

Thursday, April 5, 2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS & FAMILIES  
COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION,  
held April 5, 2018, at City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport,  
Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:33 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic and Maria Pereira. Board member Hernan Illingworth arrived subsequently as noted.

Ms. Pereira moved to approve the committee's minutes of March 15, 2018, with edits. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic. Corrections were noted. The motion was approved by a 2-0 vote. The was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was school PAC timelines and vacancies. Ms. Pereira said she was concerned that there were so many PACs not close to the required membership. She noted Batalla had too many members at large.

Mr. Sokolovic said this was an ongoing problem. He said he had personally seen principals trying to address the issue and getting information out, but parents aren't being activated somehow. He suggested trying to replicate the practices being used at the schools with more PAC involvement.

Ms. Pereira said the best place to recruit parents was in pre-K and the early grades of elementary school because the parents are new and excited.

Assistant Superintendent Janet Brown-Clayton said she has been in discussion with Delores Mason on strategies for parent engagement. One approach is to celebrate accomplishments during PAC meetings; another is celebrating attendance. She said during a Parent Conversation meeting there was discussion about engaging other parent communities and parent-led groups such as the Newtown Promise.

Ms. Pereira said we know recognizing students brings out parents, which is apparent at the regular board meetings where parents fill the room for recognitions.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said Turnaround Arts events for children are very well attended by parents.

Ms. Sokolovic said he once heard a welcoming address by a principal that emphasized no one is a better advocate for a child than a parent.

Tammy Bogdanyi was recognized. She said district-level supervision was needed of the PACs and PTSOs. She added that the parent leaders need to be held accountable for running effective organizations. She agreed that reaching parents at the pre-K and early levels of elementary school was effective.

Mr. Sokolovic said sometimes it is difficult to reach many parents because of the level of poverty and such, but the issue is reaching the parents that can devote time to parent organizations. He said he viewed this as the beginning of the rebuilding efforts of the PACs. He said he believed the PACs should be independent with rare involvement by principals.

Ms. Bogdanyi said when the District PAC was functioning it operated to make sure school PACs were up and running.

Mr. Illingworth arrived at the meeting.

Ms. Pereira noted the document provided indicated there are schools where not one schoolwide parent meeting has been held this year, even though it is a requirement of Title I. She said Bassick, Central, Cross, Columbus and Curiale were listed as not having a single monthly meeting.

James Meszoros was recognized. He said he was the PTSO president at Bassick for four years. He suggested following the practices that were used in the past.

In response to a question, Ms. Brown-Clayton said the document presented to the committee was compiled from information provided

by PAC presidents. She said she wasn't sure if it was the most recent up-to-date compilation, which was created by Ms. Mason.

Albert Benejan was recognized. He said the Bassick PTSO has 11 members and meetings are held with an agenda.

Ms. Pereira said if the PACs are not having meetings, how are they spending their Title I funds, which are for meetings. Mr. Sokolovic said a discussion of the expenditure of funds would be a future agenda item.

Mr. Illingworth said sometimes parent events or workshops are counted as meetings. He said he attended a parent event at Bassick around Christmas. He said some information did not make it into the report the committee received.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said some school literacy, math or game nights are parental engagement activities. She said she knew Columbus held at least two of those.

JoAnn Kennedy was recognized. She was not aware of any meetings at Bassick this year. She said the parents have to meet to agree on what the money is going to be spent on. She said there needed to be more outreach to parents at Bassick.

Ms. Kennedy said home-school coordinators were active in providing information to Ms. Mason, so perhaps information was not being updated.

Mr. Sokolovic said his son's school initiated phone blasts and sent forms home to parents, but there still is not going to be a full PAC complement at the school.

Ms. Pereira suggested personal phone calls be made to pre-K parents urging them to become active. She said when she was on District PAC, she and Ms. Bogdanyi made phone calls to PAC presidents and the attendance of PAC officers greatly expanded at district-level meetings. She said phone banking is more effective – just like in politics with campaign donations.

Ms. Pereira said the form indicated that Bryant School does not have one single PAC member. Assistant Superintendent Dr. Christiana Otuwa said she would look into that.

Mr. Sokolovic said a well-functioning PAC can make principals' jobs much easier.

Dr. Otuwa noted the data indicated issues at BMA. Ms. Bogdanyi said there was a full PAC at BMA and there had been meetings.

Ms. Pereira said it was very important the board receives accurate information.

There was a discussion of methods of reporting parent activity to Ms. Mason. Mr. Sokolovic suggested reaching out to PAC presidents.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said she would commit to creating an updated, accurate summary document.

Mr. Sokolovic noted Ms. Mason was not present to speak on the document. He said going forward the information could be gathered from the PAC presidents.

Ms. Bogdanyi noted minutes of parent meetings are required by the bylaws.

Ms. Pereira said the documents should indicate when the elections were held that elected the PAC officers. Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to see the elections held at the same time.

Ms. Pereira said she would contact Mr. Lischner because Robin Mastro was not eligible to be the PAC president at Hooker School since is not a parent.

Ms. Pereira asked the committee be provided with the amount of each school's allocation and how much they spent. She said Nadira Clarke would have that information.

The next agenda item was on PAC training. Mr. Sokolovic said Ms. Mason indicated she was waiting until after the elections to begin the

training. Audience members indicated two training sessions had been cancelled. Mr. Benejan said Ms. Mason had personal matters.

Ms. Pereira said the offices in each school should go up for election at the same time. Mr. Sokolovic said he believed every school would have a PAC president and vice president who could appoint members at large pending elections.

Cero Tavinia, parent of a High Horizons student, was recognized. He said he saw the situation as chaotic because no one was taking responsibility and following the bylaws.

Ms. Pereira noted the district used to have home-school coordinators that were cut who used to do much of this work. She said the board policies indicate the principal is responsible for a functioning school PAC.

Mr. Sokolovic said things were somewhat chaotic because there was a new board, a new administration and some brand-new PTSOs. He said we're trying to correct some problems we inherited.

Ms. Pereira said it was now April 5th and no training had taken place.

Mr. Tavinia noted the lack of parent participation at his daughter's school.

Ms. Kennedy said the parents at Bassick got discouraged because the election was postponed several times. She said districtwide PAC training was needed.

Ms. Pereira asked that Ms. Clayton-Brown copy the committee on an e-mail to Ms. Mason as to why the training was not held that the committee directed her to do in February.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed May would be a good month to hold the training. Ms. Pereira said she would like to attend the training.

Ms. Brown-Clayton provided a Parent Convention update. Mr. Benejan is the chairman of the convention, which will be held May

30th at Housatonic Community College. The theme is, with communication comes great success.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said Housatonic was very cooperative. The entire Beacon Hall, which can be split into separate sections, will be used, for a charge of \$910. The projected cost for breakfast and lunch for 240 people will be \$3,000. The color scheme is burgundy, black and gold. There will be giveaways for parents. Entertainment will be the Bassick High band and Madison students. Schools will create centerpieces and display boards.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said the breakout sessions will cover bullying/cyber bullying; special needs; school safety; immigration law; positive thinking; and state statutes on bilingual/ESL.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested a piece on the importance of parental involvement be considered.

Mr. Illingworth said the keynote speaker was important in highlighting parental involvement.

Ms. Bogdanyi said speaker was a Yale pediatric medical assistant who will focus on the importance of parents listening and engaging children on bullying. She described his background and past experience with bullying. She said the speaker presented to the Parent Convention committee.

Ms. Pereira asked about the basis for the speaker's medical expertise. She said she was concerned about past speakers in parent workshops and keynote speakers at the Parent Convention. She said last year's keynote speaker, who was a probation officer, was horrendous and made outrageous comments including that less six percent of our parents come to report card conferences. She added Mr. Osei played an R-rated movie at a workshop. She said Rev. Castillo also made outrageous and sexist comments at a workshop.

Mr. Bogdanyi said the speaker was not being paid. Mr. Benejan said the speaker presented a workshop at Bassick, which led to the invitation to speak at the convention.

Mr. Benejan said he has spoken to Mr. Osei and he will not be presenting any movie.

Ms. Pereira said speakers should be experts in the content area they are speaking on. She said the proposed expert did not seem to be an expert on bullying.

Mr. Benejan said there would be meetings with the keynote speaker and the workshop leaders. He said he would invite Ms. Brown-Clayton and the chair to attend.

Mr. Sokolovic said the choice of the speaker was in the hands of the Parent Convention committee. Ms. Clayton-Brown said this was the case. Ms. Pereira said Ms. Pavlich used to be very involved in the selection of the keynote speaker and there were some wonderful examples in the past.

Ms. Kennedy said there's a saying you get what you pay for, but the speakers have to be vetted. She said speakers for a large audience have to be polished.

Ms. Pereira said the local education association, the board, has the right to intervene on Title I expenditures. She said if we have another example of an ineffective speaker that she gave earlier she would make an issue of it.

Mr. Benejan said he would not bring in a speaker that would make us look ridiculous. He noted people from other cities will be coming to the convention. He added the immigration session will be led by a lawyer; Ms. Brown, a social worker, will also speak; along with Ms. Sousa Martins.

Mr. Sokolovic asked if the keynote speaker would be willing to speak to the committee at its next meeting. Mr. Benejan said he would speak to him and see if that was possible. Ms. Pereira asked that the speaker's biography be forwarded to the committee.

In response to a question, Ms. Brown-Clayton said there would be free parking for attendees and the college semester at Housatonic would be completed. Ms. Bogdanyi said the size of the event had to

be limited to 240 people due to the venue limitations. Mr. Sokolovic asked the committee archive the contact information of the attendees.

Ms. Pereira said somebody was supposed to look into why only \$9,000 was allocated for the convention. She added she knew the Title I grants had been reduced.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said the dollar amount was provided by Ms. Siegel. Ms. Pereira said the committee wanted to know the basis of the amount, which was \$27,000 two years ago. Ms. Brown-Clayton said she could report on that.

Ms. Bogdanyi said in the past the District PAC had expenditures that were covered by Title I, so if anything the amount of money available should be higher because of the lack of a District PAC this year.

Mr. Illingworth said it was possible Ms. Siegel allocated more of the Title I money to the schools and less to district events. Ms. Pereira said she believed the district received \$7 per student from Title I.

Mr. Benejan said he sent the wrong e-mail to Ms. Brown-Clayton and she did not get the bio of the keynote speaker. He said he would forward the bio.

Mr. Benejan said he was trying to obtain school dancers as well for entertainment.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said Mr. Resto reminded her that the fee being charged by Housatonic includes the technology and audio system.

Mr. Benejan said the IT department would be on hand to help with technical issues.

Ms. Brown-Clayton recapped what the committee was asking: The PAC training, information from Ms. Siegel on Title I allocation between school PACs and district events, the total amount of the Title I grant and the Priority Grant, every school's allocation and expenditure, the calculation that yielded the \$9,000 and why it was reduced from \$27,000, and the biography of the keynote speaker.



Ms. Pereira said an updated version of the status of the PACs and PTSOs was also needed.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said she knew how long Ms. Mason had been working on the data.

The next agenda item was on additional strategies to increase parental and community involvement. Mr. Sokolovic said Ms. Mason had provided a very extensive list. He noted the list included beginning PAC training on May 14th, with elections to be completed by May 4th.

Mr. Sokolovic said he found Ms. Mason's webinars helpful. He said school websites need to be made more dynamic – he suggested Facebook or Twitter pages be considered in addition to the school websites.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said some schools have very active Facebook pages and it is rolling out to other schools. Mr. Sokolovic said as many as 35 people looked at the Facebook live video of tonight's meeting.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said Ms. Mason presented information on the Every Student Succeeds Act(ESSA) to the committee. Mr. Sokolovic said the ESSA was more inclusive of grandparents.

Mr. Sokolovic noted there were issues with undocumented parents being reluctant to identify themselves and this could matter with regard to grandparents.

Mr. Illingworth said the board's parent engagement policies needed to be updated.

Mr. Sokolovic thanked everyone for participating in the discussion.

Ms. Pereira said the most urgent item was the rationale for the \$9,000 allocation. Ms. Brown-Clayton noted the district was out of session next week.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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