

Tuesday, November 20, 2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held November, 2018, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 3:06 p.m. Present were members Chair Ben Walker and Maria Pereira. Committee member Joseph Sokolovic arrived subsequently as noted.

Superintendent Aresta L. Johnson, Ed.D, arrived subsequently.

Ms. Pereira move to approve the committee's minutes of the October 16 2018, with a minor edit. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Walker said he had not heard back about whether the Linguistica and Shoreline Interpretation contracts had to go out to bid. He asked Dr. Otuwa to report on the item at the next meeting.

Ms. Pereira moved "*to table the item on special education compliance and programming.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

Mr. Walker noted representatives of the Justice Education Center were not present. He said Dr. Johnson informed him that the representative was unable to make it because the time of the meeting was changed.

Ms. Pereira moved “*to postpone the item until the next Teaching & Learning meeting.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira noted the legislative delegation created an event tonight to honor Sheena Graham and didn’t consult with the board on the timing, so Mr. Walker moved the time of this meeting up.

The next agenda item was on the ABCD program at Harding High. Dementred Young and Natisha Vidal were present.

Mr. Walker said the document was well put together, but the committee was looking for a more in-depth hierarchy of participants in the program. He said the goal is to keep the 24 spaces in the program full. He noted the priority access in the document was for teenaged children enrolled in the district interested in continuing their education.

Ms. Pereira said the verbiage should be changed to school-aged parents and not just those in their teens. Mr. Walker noted a reference to the program as a day-care center should be changed.

Ms. Pereira said there was discussion by the committee about a ranking or a hierarchy about who gets seats in the program first and how somebody is bumped out.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Walker and Mr. Sokolovic wanted Harding High staff to have second preference. Ms. Pereira said she was against this because of the shortage of preschool slots in the neighborhood. She said the program was not started to help staff.

Mr. Sokolovic arrived at the meeting.

Mr. Walker said if teachers are absent because they have child-care issues themselves the students are not getting the best education they can. Ms. Pereira said the vast majority of teachers don't live in Bridgeport.

Mr. Walker said a teacher is responsible throughout the day for the education of 100 to 150 children. He said they may make more money than cafeteria workers or other staff members, but could be in need due to the expense of child care. He said it could come to a choice for the teacher to resign their position to find employment elsewhere to care for the child at home.

Mr. Sokolovic said he agreed. He said as a blue collar worker he does not minimize anybody's job position or title, but losing a teacher to child care will have a more direct impact on students than losing a custodial worker or a cafeteria employee.

Ms. Pereira said she had never heard of a mass exodus of teachers because they can't find day care. She said only 300 of the 1500 BEA members live in Bridgeport, while most of school staff do live in Bridgeport and pay taxes.

Mr. Walker said his wife would have not have been able to teach in the district if her own mother was not running a day-care facility.

Mr. Walker said there was nothing in the document about a hierarchy after school-aged parents.

Ms. Vidal said the district committee wanted to see some availability for staff because it improves the morale within the school. She said the committee believed it should apply to all

staff in the school. She said the staff priority would be limited to two spaces.

Ms. Vidal said currently half of the center is open to staff and community. She said the two slots are reserved for the staff and the community would have access to ten spaces.

Mr. Walker said this needed to be written into the policy document.

Ms. Pereira said she just spoke to Ms. Colon and Mr. Chester in the HR department and they indicated they had never heard of teachers resigning because of lack of day care. She said the starting salary for a teacher in the district is \$45,000.

Ms. Vidal said the committee had decided that while teen parents are the priorities at all decision points, in the event there is a space available staff will have access to two spaces and the other ten spaces would be available to the community.

Mr. Young said a district committee was formed to establish the policy after the RFP came through. Ms. Pereira and Mr. Walker said the committee had been asking for the policy for months.

In response to a question, Ms. Pereira said she would define a staff member who lived in Bridgeport as a member of the community for determining slots.

In response to a question, Ms. Vidal said she would shy away from using the phrase “bumping rights” because of the Office of Early Childhood frowns upon the technical expulsion from an educational program. She said because

ABCD is a large organization they have other sites available and other school readiness sites. She said children turning three in the program can be redirected into a school readiness site. She said this is the natural transition of an infant-toddler to preschool.

Mr. Young said if the program was entirely filled with school-aged parents, there would be a contingency for a new entrant into the program, including home visiting.

Ms. Vidal said the 24 slots available should meet the needs of all the teen parents in the district.

Mr. Sokolovic said in a worst-case scenario of over-enrollment he would like to see staff slots bumped rather than students.

Ms. Vidal said there was a child in the program who was close to three in September and ABCD found another site that was available. She said the idea is to limit the number of transitions whenever possible.

Mr. Walker suggested the policy indicate infants can be accepted from six weeks of age up to three years.

Mr. Walker said this was progress but he wished the committee had seen it three months ago. He asked the staff return at the next committee meeting with a completed policy. Ms. Pereira asked that the committee be provided with the document well in advance of the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic said he thought the grade requirements might be too strict at a C average given the challenges faced by a teen parent. Ms. Vidal said the idea was to not allow a student to just barely get by with a D, which may not prepare

them for the next level. Ms. Pereira noted a D is a passing grade. Ms. Vidal said she viewed the C grade as a goal, but no one would be removed for grades. Mr. Walker suggested the goal of C be per making period. Ms. Pereira suggested the use of the word “encouraged” rather than “expected.”

In response to a question, Ms Vidal said sixteen-year-old students were not automatically emancipated. Mr. Young said parents have to sign for special education students as a surrogate until they’re eighteen. He said parents whose children drop out of school can still be called into DCF.

Ms. Pereira said the statute indicated sixteen or seventeen year-old children or their parents or guardian can file a petition asking a judge to declare them emancipated.

Veronica Lenzen provided a report on the Department of Education complaints. She said there were no new complaints since the last committee meeting.

Ms. Lenzen said the complaint of a Park City Magnet student has been closed after the corrective action was implemented. In response to a question, she said the annual review was not done on time due to scheduling and the absences of the regular teacher and the special education teacher.

Ms. Lenzen said the two complaints were filed by a parent on behalf of her sons at Park City Prep charter school. She said Park City Prep responded and the case was closed without a finding of violation.

Ms. Lenzen said she could not discuss the other aspect of the agenda item due to the absence of Mr. DiDonato.

The next agenda item was on the Roosevelt School's participation in the Commissioner's Network.

Dr. Johnson said the state was not looking to change or revamp what Roosevelt is doing now; they want to infuse some dollars into the school and support what is going on.

Ms. Pereira said the committee requested the School Governance Council's minutes of the meeting when they approved the letter of interest. Dr. Johnson said we're not at that point. Ms. Pereira said the principal told the committee the School Governance Council(SGC) had authorized the letter of interest.

Assistant Principal Jamie Feliciano said Ms. Simmons met with parent leaders, but it was not a formal item on the SGC agenda. Dr. Johnson said we're at the point of having a conversation with the board about the submission of the letter of intent. She said the state indicated they don't need an official approval, but she said she would welcome the board's support.

Ms. Pereira said per state statute the SGC must participate in decisions about curriculum, instruction, and high-level administrators. She said Ms. Simmons indicated there was a meeting with the SGC prior to submitting the letter of interest.

Ms. Pereira said this is why the administrators at the meetings need to be taking notes so they can provide the information requested by the board. Mr. Feliciano said Ms. Simmons informed Dr. Otuwa that she had an informal meeting with parent leaders.

Ms. Pereira said it would be unlawful to submit a letter of interest without the SGC's approval. She said the statements of Mr. Feliciano were not the testimony that Ms. Simmons gave about the discussion with the SGC. Mr. Feliciano said it most likely was discussed, but not as a formal agenda item.

Ms. Pereira said Roosevelt was one of the five percent worst performing schools in the state and it is required to have a functioning SGC and discussion about curriculum, senior staff and other decisions. She said the board would have to give up local control to the state for three to five years in the Commissioner's Network.

Ms. Pereira said she was really upset about it because it happened three times now out of the five schools considered for the Commissioner's Network. She said the data from the other four schools indicated the only thing that has improved is out-of-school suspensions. She said she had not received teacher turnover data. She said the board was having conversations at meetings and then doesn't get what it asks for.

Mr. Walker said he had only been involved with one other school in the Commissioner's Network, Columbus. He said in that case the state sneaked in and took the board's vote away. He said Ms. Pereira fought almost singlehandedly for the right of Bridgeport citizens to be able to vote for an elected board and to kick the state out. He said Ms. Pereira is hypersensitive to this and vigilant about it.

Ms. Pereira said under state statute there is no mechanism to withdraw a letter of interest in the Commissioner's Network.



Mr. Walker said he asked the superintendent to invite the state director of the Commissioner's Network to present to the committee to alleviate some concerns. He said he was told there was no interest in anyone from the state appearing before the committee. He said the state's offered to have the superintendent and the board chair going to visit the state. He said if he was not invited to be involved he had very little interest in moving forward with this.

Mr. Walker said it looks like things are moving forward at Roosevelt School and things the Commissioner's Network could do are already in place. He said teacher attendance is strong, chronic absenteeism is declining, and the performance index is on the rise.

Mr. Walker said he could understand why the Commissioner's Network would be interested in Roosevelt, but he asked what was in it for the district to give up local education control for three to five years.

Ms. Pereira said she has been through four Commissioner's Network schools, with Dunbar being an absolute disaster. She said if the administration had great statistics about the schools they should be produced.

Ms. Pereira said she told Dr. Johnson she was going to support this because the superintendent asked her to support it.

Dr. Johnson said she would like to have the board's approval of the Commissioner's Network because Roosevelt is doing wonderful things and it was an opportunity to get additional dollars. She said Mr. Nasimith at the state indicated this is something he would like to do to support the work of Ms.

Simmons and to move the school forward. There is no interest in changing the leadership or the teachers.

Mr. Sokolovic said the state's funding comes with the state directing how the money is spent. He said the Commissioner's Network may want to pad their numbers because Roosevelt appears on an upward trajectory. He said he wanted to see how all the schools throughout the state were doing in the Commissioner's Network.

Ms. Pereira said when she hears the superintendent say the state does not need the board's vote she wants to go through the roof. Dr. Johnson and Ms. Pereira indicated they had different understandings of the state statute about the letter of interest. Ms. Pereira said once the school is in the Commissioner's Network the Commissioner of Education has the school totally under their thumb.

Ms. Pereira said the board loses control of schools in the Commissioner's Network and it should not be treated as an afterthought.

Dr. Johnson noted that most grants have strings attached to them. Ms. Pereira said this rankles her because it happened under Ms. Rabinowitz, Mr. Vallas and now under Dr. Johnson.

Dr. Johnson said she would not want Ms. Pereira to vote for it unless he thought it was good for the school. Ms. Pereira said the data in the other four Commissioner's Network schools did not show improvement. Ms. Pereira said she would support it because Dr. Johnson asked her to, but if the school did not perform she will never support one more school entering the Commissioner's Network.

Mr. Walker said Ms. Pereira was saying we have to follow the procedures in the state statutes in order to feel comfortable moving forward.

In response to a question, Mr. Feliciano said the state was involved with the school through another School Improvement Grant. He said the state loves what is being done at the school. He said he and Ms. Simmons were in place when the school opened four years ago and the school had done amazing things. He said there had already been a larger turnover of teachers and there is a great team in place. He said the state indicated they wanted the school leadership to remain in place.

Mr. Feliciano said the state had used words like using Roosevelt as a model urban school to show the rest of the state how successful a school can be with the right leadership, staff and resources. He said the extra money can be used in the area of instruction, especially in areas where cuts have taken place. He said school culture had improved immensely and there was an opportunity to push to the next level in academics with the additional resources. He said declining this opportunity would be a grave mistake. He said if they don't give the money to us, they're going to give it to another school, probably not in Bridgeport.

Mr. Feliciano said he understood the points the board members made, but the bottom line is what's best for the students. He said we can do great things with that money.

Mr. Walker said a month ago we were getting nothing but confusion, but Mr. Feliciano's comments were more convincing. He said he did not consider Roosevelt a turnaround school. He said if it was about children, not changing administration and faculty, he was being sold on it.

In response to a question, Mr. Feliciano said the last dollar amount from the state he heard was \$700,000. The first year would be a planning year and \$100,000 would be received. Dr. Johnson said there would be a minimum of three years and the district would have to go back for renewals each year after that.

Mr. Walker asked that Mr. Feliciano check and provide the amount of the grant. He said he trusted the superintendent, but wanted to see the matter come through the front door, not the back door.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said she would retain the right to remove the principal or staff members through the usual evaluation process.

Dr. Johnson said the Commissioner's Network included transformation models, but not every school in the network was in that category.

Ms. Pereira said if the board wanted to do something specific in the school and the commissioner and state Board of Education did not want to, ultimately their authority would supersede the board's authority. She added that the state would have to follow the board policies.

Dr. Johnson said the plan for the school would be developed by a community committee, including a board representative. She said she was not aware of the state ever saying absolutely no to something in a Commissioner's Network school. She said she would not sign on to a turnaround model for Roosevelt.

Mr. Walker said a prior school was put into the Commissioner's Network's with the turnaround model without the knowledge of the board.

Assistant Superintendent Janet Brown-Clayton said she ran a turnaround school in New Haven for four years. She said schools enter the Commissioner's Network at different levels. She said the model Dr. Johnson is talking about for Roosevelt is enhancement.

Dr. Johnson said the various models for the Commissioner's Network are on the state's website. She said there was no way she would entertain Roosevelt as a turnaround school.

Ms. Pereira said Roosevelt School means something to her because her daughter went there from pre-K to Grade 6. She noted she had never supported a Commissioner's Network school, but she would vote for this because she trusted Dr. Johnson.

Mr. Sokolovic said he had been put at ease and was ready to move on to support it as well.

Ms. Pereira moved "*to approve Roosevelt School's application for the Commissioner's Network.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Walker said the matter would be presented to the board on Monday. He asked Mr. Feliciano to be in attendance to answer any questions the board may have.

The next item was discussion and possible action on the RFP for the expulsion program.

Ms. Pereira said she didn't understand how we have meetings and talk about things that need to be fixed, but the fixes aren't done. She said this happens over and over again. She said the administrators should not put their notes aside for several weeks, but should incorporate the requested changes promptly when it is fresh in their minds.

Ms. Pereira said the committee wanted a provision that all staff members had to go through a background check. She said the discussion indicated there should be a provision calling for a staff member to be five years removed from being released from probation or parole, not five years from the conviction.

Tony Pires of the business office said the language used was suggested by Attorney Ron Pacacha of the city attorney's office. Ms. Pereira said the language only covered felonies. She noted there were misdemeanors that could include crimes of a sexual nature.

Mr. Pires said he thought the language requested by Ms. Pereira was present. Mr. Sokolovic said the phraseology was very clunky. Mr. Pires said it was standard language in all RFPs. Ms. Pereira noted Mr. Pires was not present for the last discussion, but Dr. Otuwa was.

There was a discussion about what language to use. Ms. Pereira said she worried about people with a past of sexual offenses or drug dealing who could prey on children.

Mr. Walker said he believed this language should be in one paragraph in the RFP. Ms. Pereira and Mr. Walker said the language in the red and purple needed to match.

Ms. Pereira said the language should be five years since the person had been convicted of a crime and served imprisonment, probation or parole. Mr. Pires said she understood the requested change.

Ms. Pereira and Mr. Walker said the provisions for insurance coverage for sexual attacks committed against children was not in the document. Ms. Pereira said Ms. Siegel would be familiar with the language to be used.

Ms. Pereira said the committee talked about the applicant's description of past services to an expulsion program. She said Mr. DiDonato recommended that the language should be "worked with a similar population who will participate in the expulsion program." Mr. Pires said it would be added under qualifications and experience.

Ms. Pereira said a requirement regarding zoning compliance and a certificate of occupancy was requested. Mr. Pires said it was on page 19.

Mr. Pires said a reference to the approval by the Board of Public Purchases was deleted.

Ms. Pereira said African-Americans needed to be added under the description of the minority opportunities. She did said she did not understand why these minor cleanups were not done.

Dr. Otuwa said some spacing issues in the document could not be corrected due to the software being used.

Ms. Pereira said there was a reference to the expulsion program covering from Grades 3 to 12. Dr. Otuwa said that is what the law requires because it prohibits homebound

expellees. Ms. Pereira said the district only expels students in Grade 7 and above. Dr. Otuwa said no students in Grades 3-5 have been expelled, but we have to have a place to put them so they are not homebound. In the past, such students have been homebound.

In response to a question, Dr. Otuwa said 3rd graders would not be in the same classroom as the high school students.

Ms. Pereira said something was wrong between pages 10 and 11, where the text began in the middle of a sentence.

Ms. Pereira said a provision on page 13 calling for a criminal background check was crossed out. Dr. Otuwa said it would be added back in.

Ms. Pereira said she wanted to receive the revised document electronically because she did not want to find it in her board packet with mistakes.

Dr. Johnson said the board packets would be going out at 11:00 a.m. tomorrow. Ms. Pereira said there was a time to make the revisions for a future meeting. Mr. Walker said he would put the matter on the agenda of the Regular Meeting of December 10.

Mr. Pires said he would change the dates to reflect the new timeline.

Mr. Walker said the matter came out of another committee because they couldn't get the work done. He said this had to be fixed.

Mr. Pires said if the document is typed again to fix the formatting the tracking of the changes would be lost. Ms.



Pereira suggested the document not be retyped. Mr. Walker said he agreed.

Mr. Walker said the four areas of specific concern that needed to be fixed: five years after release from conviction, jail, probation or parole; the sexual harassment insurance; work experience with like populations; and removal of the Board of Public Purchases.

Mr. Walker said he wanted the RFP on the board agenda of December 10.

The next agenda item was on a Fairchild Wheeler merger.

Dr. Johnson said she sent a copy of the application sent to the state to the committee members.

Ms. Pereira said the purpose of splitting Fairchild Wheeler into three schools was for federal grant purposes. Dr. Johnson said she did not know what the original purpose was.

Dr. Johnson said the committee had been provided with a document called operations plan revision request procedure. She said the state had just put this document together. She said the plan would have one head principal at Fairchild Wheeler and three ten-month assistant principals. The tracks and the academic programming will stay in place. She said this was returning it back to the original design.

Dr. Johnson added that combining the schools will alleviate the difficulties the district had with compliance with suburban enrollment numbers.

Dr. Johnson said the fiscal impact was not the driver, but there would be a potential cost savings of \$200,000 in the next school year. She said there are currently about 1300 students in the school, which has a capacity of 1500. There are about 89 teachers in the combined school.

Dr. Johnson said changes in the operational plan require board approval. She said she met with the building leaders last week to have a preliminary conversation and also provided a timeline to the committee. She said two stakeholder meetings are scheduled at the school.

Dr. Johnson said the internal deadline is March for submission to the state in April.

Ms. Pereira said she would describe it as a reduction, not a savings, because a savings would imply the same level of service at a lower price.

Dr. Johnson said this was informational only and no action was requested at this time. She said she could present the item to the full board under her report on December 10th.

Mr. Walker said the items on Fairchild Wheeler, ABCD and the expulsion RFP should be removed from the agenda of the next Regular Meeting. Dr. Johnson said she would take care of that when she confers with the board chair about the agenda.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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