

Thursday, August 30, 2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held August 30, 2018, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:38 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Maria Pereira and Ben Walker.

Ms. Pereira moved to approve the committee's minutes of June 14, 2018, with edits. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker. Corrections were noted. The motion was unanimously approved.

The next item was on magnet school policies.

Mr. Sokolovic noted he and Mr. Walker were on opposite ends of the spectrum on the issue, with Ms. Pereira somewhat trying to find compromise and doing a good job at it. He said he believed we are close to a policy that can be presented. He said he would like to see a policy come out of the committee that he doesn't have to suggest edits to for the full board. He said he would like to give it one more shot without the need for edits at the full board.

Ms. Pereira said there could be edits from the six board members who are not here. Mr. Sokolovic said he would push edits with the full board if it is watered down too much.

Mr. Walker said the black printed draft contains some compromises on the deselection process and said he could support the provisions as stated with some minor edits. He

said he hoped the committee would present a document to the full board that the three committee members are in alignment on.

Mr. Walker asked if the superintendent, the executive staff and the magnet school principals agree with the policies in black-type version. He noted some of the principals had previously disagreed on the deselection provisions. He added that the deselection criteria proposed applies to older children.

Asst. Superintendent Janet Brown-Clayton said the policy was the result of at least five meetings in the district, with edits sent back and forth. Mr. Walker noted a lot of the edits came from the board members, and asked what the administrators would want to create in the policy.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said it protects children and gives them an opportunity to have a chance to experience the magnet schools.

Mr. Walker noted the magnet policies were last revised in 2005 and he wanted to make sure we were doing the right thing for Bridgeport students.

Mr. Walker asked how the policies compared to other districts in our DRG. Ms. Brown-Clayton said from her knowledge of New Haven there was no deselection policy except for disciplinary offenses. Mr. Walker said the board members may be interested in the answer to this question when the policy is presented. He said if questions cannot be answered by executive staff it can derail the process.

Ms. Pereira noted the principals of Discovery Magnet and Geraldine Claytor Schools did not have to remain in

attendance since the policies would not apply to those schools.

There was a discussion of the bullet which called for deselection in Grades 4 to 8 due to “A failing grade for two consecutive marking periods in a core subject.”

Mr. Sokolovic said the problem with the provisions about supports being put in place is it requires cooperation from the students and parents. If they choose not to follow the plan, the school has done all it could. Mr. Sokolovic suggested the wording be that the interventions be offered.

Mr. Sokolovic said based on the responses of the principals there were about 24 deselections over four or five years. Ms. Pereira said she filed a request for that information from the office of pupil services and no records have been kept of deselections in the last ten years. She said she was looking to see if protected classes were being disproportionately deselected.

Francine Carbone, principal of High Horizons Magnet School, said the students deselected from her school were based on behavior or academic issues, with no special education students being affected.

Ms. Pereira said the data should be tracked going forward.

Mr. Walker said there are four reasons for deselection: failing grades, behavioral grades, attendance policies and Type 3 violations. He said the steps to be taken prior to deselection should apply to the first three deselection criteria.

Ms. Carbone suggested the word “reassigned” be used instead of “deselection” in the policies. The committee members said they agreed.

Ms. Pereira suggested the 20-day notice requirement be removed.

Mr. Sokolovic said in order to support the draft he said a provision needed to be added back in calling for a C average in all subjects, which is currently in the policies for elementary magnet schools.

Ms. Carbone said a student with C’s in any subject area automatically loses entrance to Central Magnet.

Ms. Pereira suggested the phrase of a grade of D or lower for two consecutive marking periods in a core subject be a basis for reassignment.

Mr. Walker said it could say a failing grade for two consecutive marking periods in a core subject and/or failure to maintain a C average of all subjects in two consecutive marking periods. Ms. Pereira suggested using the expression a “grade below C.” Principal Helen Giles of Classical Studies Magnet Academy said she agreed with that phraseology.

Mr. Walker suggested using the terminology: a failing grade or an average below C for two consecutive marking periods in core subjects.

Ms. Carbone suggested use of letter grades, not so much pluses and minuses, because those are sometimes give-me or take-me-away depending on homework assignments

handed in and other factors. She said a lot of teachers will use plus or minus to motivate a child.

It was noted Central Magnet's requirements entrance are a C-plus average, with no D's or F's in any subject. Mr. Walker noted D is not even a failing grade.

Ms. Pereira said the principals seemed to wanted to use the criteria by subject, not average, to enter Central Magnet. Mr. Sokolovic said that was a higher standard that he was looking for. Mr. Walker said it was way too high, because a 4th grader with a C-minus could be deselected.

Ms. Carbone said she found the document on numerical grades, which indicates a D-plus is from 67 to 69, a D is 65 to 66. She said a failing grade is a U, which is 64 or lower.

Mr. Sokolovic said he supported the stricter entrance requirements for Central Magnet, but not for students to maintain attendance in an elementary magnet. He said the use of the average, rather than one grade which may be an outlier, is a better indicator of the student's performance.

Mr. Sokolovic noted he began the effort fighting for the discretion of the principals.

Mr. Walker said if the principals had their way the magnet schools would all be prep schools. Some of the principals present expressed disagreement.

Ms. Giles said the magnet school students take learning seriously and do well, so there are not that many failing grades.

Mr. Sokolovic said that was his main worry in changing the policies from their current standards.

Ms. Giles said when we see a failing grade it is because the student has given up.

Mr. Sokolovic said part of the reason the kids maintain the higher grades is because it is expected and demanded of them. Ms. Giles agreed. Mr. Sokolovic said if this attitude could be replicated in all schools the whole district would rise.

Mr. Walker said he was willing to accept a compromise of a D or below for two consecutive marking periods in a core subject. The principals said they were fine with that concept.

Ms. Carbone said she believed D was too low of a grade to succeed in Central Magnet. She said her school was a feeder school to Central Magnet. Dr. Patricia Anekwe, director of Central Magnet, said she was fine with whatever the majority said. Ms. Giles said the higher standards would encourage the kids to succeed. Dr. Anekwe said she could live with a D-plus requirement to remain in the magnet school. Mr. Walker said a student who receives a D-plus and a C-minus in math can still pull the grade out at the end of the year.

Terese McGuire, principal of Park City Magnet, said it was difficult because you don't want to put a child in a position where they lose an opportunity. Ms. Carbone said in marking period two in science students often end up with a D because they don't complete all the requirements of the scientific method to complete their project for the science fair. She said this causes some of her students not to get into Central Magnet.

Ms. Pereira suggested the phrase: a grade below D for two conservative marking periods in a core subject –reading, writing, math, science or social studies – in Grades 4 to 8.

There was a discussion of how to arrange the criteria in the policies.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said she would revise the document immediately after the meeting if there is enough time.

Mr. Walker suggested the use of the Oxford comma.

Ms. Carbone said there are occasions where she is gravely concerned about an applicant. She said there was an incident where a student had straight A's and excellent conduct grades, but was absent 99 days in their neighborhood school, despite no medical documentation. She asked if instances like that could be referred to assistant superintendents.

Mr. Walker said he would say no because the student would be deselected if they repeated such a record in magnet school.

Mr. Sokolovic said such a student would keep another student who attends school all the time from attending the magnet school. He suggested if such a student was rejected it could be dealt with in the appeal process. Mr. Walker said he did not believe K to 3 students were responsible for getting themselves to school.

Ms. Pereira said she did not want to write a policy that covers rare exceptions, but the majority of cases. She suggested the administrators work with the policy for a year

and if there are real issues they request the superintendent or assistant superintendent to suggest adjustments to the board.

The next topic was the appeal process.

Ms. Pereira said it was important to align it with the appeal process passed last year on the controlled transfer policy.

Mr. Walker said the process as written seemed okay with him.

Ms. Pereira said the parent should have the right to make a final appeal to the board just like they do with the controlled transfer policy.

Mr. Sokolovic said he disagreed due to the possible length of time involved and the fact that the board are not education experts. Ms. Pereira noted that the principals indicated there were only about 25 children over the last four years who were deselected.

Mr., Walker said if it was important to Ms. Pereira, he would agree to the change. Mr. Sokolovic said he had an issue with second-guessing the superintendent's decision.

Ms. Pereira said if it was in the controlled transfer process it should also be offered on the deselection policies. Mr. Sokolovic said he disagreed with micromanaging because we are a policy-making board. Ms. Pereira said she had heard some really negative things about children being taken out of magnet schools.



Mr. Walker said he was okay with moving the controlled transfers appeal process into the document. He said he didn't think the board would ever seen an appeal.

The board members indicated they didn't have a problem with anything on the wait list section except grammatical changes.

There was a discussion of the status of Bridgeport Military Academy. Ms. Brown-Clayton said it was not longer receiving any federal or magnet money. She said she received this information from Marlene Siegel.

In the Central Magnet section, Mr. Walker noted some grammatical corrections. He said the wait list part of that should be exactly the same as it was in the elementary section.

In response to a question, Dr. Anekwe said deselection at Central Magnet only happens at the end of the year. She said the reference to marking periods is intended to encourage students and is included in the contract.

Ms. Pereira said the Central Magnet entrance criteria should be final grades of C-plus or better in core academic subjects on Grade 7 and 8 report cards. Mr. Walker said he agreed.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said she would ask Dr. Johnson about high school entrance requirements due to the absence of federal funds.

Ms. Pereira asked that the revised document be given to the board members well in advance of the next meeting. Ms. Brown-Clayton said she would send a copy marked draft to the committee members.

Mr. Walker moved to the table the next item on sibling policy to the next meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod