Tuesday, November 16, 2021

MINUTES OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held November 16, 2021, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, and Joe Lombard. Board member Albert Benejan joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Lombard moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of October 19, 2021. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was a special education update. Dementred Young, director of social work and interim executive director of specialized instruction, presented.

Mr. Young discussed numbers of out-of-district placements. He noted when students come to the district from places such as New York their IEPs have to be continued from their prior district. He said attendance rates of out-of-district students is being watched because in the past the district was paying for students not attending school.

Mr. Young displayed special education charter school data. There is a total of 404 students. Supt. Testani said we're finding that there is a higher percentage of students identified as needing services in the charter schools than in the public schools. He said there have been some bizarre

requests that the district has had to push back on because they are not covered under law.

Mr. Young said he would check on the number of special education students in New Beginnings charter school.

The superintendent said we're looking to implement a complete review of special education in the district. He said it will cost a little bit of money for an organization to do this, but it would be worth the investment.

Mr. Young said the total number of evaluations for the 2020-21 school year was 459, with 378 students qualifying for services. Currently, there are 4,356 special education students in the district.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said the backlog of evaluations during Covid has been eliminated. Supt. Testani said there was support from CES on reevaluations.

Mr. Lombard asked Mr. Young to present academic trend data in the future.

The next agenda item was on an agreement between Ed Rising and Bridgeport Public Schools for the Grow Your Own Teacher program

Principal Jay Lipp of Fairchild Wheeler (FCW) said he was filling in for Dr. Black on this item. He said the proposal is to offer the courses initially at Fairchild Wheeler and BMA for our students to become teachers. He said one reason for the need is to address the high turnover of teachers in the district.

Dr. Nancy DeJarnette of the University of Bridgeport (UB) said the Educators Rising program is a national program which the state has partnered with. She said this offers students who are interested in becoming teachers a dual enrollment program to earn college credit. She said the UB offers two courses on teaching available to high school students. She described the opportunities available at UB, including a tuition-free internship.

Dr. DeJarnette said the Educators Rising programs provides high school teachers with curriculum and training of teachers. Students have access to the national program. The state makes a grant to the school district for teacher training and curricula materials.

In response to a question, Dr. DeJarnette said about eight to ten schools participated in the program last year through Central Connecticut State. This year, UB and other universities are coming on board.

Mr. Lipp said the courses would be an elective course for students with the ability to earn up to six college credits towards a bachelor's degree. He said this gives local students the opportunity to get the experience, college credit, and move towards a teacher's certification. He noted it would be without cost to the students.

In response to a question, Dr. DeJarnette said she believed the college credit would be transferable to other universities. She said UB is designing an education minor specifically for those credits. Mr. Lipp said some universities require a certain level of grade to earn college credit for the courses.

In response to a question, Mr. Lipp said it would not be a prerequisite that students who become teachers would have

to stay in Bridgeport. Mr. Lipp said he projected that students from the city would more likely want to stay in the city, especially at the school they went to. He said if the district gets one teacher a year it would pay for the program itself given the costs of training and hiring new schools. The grant is for $3,500 for one teacher per school, for three years.

In response to a question, Mr. Lipp said teachers at Fairchild and BMA stepped up immediately with interest in the program, but it could be offered at other high schools. Supt. Testani said Dr. Black offered it to other schools, but there is some conflicting programming. Mr. Sokolovic said he wanted to see all students get the opportunity.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested the program at FCW be weighted in the same manner as the enrollment is between in-district and out-of-district students. The superintendent said it is really up to the students and their interest in becoming educators. Mr. Sokolovic said he did not want to see a disproportionate number of out-of-district students.

Mr. Benejan joined the meeting

Mr. Lipp said the current FCW enrollment at University of Bridgeport and UConn courses is about 60 percent Bridgeport and 40 percent suburban. The superintendent said a lot of factors are simply beyond the district's control such as the cost of college education.

Dr. DeJarnette said students who attend UB can save a lot of money by living at home, along with receiving aid for Bridgeport residents.

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Ms. Allen moved *"to push to the full board to enter into an agreement between Education Rising and Bridgeport Public Schools for the Education Rising program."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was a cultural relevancy check and update on the math curriculum

Herminio Planas, executive director of elementary education and mathematics, said in 2015-16 the percentage of students at or above goal in math was 9.9 percent. The percentage was increased to 15.7 in 2018-19. There was no SBAC assessment in 2019-20. However, Grade 3-8 scores for 2020-21 were a little bit lower, so there is a lot of work to do.

Mr. Planas said there are great resources in place with a cohesive program in Grades K to 12.

Mr. Planas said a math component was added to the summer session and with just 18 days of instruction the data showed an average of five months' growth. He added it was Supt. Testani's idea to include math in the summer program.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said the drop in math scores was comparable to peer districts. The superintendent said there is a lot of discussion among the team about what acceleration looks like. Mr. Planas said his goal is to increase the students at or above goal by ten percent. He said changes are needed in instruction, along with more professional development on the strategies. He said the use of lead teachers is a great step forward.

The superintendent said he believed the last teachers' contract included provisions for more effective professional development, with each month containing a two-hour block and two hours of school improvement.

Mr. Sokolovic said mathematics was a subject that needs stepping-stones for progression to the next grade. The superintendent said it was hoped to expose another 800 to 1,000 students to the summer program next year.

Mr. Planas said the focus areas of math for 2021 are the implementation of Into Math program; implementation of standards for mathematical practice; looking at data to inform instruction/acceleration strategies; and training for mathematics lead teachers.

Mr. Planas said the data shows that if students who use the Khan Academy approach will grow if they use it for 30 minutes per week.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas described the components of Common Core math and the need to blend the three components. Mr. Lombard said he believed the tests have not kept with the times with the focus on concept and less on computation.

Mr. Planas said the Into Math program is being implemented; the curriculum is being updated to ensure alignment with the path of the book; and graphing calculators for students in Grades 7 to 12 have been purchased. He said the calculators will be an amazing tool for students taking the SAT. Teachers have received training on the calculators.

Supt. Testani said this was the type of thing that our kids should have because students in other towns have them.

Mr. Planas said a grant from a private donor was received and will be used for training teacher leaders. There will also be virtual math workshops for parents, with a focus on Grades K to 3. The superintendent added that parents have access to online PD given to teachers. Mr. Planas said the Khan Academy videos are very valuable in that regard.

Mr. Planas said the use of the phrase cultural relevance is being replaced by culturally responsive teaching. He said Connecticut has adopted a position statement on the approach. The first principle is a welcoming and affirming environment, along with inclusive curriculum and assessment, and ongoing professional learning.

Mr. Planas described the efforts around high expectations and rigorous instruction, including the use of anchor charts.

Mr. Planas said lessons should start with an explanation of why we are doing things. He said problem-solving makes the learning more engaging. He said inclusive classrooms will include characters and storylines that are real world. Professional development will also highlight equity and access.

Mr. Planas said he believed the district had an amazing, awesome mathematics program which will move math forward.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the committee on January 18, 2022