

Tuesday, March 16, 2021

MINUTES OF THE TEACHING & LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held March 16, 2021, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:32 p.m. Present were members Chair Joe Sokolovic and Sybil Allen. Board member Albert Benejan was present. Committee member Joseph Lombard joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Ms. Allen moved to approve the committee's minutes of February 16, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on audit procedures of special education and IEP formulation and implementation.

Supt. Testani said three special education supervisors would present on this matter: Lauren Lukasz, Lynda Linley, and Kenneth Gradowski.

Mr. Gradowski said SEDAC(special education data application) is submitted to the state on October 1st every year. This year there are 4242 special education students; 317 are placed out of district as of February 10th. Charter schools currently have 3620 students and 429 students are special education with an active IEP.

Mr. Gradowski described case management levels and compliance responsibilities. He said IEPs are reviewed for

dates of compliance, including an annual review, reevaluations, and scheduling of PPT meetings and accurate documentation.

Mr. Lombard joined the meeting.

Lynda Linley described the responsibilities of building-level administration and district-level responsibilities. Ms. Linley said high school administrators work with special ed coordinators to review all IEPs and special education caseloads. They also collaborate with district staff on situations where parents employ lawyers. Supervisors also discuss students if they need more specialized placements.

Ms. Linley said the district special education supervisors have responsibilities to confirm special education caseloads and audits of IEPs. They also participate in PPTs requiring district representation and collaborate with building-level administration regarding IEPs, placements, and appropriateness of placements.

In response to a question, Ms. Linley said if there is an out-of-compliance IEP we meet with the teacher to make sure it becomes compliant.

Ms. Lukasz described additional compliance measures at the department. She said there is a new special education support partner that monitors IEP Direct and state reporting. She said on-boarding procedures for new special education teachers are being strengthened, as well as collaboration between building-level administration and district supervisions to provide support. She described procedures utilized with schools that are struggling.

Ms. Lukasz said there is ongoing professional development for special education teachers and administration regarding the PPT process. The last one occurred on February 10th.

In response to a response, Ms. Lukasz said parents are part of the PPT meetings unless they give written or verbal consent that they do not want to be present.

Supt. Testani said was a three-day training prior to the last school year for all administrators. More training is planned as the district is coming out of the pandemic. The training will include the board's attorney in this area, Marsha Moses. He said the oversight process at the building level was what enabled us to take an action against an employee. He said he believed it was almost impossible to falsify information due to the layers of personnel involved.

In response to a question, Ms. Lukasz said trainings are done monthly with special education staff.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said special education students have been offered four days a week, in-person instruction. Some parents choose to keep students in remote learning and that makes it more difficult to service them. He said speech and language, social workers, paras and teachers remain diligent in outreach to support the students at home. He said the special education department is preparing for an extended school year program to be held at three sites, not one. Compensatory hours will be offered to students who have lost time.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the termination age for a student is normally 21 years old, but has been extended to 22 in Covid. Ms. Lukasz said there is a PPT meeting before the students age out of the district. If the

students have not met their goals, the department recommends a transition program.

Mr. Sokolovic said the great majority of our staff are exemplary employees and do what needs to be done. He said the audit procedures are needed for the small amount of employees who will take shortcuts. He noted there were 539 past-due IEPs.

Ms. Lukasz said the number would include initial evaluations, annual reviews, and triennial reviews. She said a lot are behind because of the closure and the times we were not able to meet. She said the numbers are going down as meetings are being held. She said she did not know how this number compared to pre-Covid years.

Ms. Lukasz said the Wednesday half day for virtual instruction has resulted in a half day for special education teachers to do paperwork and holding PPT meetings.

In response to a question, Ms. Lukasz said a report goes out to building administrations biweekly that identifies IEPs that are out of compliance. She said she reviews random documents to ensure accuracy.

In response to a question, Ms. Lukasz said many schools have peer review systems in place for paperwork. The high schools have special education coordinators. She said the hours of service are agreed upon in a PPT meeting and can only be changed with the parent's agreement.

In response to a question, Ms. Linley said speech therapists keep a log of the hours they are providing services, which are also used for billable hours.

Ms. Linley said because some students have not attended in person this year means it the department has no access to conduct the evaluations, some of which require in-person administration.

Supt. Testani said meetings are held regularly at the building level to discuss students and prepare for PPT meetings, and once the IEP is finalized everyone involved receives a copy of the final IEP. He said the entire team would have to be on board to ignore the IEP, which is almost impossible because it is a working document.

Mr. Sokolovic said parents who consent to PPTs without their presence should have to do so in writing. Ms. Lukasz said the district reaches out to parents three times who do not respond to invitations to PPTs. Meetings can legally be held after three notices. Ms. Linley said they always get a copy of the IEP within five business days after the PPT meeting was held, typically by regular mail, but parents also can request e-mails.

In response to a question, Ms. Lukasz said two special education coaches case manage all of the charter schools and attend the PPTs held in charter schools. They also case manage out-of-district students.

Ms. Lukasz said charter schools are invited to attend trainings.

In response to a question, Ms. Lukasz said the majority of PPT meetings now are being held virtually, which requires the consent of the parents. She noted some assessments need to be held in person

In response to a question, Ms. Lukasz said charter schools do not have a more self-contained setting for special education students, so they sometimes make a recommend that the child return back to their neighborhood school.

Mr. Sokolovic requested trend data on special education numbers at charter schools.

The next agenda item was on textbooks for Grades 7 and 8.

Dr. Melissa Jenkins, executive director of early childhood and literacy, presented on the Middle School ELA/Literacy textbook adoption. She said digital licenses in Grades 7 and 8 expired in June 2019. She said students would benefit from a core program that will support reading, writing, grammar, speaking and listening skills.

Dr. Jenkins said three textbook options were considered: McGraw-Hill Study Sync, Pearson SAVVAS My Perspective, and Actively Learn.

Dr. Jenkins said there were four considerations for the committee: Continuity of materials across schools, supports for English language learners, ample practice materials, and that materials that were aligned to reading research for adolescent literacy.

Dr. Jenkins said about 20 to 25 middle school teachers reviewed print and digital materials from the three providers. Costs and professional development offerings were reviewed by district administration, including the chief financial officer.

Dr. Jenkins presented the results of the textbook review committee scoring in different areas.

Dr. Jenkins said the request is to purchase two products. Study Sync would become the core program, with six-year access to renewal print resources, at the cost of \$657,418. This would provide access to all aspects of ELA content and includes professional development. Actively Learn would be purchased as a supplemental program, at the cost of \$128,000, for a two-year access, and will support additional access to culturally relevant texts, along with six professional development sessions. It contains a large database, including over 500 novels.

Dr. Jenkins said the Study Sync product includes a softcover textbook for every student, with excellent support for English language learners. She said Actively Learn is fully digital, and has diverse, contemporary texts.

Dr. Jenkins said in 2019 the six-year implementation was launched for Grades K to 3. A six-year plan for Grades 4 to 6 was launched this school year. With this approval, Grades 7 and 8 would have a six-year plan. Planning is underway to hopefully launch a high school initiative in 2022.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said Actively Learn is all digital. She said teachers have not previously used a fully digital program before, so we wanted to give it a try. She said the high schools are currently looking at Actively Learn.

Ms. Allen left the meeting.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said there is discussion underway to provide every student with a public library card, but if a class wanted to use a book in class there would not be enough copies for the entire class or grade. She said Actively Learn includes diverse short

articles and is not limited to what is printed in a book. She said after the program is implemented feedback will be gathered on how effective it is.

Dr. Jenkins said myON, a digital program, is used in Grades pre-K to 3, but there is nothing similar for Grades 7 and 8.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said a way to fund the purchase would be found due to the needs of the middle school students and to get them ready for high school success. Dr. Jenkins said the configuration of Actively Learn is also pretty good on a cellphone, which will help encourage independent reading.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said McGraw-Hill's text is diverse, but it is confined to an anthology, while Actively Learn will present extensive contemporary texts. She noted Actively Learn has no writing instruction or grammar; just texts.

Mr. Lombard moved *"to approve the purchase of Study Sync from McGraw-Hill for Grades 7 and 8 and the Actively Learn supplemental reading program."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on magnet operation plans for Fairchild Wheeler. Dr. Michael Watson said three operation plans were submitted to the committee. He said he would give a brief overview of the plans, which are about 50 pages each.

Dr. Watson said the three thematic high schools serve seven districts: Bridgeport, Easton/Redding, Fairfield, Milford, Monroe, Shelton, Stratford, and Trumbull. There are three

small learning communities of 500 students maximum, with the average class size of 25 students.

Dr. Watson said the next section covers student enrollment and composition. The report includes student enrollment by town and grade for the last three school years.

Dr. Watson said the next section covers marketing and recruitment plans and the following section covers the mission process and criteria, including the lottery, application process, and sibling policy.

Dr. Watson said the plan contains the process to help incoming students adapt, including a STEM camp. Academic programs and accreditation with NEASC are also covered.

Dr. Watson said the next section covers student activities and course offerings. He said for the Class of 2023 the state graduation requirements change to a minimum of 25 credits, up from 22.5.

Dr. Watson said the next section covers student supports, including for special education and ELL. He said the goal is to make students career and college ready, and is based on students' following their path towards future learning.

Dr. Watson described opportunities to earn college credit.

Dr. Watson said Section 7 covers school climate and culture, including community partnerships and the school governance council. Disciplinary, safety and attendance policies are also included.

Dr. Watson said the next section described management and hiring processes.

Dr. Watson said the building was opened in 2013, so the section on facilities focuses on financing of support such as state grants and other budgetary issues. The plan also describes the technology infrastructure and the improvements in that area.

Dr. Watson said Section 10 covers how program effectiveness is measured. Section 11 will cover details of this meeting and the board's meeting, including letters of support received over the years, along with awards received. He requested current board members write letters of support.

Dr. Watson said Section 12 summarizes the project and the goals in 2025.

Mr. Sokolovic said page 7 seems to take a backhand slap at Bridgeport for not taking advantage of interdistrict magnet schools. Supt. Testani said there is currently a moratorium on new magnet schools and if that was lifted Bridgeport is interested in converting schools into interdistrict magnets.

In response to a question, Dr. Watson said virtual recruitment has been going well, despite negative impacts from Covid which resulted in a lot of students deciding to stay in local areas. He said the Fairfield numbers are a bit low, but there has been an increase.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested "diverse" be added to the recruitment plan on page 10. Mr. Lombard said he had no objection. Dr. Watson said he would make the addition.

Mr. Lombard moved “*to approve, with the change noted, the magnet operations plans for Fairchild Wheeler Interdistrict Magnet Campus.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the committee on April 27, 2021