

Thursday, October 24, 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held October 24, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:32 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic and Hernan Illingworth. Board members Joseph Lombard and Maria Pereira arrived subsequently as noted.

Acting Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Illingworth moved to approve the committee's minutes of June 14th, July 22nd, and September 19th, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was a discussion on PAC/ PTSO membership, roles and issues, and the District PAC.

Mr. Testani said a list was compiled from every school, listing the PAC leaders, members of the School Governance Council, and members at large.

Mr. Testani said he has heard that it is difficult to fill all officer positions because the attendance levels at each meeting varies.

Mr. Sokolovic requested the list be updated to show the other officers and members at large. He said learning which schools have greater PAC participation could provide

valuable information for the schools where PACs are not operating as well.

Mr. Testani said he believed this year principals were working closer with their supervisors and the principals are receiving support on other issues.

Mr. Illingworth said as a former school PAC president and a District PAC president he knew that if there is a school leader that wants parent involvement the PAC will be full and active. He noted the district had lost the parent liaison and the former superintendent gave that responsibility to an assistant superintendent, who lacked the time and the motivation to do the work. He said the message had to be driven from the top.

Mr. Testani said he requested from the schools a list of the meetings that have taken place so far. He said parent involvement is a major focus because one of his priorities is reducing chronic absenteeism in the district.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said parent involvement is a component of the overall score in the evaluation of principals. He said the chronic absenteeism would be one indicator on everybody's evaluation.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested a metric be devised to track principals reaching out to parents Mr. Testani said it was fair to track whether the principals are making genuine attempts to increase parental involvement.

Mr. Lombard arrived at the meeting.

Tammy Bogdanyi was recognized. She said reports of parental meetings could be fabricated, so sign-in sheets and

minutes were needed to show the meetings were held. She suggested the administration reach out to the PAC presidents as well as principals when compiling the PAC information. She described the frustration of getting parents to attend PAC events. She said the loss of home-school coordinators and the administration's liaison to the parents has hurt parental involvement.

Mr. Sokolovic said the board's focus on making sure parental involvement spending is taking place is one component of accountability.

Mr. Illingworth moved "*to pause discussion of Item 2 and move up Item 4.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Testani said the proposed partnerships are between Harding's CNA program and Watermark at 3030 Park and Lord Chamberlain Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

Matthew Corcoran, assistant principal at Harding, said he oversees the health careers academy. Also present was Yvette Garcia, a Harding graduate and licensed nurse, who is the teacher who leads the health program at the school.

Mr. Corcoran said Ms. Garcia had worked to reinvigorate the CNA programs at the school. He said prior to the arrival of Ms. Garcia students received their CNA certification at independent trainers. Ms. Garcia has worked with the state Departments of Public Health and Education to get Harding certified as an approved training facility.

Mr. Corcoran said the contracts presented to the committee are for the clinical side of the program with Watermark and Lord Chamberlain for students to practice their skills.

Mr. Sokolovic said the board has been requiring an insurance rider on sexual molestation. Mr. Testani said that could be added.

In response to a question, Mr. Corcoran said the selection process for students entering the medical magnet program includes recruiting students from the 8th grade. Students in the CNA program have to demonstrate success in the medical magnet for three years.

Mr. Illingworth suggested that before any agreements come to the board that they be vetted by the city attorney's office because in the vast majority of cases the board sends the contracts back for review anyway.

Mr. Testani requested the committee's blessing to move forward pending the agreements being reviewed by the city attorney.

In response to a question, Mr. Corcoran said Ms. Garcia accompanies ten students at a time to the outside facilities and directly supervises them.

Mr. Testani said he did not believe the agreement would be ready for Monday's regular meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic moved "*to pick up Item 2 off the table.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic said he asked Ms. Bogdanyi to bring the draft bylaws created by the District PAC before it was dissolved. He suggested they undergo legal review before the District PAC approves them.

Mr. Illingworth said this was a perfect opportunity to bring all the PAC presidents together to discuss possibly moving forward with a District PAC.

Ms. Bogdanyi said the draft bylaws were approved by the District PAC's executive board, but subsequently the whole District PAC was dismantled. She requested there be a roundtable meeting of all PAC presidents and vice presidents to discuss bringing the District PAC back. If the decision is made to move forward, then the legal review can take place.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed a legal review in the past found some of the exclusionary bylaws to be illegal. Mr. Illingworth said the exclusionary language applied to certain community organizations as well as charter schools.

Mr. Testani said the next parent roundtable would be scheduled for November. Mr. Sokolovic said he saw some comments that some PAC presidents were not informed about the roundtable.

Ms. Bogdanyi said she believed only PAC presidents or vice presidents should be allowed to vote on the bylaws.

Ms. Pereira arrived at the meeting.

Mr. Illingworth moved *"to send the proposed PAC/PTSO bylaws to the attorney for vetting to see if they meet legal standards, so they can be presented to the PAC at one of the roundtables to decide if they want a District PAC."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was still talk about principals spending PAC money inappropriately. He said he would like to see the action plans for each school and any signed P-10s that have been approved for further discussion at the next meeting.

Ms. Pereira noted the agenda did not include notice of a vote on the previous item. Mr. Sokolovic said Ms. Pereira was correct. He said he would suggest to Mr. Weldon to put the matter on the agenda of the regular meeting.

Ms. Bogdanyi said she could send draft bylaws to Mr. Sokolovic electronically, Mr. Sokolovic apologized for not phrasing the agenda item properly to allow a vote.

In response to an inquiry, Mr. Illingworth said it was not the role of the board to have problems with the bylaws because the bylaws are created by the parents. Mr. Sokolovic said if the bylaws are legal the board should not intervene.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Illingworth voted to terminate the District PAC. Mr. Illingworth said that was because attorneys told the board there were legal problems excluding people belonging to other community organizations.

Mr. Sokolovic asked to move forward with the agenda because the past was over. Mr. Illingworth described the bylaws as Ms. Pereira's bylaws. Ms. Pereira said she had nothing to do with those bylaws and said Mr. Illingworth was a liar.

In response to an inquiry from an audience member, Mr. Sokolovic said the PAC meetings should be run by the parent leader with any support needed from the principal.

The audience member said that was not happening at Harding, nor had elections been held.

Mr. Illingworth said Harding was not included on the list provided to the committee. Ms. Pereira said her packet did not include the list.

Mr. Sokolovic said elections were needed at Harding and other schools.

Ms. Pereira said the PTSO acronym did not include principal.

Ms. Pereira said to put to rest the allegation she had anything to do with District PAC bylaws she asked that the people present who were involved in drafting them if she had anything to do with the process in 2015. Ms. Bogdanyi said she was part of the committee at the time and Ms. Pereira was not on the committee.

Mr. Testani said he would speak to Mr. Brown at Harding tomorrow regarding PTSO elections.

Ms. Pereira noted Thomas Hooker was missing from the list provided. She said she knew there were problems at the school.

Ms. Bogdanyi suggested as a parent leader that the superintendent consult the parents on who from the administration is picked to work with the parents. She said last year Ms. Brown did not want to work with the parents.

The next agenda item was on School Governance Councils(SGC). Mr. Sokolovic said it seemed the SGCs

were much better populated than the PACs. He said this was likely due to state oversight.

Mr. Sokolovic said a big part of the evaluation of the prior superintendent was parental involvement.

In response to a question, Ms. Bogdanyi said she was president of the parent organizations at Bridgeport Military Academy (where her son attends) and Bassick High (where her stepson attends). She said she was not the guardian of the child at Bassick. Mr. Sokolovic said he believed that was allowed under state law due to changes that allow even grandparents to take leadership roles. Ms. Pereira said Title I is under federal law and she would check on that.

Mr. Sokolovic thanked Ms. Bogdanyi for taking on both schools whether she has the title of official parent or not. He said he will do everything he can to increase parental involvement whether a parent is on a birth certificate or not.

The next agenda item was on the magnet school deselection report.

Mr. Testani said data management provided a report on students who left magnet schools and went back to other district schools. He said the total was 119 students based on the exit code in Power School. He said there is no way in Power School to determine if they were deselected. He said from what he has uncovered students are persuaded to leave magnet schools on their own accord through building administration. He said that was being addressed.

Mr. Sokolovic said because the numbers were not astronomical the principals could provide the information directly. He said the report was requested to make sure



there are not trends in certain groups being deselected. He added that leaving of your own accord is quite different from an affirmative deselection.

Ms. Pereira said the board policy calls for the principal to inform the superintendent of deselections, and the superintendent must report the figures to the board. Mr. Testani said according to records in the superintendent's office there was not one deselection then. He said he would have more information at the next meeting.

There was a discussion of the gender and racial breakdown of the figures provided. It was unclear whether the totals added up correctly

Ms. Pereira said the magnet school principals told the board very few students were deselected, which did not seem to be the case.

Mr. Testani said he had received complaints from parents that principals told them that their children will be held back if they remain in the magnet school. In response to a question, Mr. Testani said he agreed there was systematic problem at Fairchild Wheeler.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the reports of deselection will be tracked by Rita Valle in his office. He said the flow of information in the central office has been working well and it has been reported that there is a 60 to 70 percent decrease in parental complaints to the office.

Mr. Sokolovic asked that the executive director over the magnet schools impart to the principals the importance of tracking the data, especially affirmative deselections.

Mr. Illingworth said due to the low numbers the administration could contact the parents to verify the reason why their child left the magnet school. Mr. Sokolovic said the pressure on parents to remove a student may have been an end-run around the policy.

Mr. Sokolovic and Mr. Illingworth said they were in favor of discussing a policy to require an exit interviews for parents whose children leave magnet schools.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani described the process in place for controlled transfers.

The next agenda item was on the bullying report for 2018-19 and 2019-20 to date.

Mr. Testani said there were 383 reports of bullying last year, while there have been 56 this year, of which seven have been substantiated. He said he is now requesting month-to-month information.

Ms. Pereira asked that the incidents be reported out by school due to the widespread amount of bullying. Mr. Testani said it has to be put into Power School in order to extract the data.

Mr. Sokolovic said schools that report incidents of bullying are to be commended for addressing the issue, rather than burying information. He suggested recognizing the principal of Harding for the bullying reports at the school. Ms. Pereira suggested the principal be praised for the process in place.

Mr. Testani said Central High has taken the social-emotional learning concepts and really run with it. He said Harding has done a phenomenal job and dealt with some tough incidents

by working with community leaders, police, and security. He said he participated in a meeting at Harding to address issues, including the dismissal situation on Bond Street. He said the progress at Roosevelt School is a tribute to Ms. Simmons and her staff. He added he would report on his roundtables at the next board meeting. He said it was disheartening to hear a lot of what the students are looking for is what the board has to had to cut over the last five or six years.

The next agenda item was a disciplinary data report. Mr. Sokolovic said he had not received data on arrests. He said the building principals should be able to report the number of students arrested without identifying information.

Mr. Testani said there have been eight arrests. He said from reports the arrests have been of one female and seven males. He said one white student has been arrested and the rest are black and Hispanic.

Mr. Testani said there was a large fight at Harding and he described the video he viewed as ridiculous. There was an arrest at Barnum School. He said that incident of an assault of a staff member is still being reviewed.

Mr. Sokolovic said the racial breakdowns were needed to see if there are trends we need to address. He said arrests, SROs in the buildings, and the school-to-prison pipeline are all interconnected. He questioned why there was a reluctance to provide the data.

Ms. Pereira said since 2009 the board has always received a report by school of disciplinary incidents. She said Lt. Grech and the police department have no authority over the public schools or our security guards. She said the memorandum

of understanding signed during the term of Supt. Vallas did not say one thing about security guards.

Ms. Pereira said 20,000 SROs had been hired since Columbine, which has significantly increased the number of black and brown students, predominantly, who have been funneled into the school-to-prison pipeline. She said children do not act out for no reason, so arresting them will not fix that. She said psychologists, social workers and guidance counselors were needed in urban schools.

Mr. Testani said the incident that resulted in the arrests at Harding was not a fight. One individual was assaulted for four or five other folks. He said the parent of the victim sent him the video. He said the student was assaulted because of where he lives and who he hangs out with. The student has since returned to another school and has had no further problems. He said the assailants should have been arrested.

Ms. Pereira said support services were needed for the students to address their behavior. Mr. Illingworth asked what support services could be provided if it was gang-related. Ms. Pereira said because police officers are taught to arrest she did not want them in the schools.

Mr. Testani said we have a good group of SROs who do good things with our students such as working at summer camps at Central High. He said the SROs did those functions as part of their duties and as volunteers.

Mr. Sokolovic said he did not intend to bash the police department. Mr. Illingworth said in the past he observed an incident where a student was misbehaving and should have been arrested, but Lt. Grech was present and did not arrest the student.

Mr. Sokolovic said fights at a school such as in Fairfield where a police officer is not present will be less likely to result in an arrest as the same type of incident in Bridgeport. He said arrests for things like breach of peace are more likely to happen in Bridgeport.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said if an officer wishes to make an arrest there is usually a conversation whether it is warranted. He said we want to make sure we give every child an opportunity to be successful and to get support, but we leave out a chunk of students every day because they do not have opportunities to reach their full potential. He said programs and pathways were needed for children who do not want to go to college. He said the students at Bassick in the auto shop are not causing problems. He said it was difficult for students to get into Bullard Havens and the district needed a vo-tech school.

Ms. Pereira said for Lt. Grech to refuse to give information about the children arrested in the district's schools is outrageous. Mr. Testani said unfortunately he was absent at that meeting and he would provide the information at the Facilities Committee.

Mr. Sokolovic said the board had to create policies for the future to protect our students, not just the present.

Mr. Testani said he received the video of the incident at Barnum School and he was reviewing the actions of everyone involved.

Maria Ramos, a parent of a Fairchild Wheeler student, said she agreed with Ms. Pereira. She said when parents have

good communication with the teacher or the school the problems can be addressed without arrests.

Mr. Illingworth said he believed if small incidents leading up a big incident were taken care of appropriately the big incident would not have happened.

Mr. Testani said there was an incident at the Fairchild Wheeler cafeteria a few days ago where the police were present and no one was arrested.

JoAnn Kennedy said certain things happen in the community that spill over into the school. She said the school-to-prison pipeline was real. She said there were mentoring programs currently going on at Bassick, Harding and Central.

Mr. Testani said the district was short of counselors and social workers, and the social workers have to spend a lot of time with students with IEPs.

Mr. Illingworth moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved. The meeting was adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the committee on January 16, 2020*