

Thursday, May 10, 2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STUDENTS & FAMILIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 10, 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.

Ms. Pereira moved to approve the committee's minutes of April 5, 2018, with edits. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker. Corrections were noted. The motion was approved by a 2-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Pereira and Sokolovic. Mr. Walker abstained.

The next item was on magnet school policies. Asst. Superintendent Janet Brown-Clayton said she spoke with Shola Freeman and Katie Atkinson at the state Department of Education who are in charge of interdistrict magnet schools. She noted the purpose of magnet school was to cease and abate racial isolation.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said since there is no criteria for entrance in the magnet schools there can be no criterion for deselection.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said if a student is expelled from an interdistrict magnet schools their seats remain until they come back because they're considered to be a part of the school. She added if a child is accepted into a magnet school their acceptance cannot overturned due to grades unless they are being retained.

Ms. Pereira said the reference in the policy to a conduct or effort grade reference should be eliminated for regular magnet schools because it is unlawful.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said the discussion with principals at the high schools and magnet schools was they wanted it to align to with the chronic absentee requirements. She said the phrase is students' school attendance must align with the district's attendance policy.

Ms. Pereira said this was contradictory because the attendance provision had been removed from the magnet school policies.

Ms. Sokolovic said the problem is we're trying to align to the state standards, not that it's illegal per se to have entrance requirements and deselection requirements for the district schools.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said she would have to take the hit for not understanding what the committee was asking.

Mr. Sokolovic said if you have an entrance requirement for conduct, you can have a deselection requirement for conduct in the intradistrict schools.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said we're trying to align the policies between interdistrict and intradistrict schools.

Mr. Sokolovic asked if we choose not to align the policies and have a standalone citywide board policy, would it be illegal to have the entrance requirement and the deselection. Ms. Brown-Clayton said she did not believe it would be illegal because the policies shared by the Department of Education are for interdistrict schools alone.

Ms. Pereira said the intradistrict magnets are High Horizons, Multicultural and Park City.

Ms. Pereira said the question raised by the committee was on restrictions on intradistrict magnet schools. Ms. Brown-Clayton said what we were attempting to do in meeting with the principals is to align the policies with the interdistrict magnet schools.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said she believed it was legal to establish criteria for intradistrict schools, however we talked to the principals and we agreed that would not be the practice.

Mr. Sokolovic said the question was asked if it would be illegal for the district to have its own policies for intradistrict schools, including deselection. Ms. Brown-Clayton said the state only answered as to the interdistrict schools.

Ms. Pereira noted that students from Fairchild Wheeler and Discovery could not be deselected.

Mr. Walker said he was disappointed we didn't get what we asked for and the whole second page has to be eliminated.

Mr. Sokolovic said we need to get a legal opinion specific to intradistrict schools. He noted there are two different views in the committee as to whether there will be criteria or not. The question is whether it is legal in intradistrict schools to have entrance and deselection criteria.

Ms. Pereira said there is confusion because we already knew the schools that receive federal funding could not have any selection or deselection process.

Ms. Pereira asked that the question be put in writing to the state Department of Education with a copy to the three committee members. Ms. Brown-Clayton said she understood the request to be the legality of an intradistrict school to have a selection or deselection process.

Ms. Pereira said it was kind of crazy to have a blind lottery and then after students are drawn you put a criteria on the policy to reject the individual.

Mr. Walker said he didn't care if it was lawful; it's not moral. He said we are not running private schools, charter schools or prep schools. Public schools should not have any policy that is exclusionary.

Ms. Pereira said she believed BMA gets federal dollars. Asst. Superintendent Dr. Christina Otuwa said she would check on that.

Ms. Pereira said the board had been trying to get this done since Supt. Rabinowitz was here. She said it was two months since the policy was referred, followed by a request by Dr. Johnson for a postponement.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said before the next policy is presented the committee will receive in writing the response from the state

Department of Education that answers the question about the legality of intradistrict magnet schools.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said that Dr. Johnson is in agreement that we should follow the interdistrict policy. Ms. Pereira said she and Mr. Walker agreed, but Mr. Sokolovic did not.

Ms. Pereira asked if a selection and deselection process was allowed if there would be an appeal policy for parents. She said these were coveted seats that six thousand students a year apply for and only about 2,100 are selected each year.

Ms. Pereira said we had to have this for the next meeting. She said the document should be created with the items removed from the current policy lined out and new language should be in red and underlined. She added that the notes that were made should not be put in the draft document.

Mr. Sokolovic said we need the legal answers for the remaining board members.

In response to a question, Ms. Brown-Clayton said all magnet principals were on board with the proposed policy.

The next item was on Bassick High School advanced manufacturing magnet pathway.

Dr. Otuwa said she was hoping Mr. Wallack would be here to discuss the issue as well

Dr. Byron Williams, principal of Bassick High, noted there have been discussions about a new Bassick. He said this program might help the school go in that direction a lot quicker than we've anticipated.

He said there are curriculum pathways that are being looked at: advanced manufacturing, automotive, medical careers and health, and construction technology and culinary arts.

Dr. Williams said the current Bassick would not support this program. He said with the help of the Justice Education Center for 2018-19 the

construction management and culinary arts programs are proceeding. He said the Justice Education Center was paying for faculty and renovation of rooms in the basement.

Dr. Williams said instructors for the advanced manufacturing program will come from the laborers' union. He said students who go through the program will have options to take tests that laborers take. He said there was an employer with a warehouse near Batalla that was looking to hire graduates.

Dr. Williams said the academy will cover from Grade 9 to Grade 12. The importance of the 9th grade participation is it allows students to sample areas of the program, giving students an opportunity to change their minds.

Dr. Williams said the current school building will not support a full ramp-up and even a build-to-new would not support a viable program.

Dr. Williams said the program is oriented towards futuristic and here-and-now jobs for students.

Dr. Williams said college-readiness will not be decreased because the amount of AP courses and early college entry courses are being increased at Bassick.

Dr. Williams said the plan is to make the school a neighborhood magnet. Dr. Otuwa said the advanced manufacturing program will lead to students who are college and career-ready.

Dr. Williams said the culinary arts program would develop a restaurant similar to the fish market at Aquaculture.

Mr. Walker said he was totally in favor of the program. He said he was skeptical that if the program is created that a new school would be built. He said there was little to no chance that a new school would be built in the current climate with money in the state.

Dr. Otuwa said a grant would be submitted to the state. Dr. Williams said the state encouraged us in this direction.

Mr. Walker said the Justice Education Center was a godsend, but the district doesn't have any money to contribute to this. He did not want to start a program and have the state say it doesn't have any money.

Beswick Channer, assistant principal at Bassick, program, said there are currently two cohorts of Bassick students are in advanced manufacturing at Housatonic Community College(HCC). He said there were six thousand open jobs in advanced manufacturing in Connecticut.

Mr. Channer said the ultimate goal is to get a four-year program in Bassick for advanced manufacturing, where graduates would have a year towards an associate's degree.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was a blue collar worker. He said blue collar work does not necessarily require academic skills. He said he would not want to see a mechanic with great aptitude lose out because of academics.

Dr Williams said we have to meet the state requirements. He noted math requirements are not getting any lighter and it will be up to us get the kids ready for it.

Dr. Williams said the magnet status gets us money. Ms. Pereira said the district did not get extra dollars for intradistrict magnet schools.

Dr. Williams said we need to serve the population we have in the Bassick neighborhood.

Ms. Pereira asked if there had been a meeting with Mr. Wallack, who is working with the school building committee. She said they have gone out to bid for an architect for the Bassick project.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Wallack indicated they were trying to see if one Bassick building was knocked down and the other was renovated if that would qualify for the state reimbursement level of 80 percent. She added she was totally opposed to knocking down the older building at Bassick due to its beautiful architecture.

Dr. Williams said he had reached out to Mr. Wallack and had not heard back. Dr. Otuwa said she thought Mr. Wallack would be here tonight.

In response to a question, Dr. Williams said the basement renovation would begin this summer. He noted it was in the old building.

Mr. Walker said he was one hundred percent behind the program, but was skeptical about the money because the district had been burned many times in the past. He noted everyone is not destined for college and jobs in the future may not require a college degree.

In response to a question, Assistant Principal Carmen McPherson said capstone projects are not currently required to graduate, but they will be in the future. Ms. Pereira objected because a child may perform well in school but be unable to graduate because of problems with their capstone project.

Ms. McPherson said there can be creativity as to criteria for the capstone.

Mr. Walker said other districts have been creative in how they handle capstone projects; they view it more as a portfolio of the work the student has done. He said on an initial first blush he was resistant to the idea of capstone, but it can be individualized to something that can be almost resume-building.

Mr. Sokolovic said he liked the capstone because students have to have a work product at the end. He said it could be treated as a piece of the grade or weighted average.

Dr. Williams described the development of a mentorship program at Bassick. The first meeting will be in about two weeks.

Mr. Walker said in reality by the time that these freshmen will begin this program the capstone project it will be a requirement by the state. He said the state had done better than other states that have a diploma exam at the end.

Ms. McPherson said there are currently 19 Bassick students who attend St. Vincent's College five days a week and take specific courses there. That aspect of the program began last year with freshmen.

Ms. McPherson said the courses for construction and culinary arts have been approved for seniors next year. Mr. Channer said there will be a summer program that has been pushed to 8th grade students to be in a program that will give sample exposure to advanced manufacturing.

Mr. Walker said quite a few things are highlighted as electives in advanced manufacturing document. Dr. Williams said the electives are still being developed for the construction pathway. Mr. Channer said the electives for advanced manufacturing are established programs with college partners.

Dr. Otuwa said she believed the program needed to be submitted to the state for approval. She said she believed Mr. Wallack had to submit the item in a short period of time.

Mr. Sokolovic said the item could be added to Monday's Regular Meeting.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to approve the Bassick High School advanced magnet career curriculum pathways presented this evening."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

The next item was the Parent Convention update. Ms. Brown-Clayton said the 46th annual convention would be held on May 30th at Housatonic Community College, from 8:30 to 2:00. She noted the keynote speaker was unable to come to the meeting tonight.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said there was a budget of \$9,000 for the convention. She credited the committee for being fiscally responsible. Centerpieces are being made by schools. The payment to HCC is \$910. The largest expenditure is \$4500 for food. There is \$2500 left that has not been spent.

Mr. Sokolovic said he heard registration so far was on the low side. Ms. Brown-Claytor said phone blasts are being created and it will be timed for next week on Sunday afternoon and again on Friday. She said principals were requested to share information such as registration forms for the convention with parents

Ms. Pereira said the committee was supposed to get the biography of the convention speaker because of issues with speakers in the past. She said if there are issues with this speaker she would not support a convention going forward.

Ms. Pereira said the committee also asked for the calculation for only giving the convention \$9,000. Ms. Brown-Clayton said according to Marlene Siegel the monies for the convention are over and above the one percent amount that is allocated to schools. It was thought to be fiscally responsible in the face of the reduction to Title I funding not to spend the \$17,000 that was budgeted last year.

Ms. Pereira said the extra money for the convention really isn't a requirement; it's just an extra pot of money we've always done as a district. Ms. Brown-Clayton agreed with the characterization. She said the expenditure allotment to the schools under Title I is almost \$60,000 above the required amount of one percent.

Ms. Pereira asked all staff to consult the draft minutes posted on the website to be sure the board gets the information it requests at meetings.

Albert Benejan was recognized. He said as the chair of the convention he apologized for not sending the biography to Ms. Brown-Clayton but he had a death in the family. He said the biography was being forwarded right now.

Mr. Benejan said he has visited some schools to discuss the convention. He said in some cases principals had not done enough to publicize it.

Mr. Sokolovic asked Delores Mason to circle back to the principals and make sure the flyers are going home with the students. Ms.

Mason said we are doing that. She said the deadline for registration was May 18th.

In response to a question, Tammy Bogdanyi described the breakout session at the Parent Convention on the power of positive thinking. Mr. Benejan said the presenter is coming from Florida free of charge to do the presentation.

Ms. Pereira said \$18,500 was the amount not spent this year by schools.

The next agenda item was on PAC/PTSO membership.

Delores Mason said one update was sent a few days ago and today there is another update.

Ms. Mason said the elections were held at Bryant for the secretary and bilingual secretary. The elections on May 18 will be for president and vice president. Ms. Pereira noted the school went a full school year without a PAC.

Ms. Mason said Bryant is a school with a large immigrant population. She said there is lots of parent engagement going on, but immigrants are scared and they don't want their names on legal documents. She said that could be true in other schools. Ms. Mason said the principal at Bryant, Ms. Egri, is doing an excellent job with parental engagement.

Ms. Mason said she held PAC training on November 8th, November 17th, December 12th; there were webinars on March 6 and March 7. She said the April 2nd and 3rd trainings were cancelled due to snow, a death in her family and a lack of registration. Trainings were held May 3, May 4 and May 8. A newly involved parent from Multicultural Magnet has been trained.

Ms. Mason said an excellent parent leader at Marin, Maria Silva, passed away unexpectedly.

Ms. Mason said she works with high schools separately because there is a different type of spending.

The next item was on Title I funding expenditures by PACs and PTSOs . Ms. Pereira noted a report had been distributed which shows spending through May 3rd.

Ms. Pereira said there were major problems. Lots of money was encumbered because people were putting in their B-10 forms at the last minute. She said the money should be spent throughout the year. She noted some of the most impoverished schools such as Barnum, Hall, Skane, Cross Tisdale and Roosevelt had done a poor job of spending the Title I money.

Ms. Mason said historically Black Rock School had not spent its Title I money, instead relying on fundraisers. She said the Title I money should be spent in alignment with the school goals. She said some of the events held by Black Rock do not qualify for Title I status.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed we should never leave money on the table.

Ms. Pereira said Park City Magnet as of May 3rd had not spent a dollar. Mr. Sokolovic said Park City does a lot of stuff in conjunction with Lighthouse, but the money still should be encumbered and spent.

Ms. Mason and Ms. Brown-Clayton said money not spent goes back to the general Title I fund in the district.

Ms. Mason said she insists and begs school to write action plans in June, and then in September they should already know how they're supposed to spend their money. She said she preaches to people who don't listen that they should spend and encumber the money early in the year.

Mr. Sokolovic said there were two parts to the equation: the PAC president and the principal. He said the board had no authority over the PAC presidents, but we can hold the principals accountable for a failure to spend money on parent engagement.

Ms. Pereira said the situation at the high schools was deplorable. She gave kudos to Bassick, which spent by May 3rd and only has \$800 encumbered. Ms. Mason said Central didn't even have a PTSO until recently.

Ms. Pereira noted the assistant superintendents evaluate principals on parent engagement. She pointed to a failure to spend at Harding, BMA and Fairchild Wheeler.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed the committee had to take a stronger stance on this. She said perhaps quarterly reports were needed.

Crystal Aguire of Harding High was recognized. She said she had never seen an initiative to have parents come to school. Asst. Superintendent John Lischner said he sees parents in the building almost every day. Ms. Pereira said that is different because it doesn't mean they're engaging in meaningful learning or activities about helping their children.

Ms. Mason said she doesn't know why Harding is not spending, but she gets a lot of information from Kathy Silver on events, including events that are highlighted in the district newsletter.

Ms. Pereira noted to the assistant superintendents that the report on PAC/PTSO spending was available at any time from Nadira Clarke.

Mr. Sokolovic said the training should emphasize that parent leaders can pressure principals to spend the Title I money.

Mr. Benejan said at some schools PAC and PTSO presidents don't sign the B-10 forms. He said he and Dr. Williams always sign the form, which is the way it is supposed to work.

Mr. Lischner said there is a huge umbrella of uses for Title I funds such as access to equal education and closing gaps associated with social-economic status. He said the non-parent engagement spending is used for programming and staffing. He said any organization you have to pay to be a member of is not recognized by Title I.

Ms. Pereira said parents cannot be charged for Title I events. She said she had witnessed some violations in this area. Ms. Mason said she drives the message home about that.

In response to a question, Ms. Mason said High Horizons had used their Title I money. Ms. Brown-Clayton said the figure was 96.3 percent and they had spent throughout the year.

The next item was on family engagement strategies and a speaker at pre-K and kindergarten orientations. Mr. Sokolovic noted there were about four or five orientations left. He suggested a speaker be considered on the importance of parental involvement in their children's education.

Ms. Mason said she has emphasized in training that the teachers know the families better than anyone else and can identify parents who might be interested in becoming involved.

Mr. Sokolovic said the most fertile time to plant the seed is with parents of children of pre-K and kindergarten students.

Ms. Pereira said it was a good idea to have a PAC president speak at the parent orientation. Mr. Sokolovic said the links between family involvement and student achievement should be emphasized.

Ms. Pereira said that should really be pursued next year.

Mr. Sokolovic asked the students in attendance from Make the Road how the board could get more family involvement.

Luis Luna said a strategy was needed to reach undocumented parents. Mr. Sokolovic said the form for the parent convention is in both languages and there are no questions about whether the parents are legal residents. Ms. Pereira noted the parental convention will have a breakout session on immigration rights.

Mr. Benejan said all the workshops at the convention will be translated into Spanish. A lawyer will present on immigration law

Ms. Aguire said it would help for the atmosphere in the school to be more friendly. She said the first thing you see in the morning should not be feeling like you're in a prison. She said having things like music can help.

Ms. Mason said components to a welcoming environment include the overall look of the school, print materials, communication and in multiple languages, and bulletin boards.

Mr. Sokolovic said he didn't know what could be done about metal detectors due to today's society. He said perhaps signs could be put up to tell students that it is for their safety.

Ms. Pereira said a major issue at Harding are the multiple entrances and exits and students letting people through the doors. She said fire codes do not permit the reduction in the amount of doors. She said the reality is if a student wants to get a weapon in the school there are ways of planting one for later retrieval.

Ms. Aguire said teachers, including substitutes, should get checked upon entry to school.

Ms. Pereira said the students have made some really great points at board meetings. She noted the board doesn't control things out of school grounds like sidewalks, stop signs, lighting and crosswalks. These things that have to be handled by the mayor and City Council.

Mr. Sokolovic noted the issue had been discussed at this week's Facilities Committee. Mr. Lischner said the students who are in line when the late bell goes off are not marked late. He said he had done spot checks of the high schools after the issue was raised. He said if anything the principals are being a little too lax on it.

Ms. Brown-Clayton and Mr. Lischner said the length of the lines at security were timed and the peak at 7:45 to 7:53 was a two-minute wait.

Mr. Sokolovic said if persons who are in line are not marked late and if the time is extended people who come at the last minute are going to come at another last minute. He noted students would be held

accountable when they went into the workforce. He said the students may not like to hear this, but it was best to learn now.

Ms. Pereira said there was a state law allowing employees a five-minute grace period. She wondered if the district could grant a similar leeway.

Mr. Benejan said students at Bassick are recorded as absent if they are in line when the door is closed at 8:10. He said he had seen as many as 135 students who have to stay in the auditorium for the first period.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would put an item on the next agenda regarding students walking to school and gaining entry.

Dr. Otuwa said the Bassick magnet pathways issue can be handled by the board on May 29th.

Ms. Mason asked if there could be a discussion with the bilingual department to discuss the concerns of the parents regarding the district phone blasts and communications in a dialect of Portuguese not understandable by parents of Brazilian origin. Ms. Pereira said she believed the Brazilian parents were able to understand either dialect. Ms. Mason said the Brazilian parents are saying it's a huge issue.

Mr. Lischner said that should be dealt with at the administrative level with the world languages department.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

(Approved by the committee on June 14, 2018)