingworth said with the use of the word flagrant he was interpreting Ms. Pereira's comments to mean our school administrators are specifically targeting black males. Mr. Sokolovic said we had to be careful in choosing our words.

Ms. Pereira said what happens is most people don't understand they have a bias.



Mr. Illingworth said if we follow the Code of Conduct the type of infraction that occurs is what results in the consequences. He said he did not look at things in a racial manner.

Mr. Sokolovic described how disparate treatment in a classroom might work depending on the ethnic background of the student. He said the teacher may not have to be Caucasian to have the bias. He said unconscious bias is a big issue.

Ms. Kennedy said there was a serious issue with black and Hispanic boys getting shot in the street by police officers. She said America was built on what we're talking about right now.

Ms. Pereira said this was a reason why the traffic stops in Connecticut are now tracked by race.

Mr. Illingworth apologized for his own ignorance, because he does not see things from that perspective.

Ms. Pereira described an incident when she was a Harding student where she was treated more favorably than her African-American friend.

Ms. Pereira suggested looking at the data to see the percentage of African-American males in the school and the percentage that were suspended. She said the data indicates there is a problem there.

Mr. Sokolovic and Ms. Pereira described some racial issues in their childhood.

An audience member was recognized. She described some trainings that were needed.

Mr. Sokolovic said this conversation is a microcosm of what we're going to have to face across the district. He noted everybody at the meeting was now on the same page and amiable about it.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod