

Tuesday, October 16, 2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held October 16, 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 Ben Walker, Maria Pereira, and Joseph Sokolovic. Board member Hernan Illingworth was present.

Supt. Aresta L. Johnson, Ed.D, was present.

Mr. Sokolovic moved approval of the minutes of September 18, 2018. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira. A correction was noted. The motion was approved by a 2-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Walker and Sokolovic. Ms. Pereira abstained.

Mr. Sokolovic moved approval of the minutes of September 26, 2018. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic moved that Item six be moved to the number two spot in the agenda. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

Dr. Johnson said there is work underway to start a grow-your-own program in the district. She said conversations with Sacred Heart University led to them bringing forward a five-year plan. The proposal includes students receiving five years of education at Sacred Heart, completing an internship

in the district and committing to teach with the district for a certain period of time.

Dr. Robin Cautin, dean of the college of arts and sciences, and Dr. Michael Alfano were present from Sacred Heart.

Dr. Alfano said the proposal brings together a variety of best practices examples from around the country. He said Sacred Heart recently acquired St. Vincent's College and is expanding the mission of St. Vincent's beyond health studies.

Dr. Alfano said the partnership with the district would identify ten high-potential candidates in the district who have an interest in becoming educators. Funds would be raised to support the students' education at St. Vincent's, with a cohort model being used.

Dr. Cautin said the students would study liberal arts for two years, which would make them eligible to enter Sacred Heart for a bachelor's without having to take all the general education credits that are part of the core curriculum, except for the Catholic intellectual tradition seminar.

Dr. Alfano said for the third year the ten students would live at Sacred Heart in a living learning community. Following completion of the bachelor's degree the students would enter their fifth year in the master's arts and teaching program and intern in Bridgeport Public Schools. They would then complete their requirements for licensure and would be bound to return back to the district for three years of teaching.

Dr. Alfano said the program brings together elements from high-powered programs doing work in minority teacher recruitment and town-gown relationships.

Dr. Cautin said initial work has begun to raise money for the program. She added that retention rate for students in living learning communities are excellent.

In response to a question, Dr. Alfano said the tuition at Sacred Heart is \$45,000, while the cost at St. Vincent's College for the first two years would be less expensive. Room and board at the Fairfield campus adds another \$15,000. Dr. Cautin said the costs would be underwritten by donors.

Dr. Alfano said in the fifth year the candidates would work fulltime within the district on their internships, which would be partially funded through the district's substitute teacher budget.

Dr. Johnson said this would give us an opportunity to support our own students.

Ms. Pereira asked since the students were receiving such huge gifts why they should not commit to staying with the district longer than three years. She suggested approaching the City Council about granting tax incentives for buying homes in Bridgeport. Dr. Alfano said the three-year commitment was based on similar programs. He said the fact that the candidates are from Bridgeport would create a stronger likelihood they would remain with the district.

In response to a question, Dr. Alfano said the student selection process would be developed in collaboration with

the district. He said he hoped the slots would be very competitive to get the best and the brightest.

In response to a question, Dr. Alfano said the St. Vincent's associate's degree that would be earned after two years gives students who wish to abandon the program an off ramp with a tangible credential. He said some programs require students who do not complete their full course of study to pay back the money they received. Such regulations would have to be developed with input from lawyers.

Dr. Cautin said the selection process and the eligibility criteria would be designed to avoid students who would not make the full commitment. Dr. Alfano said the selection process would be aimed at a broad selection of disciplines, including shortage areas. Dr. Johnson said minority recruitment would be embedded in the proposal as well.

Mr. Walker suggested that a four or five-year commitment to teaching in the district be considered. He said he was totally in favor of Bridgeport being nationally out of the box with this.

Dr. Johnson said the presentation was intended to be informational and it would probably be brought back to the committee in the spring.

In response to a question, Dr. Alfano said he and Dr. Cautin initiated the proposal in discussions with Dr. Johnson.

Mr. Walker said it broke his heart when the district could no longer fund interns in the classrooms.

The next agenda item was an update on special education. John DiDonato, chief of specialized instructional reform, and

Veronica Lenzen, interim director of planning and placement, were present.

Ms. Lenzen provided an updated on state Department of Education complaints. She said there was a July 2018 complaint about a Barnum School student claiming failure to develop an IEP with appropriately written goals and objectives and a reading program. The state required corrective actions, including compensatory instruction, and the complaint was closed.

Mr. DiDonato said a gap in practice and supervision led to the situation, which was addressed in a formal way. Mr. Illingworth said you're not going to get more honest than that.

Ms. Lenzen said a complaint was filed in August 2018 on behalf of a Park City Magnet student claiming failure to conduct an annual review IEP meeting. The state required corrective action that was implemented and the district is awaiting formal closure.

Mr. DiDonato said under Dr. Johnson's leadership the department looked at how schools implement the required annual reviews. He said the schools that keep to the requirements schedule their annual reviews a month ahead of the due date, which can be rescheduled if teachers are absent.

Ms. Lenzen said two complaints came in on October 3rd filed by a parent on behalf of both her sons at Park City Prep charter school. She said the district has a shared responsibility in this matter, but Park City Prep has to respond to the state and develop any requested corrective action plan.

Mr. DiDonato said he outlined a structured settlement made with Make The Road Connecticut at the last meeting. He said entering into the agreement put a stop to an immediate filing of a lawsuit. He said there was a meeting in October with Make the Road that led to understandings that the district would look at some areas, including the way parents are informed of the availability of translation services.

Mr. DiDonato said there would be professional development for office staff so they are informed as to the full extent of how they should respond to a parent who speaks to them about translation services. He added the home language survey is being looked at to include questions on whether translation services are needed.

In response to a question, Mr. DiDonato said under IDEA there are specific requirements for non-English-speaking persons.

Mr. DiDonato said oftentimes the way laws are written create problems for people who have to implement the laws. He noted the attorneys who have joined with local attorneys are national advocate attorneys and this is part of a nationwide effort.

Mr. DiDonato said while Make the Road has made the allegation it should in no way suggest the district had not implemented things to provide interpretation and translation services.

Ana Sousa-Martins, director of bilingual education and world languages, said the district has implemented an interpretation and translation plan, which includes a mission statement, definitions, and responsibilities. She said there is

a school messenger program that has the capacity of translation. The district's webpage has Google Translate available. Ms. Sousa-Martins said districts such as New Haven, Hartford, Waterbury and Windham use Google Translate on their websites. She added with the move to Office 365 there will be better options for the web pages.

Ms. Sousa-Martins said every school has a multilingual poster announcing the availability of translation services. She said there has been training of administrators on the procedures for requesting interpretation or translation services. Professional development for staff will be provided by herself and a certified translator/interpreter on confidentiality, ethics and dealing with parents.

Ms. Sousa-Martins said the district works with two companies, Linguistica (for languages other than Spanish) and Shoreline Interpretation for Spanish, both of which provide services by telephone and in person. She said both companies translate documents and since August about ten IEPs have been translated into Spanish at the request of parents.

Ms. Pereira noted under the city charter and state statute the contracts would have to go out to bid because they exceed \$25,000. Mr. DiDonato suggested he talk to Marlene Siegel tomorrow about the agreements. Ms. Sousa-Martins said the contracts were signed last year. Mr. Walker said there was a discussion of Linguistica in February.

In response to a question, Ms. Sousa-Martins said Ms. Siegel was aware of the contracts that had been signed.

Ms. Pereira noted the cost of Linguistica translation services for documents was 15 cents per word. She said going out to bid leads to companies reducing their prices.

In response to a question, Ms. Sousa-Martins said if the phone connection is lost during a session there is a case number that connects back to the previous interpreter.

Mr. Walker said video conferencing would probably be more effective than translating over the telephone. Ms. Sousa-Martins said often staff in the building are used for translation. Mr. Walker said that is an area where we can get in trouble. Mr. DiDonato said that issue was under negotiation with Make the Road around neutrality issues. He said that often parents bring someone to translate for them but sometimes it is a teenager, which would not be appropriate.

Mr. DiDonato said there is a special education ombudsperson, Yvette Martinez, who joins in meetings and acts in a neutral role and as an advocate for the parent.

Mr. Walker said if this was three or four years ago he would be concerned, but since working with Mr. DiDonato he has learned the adversarial nature of the PPT process has gone away.

In response to a question, Ms. Sousa-Martins said the school messenger communications are in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole and Vietnamese.

Ms. Pereira said the pricing for translations of written documents seemed exorbitant at 18 cents a word. Mr. DiDonato said that will be looked at with Ms. Siegel.

In response to a question. Ms. Sousa-Martins said Ms. Siegel had incorporated the expenses into the budget.

Ms. Pereira moved that the discussion of Roosevelt School's application to the Commissioner Network be the next item on the agenda. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Jacqueline Simmons, principal of Roosevelt School, said the turnaround office contacted the school last year and asked if we would consider applying to the Commissioner's Network. She said the letter was submitted just recently, there was an audit last week, and tonight is to advise the board and receive input. She added the board had the right to have input on the makeup of the committee for the application.

Ms. Pereira asked how a letter could be submitted without the board's approval. Ms. Simmons said it was just a letter of interest. Mr. Illingworth said he believed they could submit a letter of interest. Mr. Walker said he thought that was the way it was done last time. Ms. Pereira said the process of putting Columbus School in the Commissioner's Network was done completely illegally.

Ms. Pereira said this has been an ongoing problem with the Commissioner's Network and the law has been repeatedly violated. She said this was the first she was hearing of this.

Assistant Superintendent Dr. Christiana Otuwa said she believed we could submit a letter of interest and let the board know during the process. She said things were going well at the school and additional support was needed.

Ms. Pereira said this happened before with the Commissioner's Network. She said we've made it clear there

is no right to submit the letter of interest. Mr. DiDonato suggested the administration look at this and get back to the board on it.

Ms. Pereira said that data indicates that the four schools that have been in the Commissioner's Network have all been seriously problematic and been disasters or performed horrifically. She said suburbanites from the state, who don't know anything about Bridgeport, dangle a carrot that gives money in exchange for giving up local control.

Ms. Pereira noted the negative data at Columbus School, Curiale School, Marin School, and Dunbar School. She said that a convicted felon, Dr. Sharp, was placed in charge of Dunbar School. She added that teacher turnover was also horrible at the schools, even though that data was not present.

Ms. Pereira said she already knows the letter of interest cannot be submitted without board approval. Mr. DiDonato said he would like to add to clarity and get a definitive answer.

Mr. DiDonato asked if the principal's belief that the influx of resources from the Commissioner's Network would be helpful, with a lack of a requirement to change staff, would change Ms. Pereira's mind. Ms. Pereira said she was totally opposed to the Commissioner's Network, especially given the data.

Dr. Otuwa said only a letter of interest was submitted. Ms. Simmons said it occurred about two weeks ago at the deadline. Ms. Pereira said the letter had to come to the board because now it cannot be retracted.

Mr. Walker said he was not as opposed to the Commissioner's Network as Ms. Pereira, but he was not as educated as her on the subject. He said he was involved in the process at Columbus School, which was done by back channel because Supt. Rabinowitz circumvented the committee.

Mr. Walker said things should be done in the right order and in accordance with board policies.

Mr. Walker said he would like this put on the backburner. He asked if someone from the Commissioner's Network at the state could appear before the committee to speak on the advantages.

Ms. Pereira said she was not interested in hearing anybody from the state. She asked for a copy of the letter of interest. She said the local school board gives up control of Commissioner's Network's schools for three to five years.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to hear more information about the Commissioner's Network in order to make an informed decision.

Ms. Simmons said she could ask someone from the state to appear before the committee.

Mr. Walker said he could understand why Ms. Pereira was upset by this due to the past history. Ms. Pereira said this was the third time since she's been on the board that letters of interest have been submitted without the board's knowledge or approval.

Mr. Illingworth said he believed the Commissioner's Network was a good thing, but the plan that is created is vital to

success. He said he knew from the beginning that the Marin plan had been watered down and he shared that with Supt. Rabinowitz. He said he did not want to risk losing the current leadership at Roosevelt.

Ms. Simmons said she appreciated the input and she understood why the committee had some concerns. She said there had been a lot of improvements at Roosevelt, but support was needed for academics. She noted the school personnel had been turned over quite a bit in the last three years and further changes there were not needed.

Ms. Pereira said under state statute the BEA gets to appoint committee members and the board gets to appoint two members, so no plan can be created without board authorization.

Dr. Otuwa said she had seen the progress at the school under Ms. Simmons. Mr. Illingworth said a little extra funding could be important.

Mr. Sokolovic said he wondered since the school was on an upward trajectory already that the state might want to use it to point to as a success for the Commissioner's Network.

Ms. Pereira said she was livid right now. Mr. DiDonato said he would share the concerns with the superintendent.

Ms. Pereira said except at Curiale the Commissioner's Network has been a disaster for our schools as indicated by the data.

Mr. Sokolovic asked about trends in Commissioner's Network schools statewide. Ms. Simmons said the state could share such data.

In response to a question, Ms. Simmons said there was a meeting with the School Governance Council prior to submitting the letter of interest. She added the SGC does not have nine members due to the loss of members. Ms. Pereira said she would like to see the meeting minutes to see how many people were present.

The next agenda item was on ABCD enrollment hierarchy. Mr. Walker noted the committee received nothing in advance on this. He said he asked the superintendent to bring forward a plan.

Mr. Walker noted that school-age parents enrolled at Harding should have first priority. Ms. Pereira said the next priority should be other public school school-age parents.

There was a discussion of what the next priority should be. Mr. Walker and Mr. Sokolovic said they would like it to be staff at Harding next. Ms. Pereira suggested parents in the neighborhood be entitled to slots ahead of staff members who may live outside of Bridgeport. Mr. Sokolovic noted the severe retention problem of teachers in the district.

Ms. Pereira said payments for the early childhood center at Harding was based on salary with a sliding scale. Mr. Sokolovic said it would most likely be free for students due to their income.

Mr. Walker noted neighborhood parents might have no connection to the school other than they moved into the area.

In response to a question, Dr. Melissa Jenkins said the area around Harding was a dead zone for early childhood day care.

Mr. Sokolovic said our focus should be on the educational piece, with the day care availability being more of a city concern. Ms. Pereira said Ms. Peloso-Ulreich used to be involved in day care across the city by sitting on the council that awards the slots.

Dr. Jenkins said the school readiness liaison, Lee Helmerich, is the umbrella for the district and all the community providers. Dr. Jenkins said she supervises the preschools for the district.

Mr. Sokolovic and Mr. Walker said they supported Harding staff being the next priority. Ms. Pereira said she disagreed and would take the matter to the full board. She noted the teachers were likely to be more affluent and have greater access to transportation than people in the neighborhood.

Ms. Pereira said the center was not created for staff, but to keep public school students who are parents in school.

Mr. Illingworth said he agreed with Ms. Pereira's point of view. He said the board had been trying to create community schools.

Mr. Walker said since the committee was divided by two against one, staff from Harding should be given third priority for now.

Mr. Walker said another issue that had to be resolved was potentially bumping children out of the available slots if new student parents emerge. Mr. Sokolovic said the bumping

would have to follow the school year, but birth patterns would not follow the school year.

Mr. Walker suggested consultation with the ABCD representatives because there are age restrictions on very young children.

Ms. Pereira said children of students should always get precedence. Mr. Walker said the bumping should occur after a school year. Ms. Pereira noted if a child was born in January the student would be unable to get their child in the program. Mr. Sokolovic said he could see bumping a teacher's child in favor of a student's child.

Mr. DiDonato noted this was going to be a challenging thing.

Mr. Sokolovic wondered if we would even fill all the seats with children.

Mr. DiDonato said informed consent could be provided to staff members or community residents with the conditions upon which they are being admitted to the program.

Mr. Walker noted that students with children may have to be control transferred into Harding due to the difficulty of getting the child to a day care and attending a different school.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested creating the policy with a broad brush with an appeal process involved because the board could not cover every scenario. Ms. Pereira noted teen pregnancy rates were way down.

The next item was the RFP for the district's expulsion program. Mr. Walker said he knew Mr. Sokolovic and Ms. Pereira had looked over the document extensively.

In response to a question, Mr. DiDonato said Mr. Pires indicated the timeline contained sufficient time to complete the process.

It was noted there were different versions of the document. Dr. Otuwa said one had ongoing corrections and one was complete.

In response to a question, Dr. Otuwa said a provision about a criminal background check being struck out was probably done by the lawyer. Ms. Pereira said there was a background check for company officers, but the provision in question applied to every person in the building.

Ms. Pereira said it was incompetence that the committee had been sent two different marked-up documents. Mr. DiDonato asked how the committee wanted to remedy the situation.

Ms. Pereira noted in several places it says the RFP has to be returned by 2:00 p.m. and in other places 5:00 p.m.

Mr. Sokolovic left the meeting.

Ms. Pereira suggested the matter be tabled. Mr. Walker said he agreed, however, it was best to bring corrections out that were needed now so there will be fewer corrections at the next meeting.

Mr. Walker suggested the documents be designated drafts with the date and time of the version indicated.

Dr. Otuwa said she worked all day Friday on the document without secretarial help. Mr. Walker suggested the

documents be provided to the committee in advance, which would make the review for corrections easier.

Ms. Pereira discussed the section under screening protocol. She noted the phraseology of the provision would allow someone still on probation five years after their sentence to work in the program.

Ms. Pereira suggested a provision on insurance regarding sexual misconduct be added.

Ms. Pereira suggested the applicants' description of past services provided to schools include a description in regards to an expulsion program.

Ms. Pereira said the references provided should be from school districts, not parents whose children may have been tutored.

Mr. Walker noted provisions in these areas might limit any entity that is new to the game, which may not be legal. Dr. Otuwa said she believed the lawyer removed a provision for that reason. Mr. Walker said the RFP doesn't have to be exclusionary because applicants will receive further scrutiny in the evaluation of the proposals.

Ms. Pereira suggested the reference be to someone who has worked with expelled student populations. Mr. DiDonato suggested the phrase "worked with a similar population who will participate in the expulsion program."

Ms. Pereira said the program should have professional references, not from a parent who received math tutoring. Mr. Illingworth and Mr. Walker said the evaluation of the proposals will weed that out.

Mr. Walker noted experience at a private school such as The Gunnery would be excluded if the applicant had to list experience with public schools only.

Ms. Pereira suggested a certificate of occupancy and legal zoning as a school be added to the requirements.

Ms. Pereira said the scoring of qualifications was not weighted heavily enough in the evaluation criteria. Mr. DiDonato said to him the reference to organizational structure meant the staff and the guts of the organization. Ms. Pereira agreed to the scoring weight in the document.

Ms. Pereira asked that the reference to the committee making a recommendation to the board of public purchases be eliminated because the Board of Education makes the decision. Dr. Otuwa suggested the lawyer be consulted. Ms. Pereira said there was nothing to ask and it should just be taken out.

Ms. Pereira said the reference to minority groups should include African-Americans. Mr. DiDonato said that section would be looked at. Mr. Illingworth said "African" may have been left out in front of "Americans."

Dr. Otuwa said the committee did not need to review the contract that was provided because it was not going out with the RFP.

Ms. Pereira said the only time the committee should receive a document in all black without markups is at a regular meeting. Mr. Walker said he asked for a black ink version at one point. He said both could be sent as long as they were dated.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the committee on November 20, 2018