

Tuesday, January 19, 2021

MINUTES OF THE TEACHING & LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held January 19, 2021, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m. Present were members Chair Joe Sokolovic, Joseph Lombard, and Sybil Allen. Board members Bobbi Brown and Albert Benejan joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Ms. Allen moved to approve the committee's minutes of November 17, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was an update on the social studies curriculum and development for culture relevancy.

Supt. Testani said the members of the committee included accomplished social studies teachers and administrators. He said the committee was doing a great job in trying to revise the curriculum and save the district significant dollars.

Chris Johnson, co-chair of the curriculum development team, made a presentation. The team was assembled in December. He said the biggest changes are in 7th and 9th grades. He said the committee found a lot of overlap in studying certain subject such as Ancient Egypt. Ninth grade will move to more modern world history.

Mr. Johnson said the big thing the committee has done is to try to create a structure not based on textbooks, which are often written from a Eurocentric lens. He said there is concentration on the Connecticut Social Studies Framework skills which includes sustained inquiries. Students are presented with problems or challenges and they try to come up with solutions.

Mr. Johnson said the U.S. history group discussed the Progressive Era's response to the Gilded Era, and how to make that relevant to kids today. He said educators should instill the idea of our students becoming progressive members of society constantly pushing for social change. He said it will include analyzing primary source documents and arguing or debating a point.

Mr. Johnson said the original administrative team included six former history teachers, who then asked the principals to nominate their best teachers to contribute.

In response to a question, Mr. Johnson said there is full alignment with the state standards, which also aligns to Common Core standards. He said the district was ahead of the curve with the Perspectives on Race course. He said Dr. Canton is working with a group of teachers to revise that curriculum.

Mr. Sokolovic expressed concern about material that includes pictures that are not multicultural. Mr. Johnson said one goal is to round out the sources being used. He said the effort is to tap into our best teachers to make sure kids across the district are doing project-based learning, which leads to higher engagement. He described the way world history is being approached.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said he has discussed with Ms. Siegel the district's approach to K-6 curriculum. The approach may be more traditional in that area after a committee has been put together to vet potential resources. He said the fruits of the current committee can be used when the K to 6 curriculum is addressed later.

In response to a question, Mr. Johnson said the graduation requirements for history are Modern World History in 9th grade; Civics, paired with Perspectives on Race, in 10th grade; and U.S. History in 11th grade.

Mr. Johnson said electives such as psychology, sociology and Latin American studies are being reworked.

The superintendent noted social studies had been without a director due to budget cuts since about ten years ago. He noted there are many skills embedded in the social studies curriculum such as reading, writing, and critical thinking.

Ms. Brown joined the meeting.

Ms. Brown said she was excited to see what the committee comes out with. She noted social studies inspired her while she was in school.

Supt. Testani said the state has made African-American and Latin American studies a minimum requirement, and the district is looking to stretch that, requiring both courses to graduate. He said Perspectives on Race is an important elective.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested a follow-up report on the work in April.

Mr. Benejan joined the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic said he had discussion with the superintendent about the next agenda item on MTA track safety. He said the program looks good, but it is for the future. He suggested the matter be postponed, perhaps to May or June, until more attention can be devoted to it.

Ms. Allen moved "*to table this to another time that we can get more out of it.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard.

Mr. Sokolovic said he wanted to give the item a proper vetting and give it the respect it deserves, since it was referred by City Council members.

The motion was unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 6:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the committee on February 16, 2021*