

Thursday, January 11, 2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS & FAMILIES
COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION,
held January 11, 2018, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace,
Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Ben Walker and Maria Pereira. Board member Chris Taylor arrived subsequently as noted.

Supt. Dr. Aresta Johnson was present.

Mr. Walker moved to approve the committee's minutes of November 8, 2017. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic. The motion passed by a 1-0 vote. Voting in favor was Ms. Pereira. Mr. Walker and Mr. Sokolovic abstained.

The next item was on the Bridgeport Public Schools logo contest. Supt. Johnson said most school districts in the country have logos. She said the district has been using the city seal as the logo.

Dr. Johnson showed some other school districts' logos on the Smart Board. She said she thought it was a great way to engage the students in the effort to design a logo. Director of Art Alicia Robinson started the contest and there were almost fifty-plus submissions from students. The department of teaching and learning then met and they selected the top three logos. She added the students did an outstanding job.

The committee discussed some of the logos.

Mr. Taylor arrived at the meeting.

Dr. Johnson said she would provide the logos in the board packets for the next meeting. She said the logo the board decides can be tweaked by the student.

In response to a question, Assistant Superintendent John Lischner said Tyrone Jones from EOC was working with the director of arts to do a new flag for the city.

Mr. Walker and Ms. Pereira suggested bringing all three logos to the full board.

Dr. Johnson said there was also a logo contest for attendance and one will be selected for the attendance campaign.

Dr. Johnson said she brought this forward to the board because the city seal had always been used.

Mr. Walker moved that *“the three logos be included in the Board of Ed packet and as part of the chair’s report we refer to this document in the Board of Ed meeting and for the members to give their opinion and vote on one of these for our school district.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

Mr. Walker said anything that showcases our students is what we’re all about.

Dr. Johnson left the meeting.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action on proposed magnet school policy changes.

Mr. Sokolovic said this dealt with entrance criteria. He said he knew the committee has been working very hard and Ms. Pereira did some fine work, but he had some alternate suggestions.

Mr. Sokolovic said on his visits to schools not one principal was in support of the proposed changes to the policies. Ms. Pereira said Dr. Johnson had a meeting with all the principals and Ms. Morrone reported back that the principals had no issues with the changes.

Christine Morrone said the principals objected to the deselection piece, not the entrance.

Mr. Sokolovic said the principals would like to have discretion. He said the principals know their building and know their students. He

said giving the principals the burden of providing mandatory support services would put the principals in an impossible position to ever deselect a child. He noted the lack of literacy coaches and assistant principals in magnet schools.

Mr. Sokolovic said the principals aren't willy-nilly deselecting students. He said the largest amount he heard of was 2 percent at Central Magnet last year, which was an aberrantly high number.

Mr. Sokolovic said it was important from a financial standpoint to concentrate our services where they're needed. He noted the policy would be helpful for all 22,000 students because it would eliminate the need for literacy and math help at the magnet schools so they could be redirected.

Mr. Sokolovic said if a student at Park City Magnet needed services the interventionist might have to be taken from Hallen School. He added that standards get tougher and tougher as the child advances in the magnet school, and it is setting them up to possibly fail.

Mr. Sokolovic said if kindergarten paras are brought back on a limited basis, perhaps a para would be as necessary in a magnet school classroom because of the entrance criteria.

Mr. Sokolovic said we're very poor district and we need to consolidate our services as much as possible.

Ms. Pereira said this was disgraceful. In response to a question, Mr. Sokolovic said he has not talked about his proposal with Dr. Johnson, but she was welcome to comment.

Ms. Pereira said the policy was worked on for a year and Dr. Johnson spoke to the principals about the entrance requirements. She said Mr. Sokolovic is saying a kindergartener has to pass a readiness assessment.

Mr. Sokolovic said the current policy has never been revised, so he didn't know how the testing ever stopped.

Ms. Pereira said an assessment would penalize children who have not attended preschool. Mr. Sokolovic noted the assessment takes place after the lottery.

Mr. Sokolovic said for a student who failed to meet the entrance criteria it would be less a rejection than a redirection to get the resources they need to perform to the best of their ability.

Ms. Pereira said the policy was racist and discriminatory. Mr. Sokolovic said the breakdown he received shows the magnet schools are more diverse than standard public schools. Ms. Pereira said you're going to be rejecting minorities who haven't had access to preschool. Mr. Sokolovic said it would enhance the education of minority children, raising the education and redirecting minority students to the services that could help that child.

Ms. Pereira said if a child does not get into a magnet school at the kindergarten, it's almost impossible to get into the school due to lack of vacancies. She said there were almost five thousand applications for magnet schools.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed the BRIGANCE assessment was used for kindergarten, which covers shapes and colors. He wondered if the policy has not never changed, why has the testing stopped.

Sauda Baraka was recognized. She said the testing stopped because it was racist. She said it ended when her daughter was denied entry into the magnet program. She said the people administering the test did not know how to administer it properly. She said she spoke to the developer of the test at Yale University. It was realized there were countless number of children who were denied entrance into the magnet schools because of the requirements, so it was eliminated. Her daughter subsequently performed at a high level in the magnet school.

Ms. Baraka said you teach the child at the level that they're at. If they need additional services, the child may have to be referred to a program or school that better meets its needs. She added Maria Miranda, the former principal of Multicultural Magnet, brought a disabled program to the school and said there wasn't a child she

couldn't teach. She said teachers are taught to teach every single child they come in contact with.

Ms. Baraka said to establish a test at that level is wrong and you're opening yourself up for a lawsuit.

Ms. Baraka added that the Geraldine Claytor School is a community neighborhood magnet school, so none of the policies about entry and deselection will apply to it. She added there is a handbook for the school that makes this status clear.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed that exception would be well received.

Mr. Sokolovic said his son was administered the BRIGANCE exam when he entered Park City Magnet. Ms. Baraka said the little fiefdoms in the district are a problem.

Mr. Walker said he believed in the phrase in the policy that Bridgeport Public School magnet schools are open to all students on an equal basis. He said that statement was in contradiction to a policy that would test the kids out of the program. Mr. Sokolovic said the policy would apply to all children equally.

Mr. Walker said he was looking at this as it becomes a discriminatory thing. He said when the first magnet school happened in his area of Texas it was intended as a desegregation tool. The schools were aimed at special interests such as music, arts, math or science – a magnet to draw the kids into the school. He said it had nothing to do with merit, but rather with interests. He said the policy would turn the magnet schools into talented and gifted (TAG) schools. He added that his 180 music students are leveled, but we never kick kids out.

Mr. Walker said he sees where Mr. Sokolovic is coming from, but they are really not select schools. Students would enter based on tests, not a lottery. He added that he wished we had TAG schools, but we do not. He said the meme he sees regarding equity and equality means we need to be more focused on equity. He said students who don't pass the kindergarten criteria might have more reason to be in the magnet school than the ones being admitted.

Mr. Sokolovic said we're not attempting to institute a policy that selects children based on a test, but we're attempting to change a policy that already does that into one that does not. He said the current policy does include deselection criteria and preferences to grades and gives the principals the right to deselect.

Mr. Walker said the current policy should be thrown away. He said we are not about excluding and we need to include as many students in our gifted and talented programs as we can.

Ms. Pereira said the policy changes should be delineated in colors with line-outs and red ink, and that the document proposed by Mr. Sokolovic is confusing. She suggested Mr. Sokolovic's proposal be in blue in the document.

Ms. Pereira said Dr. Johnson agreed we needed to be more student-centered and inclusive. She said Dr. Johnson wanted her staff held accountable for putting in an action plan to improve student performance, not just removing students from a school.

Ms. Pereira said she knew of an instance where a five-year old child was kicked out of High Horizons 26 days before the school year ended. Mr. Sokolovic said his proposed language will not allow deselection after the third marking period.

Ms. Pereira asked if Ms. Morrone could put Mr. Sokolovic's language in blue on a new document.

Mr. Sokolovic said he didn't expect action tonight because it was a drastic change. Ms. Pereira said the language had been worked on for a year and parents and board members at the last meeting agreed it was a reasonable compromise.

Ms. Morrone said the real sticking point has been the deselection process more than the entrance requirements for the parents.

Mr. Taylor asked what was the purpose of magnet schools. Mr. Walker said curricula instruction is centered on certain themes – High Horizons is language arts, Multicultural is world language, Park City is STEAM.

In response to a question, Mr. Walker said he didn't believe magnet schools were more academically advanced, but you draw in kids who are interested certain subjects, which makes them more interested in the school and being academically engaged.

Mr. Walker said he would like to see more magnet schools, however the state policies have changed. He said he was all in favor of TAG programs, even within magnet schools. He said in life a lot of people are motivated by the threat of being replaced, but these are small children so we have to do it in small doses.

Mr. Taylor noted he had behavioral problems in school and asked how such students were dealt with in magnet school. Mr. Walker said that is dealt with by keeping students engaged.

Mr. Sokolovic noted the extra funding by the state only goes to interdistrict magnet schools, not the intradistrict magnet schools. He said the only thing that separates the magnet schools from other schools are the policies we're attempting to change right now.

Mr. Pereira said the number of magnet schools in the state has capped by the Legislature and there are no more interdistrict magnet schools allowed.

Mr. Sokolovic said there could be a theme school without it being a magnet school. He said this is a low-cost way to have a talented and gifted program. He said less \$300,000 goes to the talented and gifted program. He said TAG students are a special needs group whose needs are not being met.

Ms. Pereira said talented and gifted programs segregate students. Students around them don't benefit from their knowledge and intellect. She added that she did not support magnet schools.

Ms. Pereira said the question remained as to whether there can be deselection policies in interdistrict schools. She noted the federal funding of Fairchild Wheeler and Discovery Magnet did not allow for any entrance criteria.

Ms. Morrone said as a result of the research by Ms. Clayton-Brown the district is not allowed to have deselection criteria in those schools. Mr. Sokolovic said the policy document would have to exclude those two schools.

Mr. Sokolovic noted the principal had a lot of input into the proposed policies concerning Central Magnet and they are reflected in the standards and the deselection criteria for the school.

Mr. Sokolovic said the staff of a school cannot control whether a student does not study or do their homework. Ms. Pereira said they're supposed to work with the student, including with social workers and an IEP if needed. She said the superintendent wanted a policy that mandates interventions at magnet schools. She asked why we were telling her what should happen with her staff. Mr. Sokolovic said the board would set the policy and the administration can implement the policy the way choose to meet it.

There was a discussion of not listing Geraldine Claytor in the policy since it was a neighborhood magnet school.

Ms. Pereira said Classical Studies began as a theme school, but became a magnet school(with a lottery) about two years ago.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was some urgency to get the matter before the board so the lottery could be held in an open forum to counter accusations that it is rigged.

Ms. Morrone said the theme of Central Magnet was academic excellence. A student deselected goes to their neighborhood school.

Mr. Taylor said due to the financial difficulties of the board he asked that whoever was making color copies to please cease doing so.

Mr. Sokolovic said he had no issues with the sibling policy as long as it mirrors the magnet policy.

There was a discussion of the changes Ms. Morrone should make in the draft policy. Mr. Sokolovic asked that it be prepared as a Word file as well PDF so it could be tweaked.

Ms. Morrone said the state clarified that a student who is expelled while in a magnet program is returned to their original school at the end of their term of expulsion.

Assistant Superintendent Dr. Christiana Otuwa said expulsion is when a student commits a Type 3, 4 or 5 offense, usually involving weapons and assault, and is removed from one school for up to one calendar year. She said she was not sure why it's called expulsion. Mr. Lischner said expulsion is basically a suspension for up to a year. Ms. Pereira noted students that are expelled go to The University School. Mr. Taylor said he went to The University School briefly. Dr. Otuwa said in other states expulsion is called long-term suspension.

Ms. Pereira said it was crazy to remove a student from a magnet school for getting a D in language arts, but a student who gets expelled gets their seat back after the expulsion has expired.

Mr. Walker said the students are allowed back in the school due to the emphasis on restorative justice.

Mr. Sokolovic questioned whether the state's policy should be referenced in the board's policy. Ms. Pereira said it was a good idea to share it with parents.

Mr. Sokolovic requested Ms. Morrone provide the revised document five days in advance of the next committee meeting on February 8th. There was a discussion of possible schedule conflicts with that date.

The next agenda item was discussion of creating a Parents Matter campaign.

Me. Sokolovic said parental involvement in the district was very low, despite the presence of four parents and community members at this meeting and the parents who come to board meetings when there are controversial issues.

Mr. Sokolovic said every day parents need to be on top of what is happening in the system. He said he had something in mind like the attendance campaign, reaching out to the community. He said this

could be a continuing agenda item with the committee. He added that it was important to get functioning PACs up and running at all the schools.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Testani was supposed to provide the committee with the composition of the PAC leadership at every school. She said she never saw the list.

Mr. Lischner said he could gather the information and provide it to the committee. Ms. Pereira said every school should have a minimum of eight members, including the five members at large, and nine if they have a bilingual secretary. She said she would also like to know if the officers were still active.

Mr. Sokolovic said once the committee has the names, we can move on to see where it's effective and where it is not, and what is needed to get more involvement in the schools that need it.

Tammy Boyle was recognized. She said she understood the parent piece at the Parent Center had been dismantled because Lisa Pavlich lost her job. She said Delores Mason was present at a nutrition meeting and said she was the parent engagement coordinator. Ms. Pereira said she believed Ms. Mason is in charge of the PACs and SCGs still. Mr. Sokolovic said we should probably have her as a staff member at these meetings.

Ms. Pereira said the district's website describes Ms. Mason as National Network Partnership school facilitator. She said she would contact Dr. Johnson to learn her title and her role.

Ms. Pereira said the Parent Convention committee needed to get started.

Albert Benejan was recognized. He said we also need to find out who signed Title I documents for each school. Ms. Pereira said Ms. Siegel has the PTSO president and principal sign the Title I documents.

Mr. Sokolovic said we had to get our District PAC up to date again. Ms. Pereira said the committee never moved on this issue last year

because it never received the list it requested. Mr. Sokolovic said he believed there were now proposed bylaws for the District PAC.

Ms. Boyle said she provided them in June. Mr. Sokolovic asked that she send them again to him.

Ms. Pereira said the first step would be to have the parents approve the bylaws. She said a meeting could be called of all the school PAC presidents.

Ms. Boyle said since the board illegally dismantled the District PAC, the board would have to vote to reinstate the District PAC before the bylaws are voted on.

Mr. Benejan said the PTSO is not under federal Title I money, while the PAC is.

Mr. Walker said both the PACs and the District PAC should all be under the supervision of this committee. He said he was present when the board voted to disband the District PAC and he never thought that was a legal move. He said the boycott prevented that from coming before the board again.

Mr. Walker said there is a Catch-22 on which came first, the officers of the District PAC or the bylaws. He said the bylaws already exist and a meeting of the PAC presidents should vote on the bylaws, and then a timeline should be set for elections for District PAC officers.

Ms. Boyle said there had not been a functioning District PAC for almost two years. Ms. Pereira said if the District PAC bylaws are organized at a meeting, that will reinstitute a District PAC, and then this committee could go to the full board to reinstate the District PAC executive board and help organize elections. Then once it is up and running, the board would leave it alone.

Mr. Walker said he believed Mr. Sokolovic and the committee was up to the challenge of helping the District PAC reorganize. He said without the parents, we're a three-legged stool without one leg.

Ms. Pereira said Ms. Mason could call a meeting of the school PACs. Mr. Walker said before we bring the matter to the full board he wanted to see a copy of bylaws approved by the school PAC presidents. He said he wanted to hear grown-up things and see things moving forward in an adult fashion.

Mr. Walker said if Mr. Sokolovic can produce this outcome it would be a big feather in his cap as chair of the committee. Mr. Sokolovic said he was the type of person who doesn't need credit, he just needs it done.

Mr. Sokolovic said we could work with the principals to re-engage parents where the PACs are not active. Mr. Walker said it works if it is run as a collective, where all views and opinions are heard and respected. He said a lot of people don't want to be part of the PAC because it's been a contentious thing for a while.

Ms. Boyle said last year there was concern that a lot of Title I money was not being spent because there were no operating PACs and PTSOs in some schools.

Ms. Pereira said Ms. Siegel or Ms. Clarke could provide that information. Mr. Lischner said he would ask Ms. Siegel. He said if the funds were not used, it would be pulled from that school and put back into the general Title I fund.

Mr. Benejan said PAC or PTSO officers should have a child in the school. The board members said that would be up to the bylaws created by the parents. Ms. Pereira said under federal Title I it is parents who make decisions.

Mr. Sokolovic said this would be a continuing item on the committee's agenda. Ms. Pereira said the agenda item should be more specific, such as DPAC/school PAC organization.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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