

Tuesday, February 20, 2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held February 20, 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 and Joseph Sokolovic. Member Maria Pereira arrived subsequently as noted.

Mr. Sokolovic moved approval of the committee's minutes of January 16, 2018. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

John DiDonato, chief of specialized education reform, reported there are no outstanding state Department of Education complaints against the district. All complaints filed in this school year have been resolved.

Mr. DiDonato said in response to the ongoing OCR(Office of Civil Rights) complaint about the district's website the first submission has been made and approved. A second submission has been submitted as well. The IT director was responsible for preparing the submissions.

Mr. DiDonato said the updated number of IEPs that were cited by the state is 167. He said he provided information to the committee on the category of citations, with the most common area being evaluation days, which speaks to the timeliness of the evaluations. He said the state has not indicated whether they are going to ask for a corrective plan or not, but the district is doing its own corrective action.

Mr. DiDonato said he is working with Dr. Johnson and the office of data management to expand a position in that office to include special education and general education responsibilities, so the special education data will be more closely monitored.

Alicia Robinson, director of performing and visual arts, provided an update. She said there is an 8th grade drumming and xylophone project at Blackham School involving every home room. Central High will be offering an early college experience music appreciation course next year.

Ms. Pereira arrived at the meeting.

Ms. Robinson said the district's Black History Month. Concert will be held on February 28th in City Hall. There is also a black history essay contest for middle school students.

Ms. Robinson said Central was chosen as one of the fifty schools nationwide to participate in an art contest. Sneaker designs will be submitted on local flavor and off the wall themes. The winning school receives a monetary award for arts education.

Ms. Robinson said the kiln in Central was removed during the renovation, so a room must be ventilated and fireproofed for a kiln. Ms. Pereira said she had often seen beautiful clay artwork at Central displayed in the foyer.

Alan Wallack said the principals and art director at the time removed the kiln from the renovation. He said he was soliciting prices for restoring the kiln, however, the project is over budget and the cost is significant. He said this was a problem when planning a program over the course of six or seven principals.

Ms. Robinson said the former art room with a kiln is now a home economics room, but the kiln is still on the premises. Mr. Wallack said he should have price estimates on reestablishing the kiln tomorrow. He noted Claytor School includes a kiln.

Mr. Walker said you can't have a ceramics program without a kiln.

Ms. Robinson said the district is participating in The Links, Incorporated's national poster contest. Previously only Johnson School participated.

Ms. Robinson said the first place winner of the district logo contest was Abigail Estrada. Ms. Estrada and the other finalists were all from Central High under the direction of George Bella in his graphics course.

Ms. Robinson said this was the first year the Valentines for Vets initiative was districtwide, with over twenty schools participating. Thousands of Valentines delivered to Congressman Himes's office. Ms. Pereira suggested some photos of the campaign be put on the district's website.

Ms. Robinson said the Turnaround Arts program is now under the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts. There will be a talent show on March 11th in Washington, D.C. Fundraising is underway to send three students from each Turnaround Arts schools to Washington.

Ms. Robinson said a handbook will be created that will list each school and the types of arts and music courses that are offered.

Ms. Robinson described the differences between concert band and modern band(which is a new wave of music philosophy of a garage band, with guitars, bass, keyboard and voice).

In response to a question, Ms. Robinson said all schools offer at least concert band, modern band or chorus except Bridgeport Learning Center and Skane School.

Ms. Robinson said the music teacher at Dunbar was a long-term sub who is doing a great job. Two other schools also have long-term subs.

Mr. Walker said there are many lessons children can learn from performing in a group.

Mr. Walker said it made sense that Bridgeport Learning Center(BLC) and Skane School don't have the music programs like other schools, but he said he believed students at those schools also deserve music. He said in the past he taught a class for special education students in music where the students either sang, listened or moved.

Ms. Robinson said she believed there was a prior music program at Skane. Last year, there was a .2 position allocated to the BLC, but that teacher has now been allocated to a fulltime position at another school. She said she would follow up with Ms. Siegel in allocation conferences. She said there is a visual arts teacher at BLC one day a week.

Mr. Walker said where he teaches he works with the special education department to have students attend his percussion class. Ms. Pereira said it was not acceptable that two schools did not have music.

Mr. Walker said music touches a part of a person that you can't always see. He urged Ms. Robinson to camp outside Ms. Siegel's door about adding music to these two schools.

Ms. Sokolovic said even though he is tone-deaf he has learned about music's close relationship with mathematics from helping his son with music homework. He said this would be a good selling point for the music program or fundraising efforts.

The next item was on the Early Learning Center at the new Harding High. Natisha Vidal, teen pregnancy social worker, was present.

Ms. Vidal said there used to be such a center at Harding about ten years ago. The current plan is to create a licensed early learning center with three classrooms and an observation room. The goal is for the center to become NAEYC accredited.

Tina Peloso-Ulreich, director of early childhood, said most of the district's current preschool programs are NAEYC-accredited, with the newer programs still in the accreditation process.

Ms. Vidal said the program would provide child care primarily for teen parents in the high schools, and if space is available staff from the school or parents in the community could place children in the program. The goal is to keep the district's young parents in high school.

Ms. Vidal said the program would accommodate 24 children. Ms. Peloso-Ulreich said there will be three classes, consisting of an infant program, a toddler program and a preschool program, each of eight children.

Ms. Vidal said children as young as six weeks could enter the program with the proper immunizations.

Ms. Vidal said the proposal is to hire an existing operator within the community to run the center. The operator would obtain their own funding and offer either free participation or charge a sliding scale fee for participants.

Ms. Vidal said teen pregnancy rates had dropped significantly nationally and statewide. Currently, there are 30-plus teens parenting or pregnant within the district, who have a range of needs including bilingual and special education support.

In response to a question, Ms. Vidal said a lottery or waiting list could be used if there are more children than slots available. She said the plan would be to retain the children in the program until they enter kindergarten.

Mr. Wallack said the board would have the responsibility for selecting the participants, not the vendor.

Ms. Pereira said she wanted to be sure we have a plan in place for how the applicants are chosen on an equitable and fair basis. She questioned a Harding graduate retaining a seat for their child in place of an younger high school student with a child.

Mr. Wallack said a Harding student using the program would have to have consistent attendance.

Ms. Pereira said it sounds like most of our teen pregnancy is coming from the East End and East Side. She said a written policy was needed on the center.

Mr. Wallack said the matter was brought forward to get the RFP before the full board, while allowing time for advertising, legal review,

and vetting of the vendor. He said the program is going to open up in August. He requested approval by the committee, with the policies to be worked out by the administration.

Mr. Wallack said the matter was brought to the Facilities Committee as an FYI.

Mr. Walker asked the RFP be electronically sent to the committee and put in the board packets. He said he will make sure the item is on the agenda at the next board meeting.

Mr. Walker asked that Ms. Vidal return to the committee with the proposed policies.

Mr. Walker said he believed a student who has controlled transferred into Harding for this program should not be bumped by a Harding student.

Ms. Vidal said she hoped that the operator of the center could help leverage more space in their other locations. Ms. Pereira said ABCD and well-known providers would definitely apply.

Ms. Robinson said she met with Dr. Johnson on the issue of district students attending the Regional Center for the Arts(RCA). The district pays \$2,600 per student for tuition at the RCA for students who are bused to RCA in the afternoons. The Regional Center for the Arts is located in Trumbull. The district has budgeted \$213,200 for up to 82 students.

Ms. Robinson said she and Dr. Johnson agreed this is a program our high schools should be providing themselves. She said years ago the high school music programs in the district were gutted.

Ms. Robinson said data management will be providing data on the number of students enrolled in RCA by grade and school, along with five-year trend data, to see the progress of students and graduation data.

Ms. Robinson said the \$2,600 figure includes tuition and transportation.

Ms. Robinson said there are quality music educators at the three comprehensive high schools; all have performing ensembles. She said if funds were freed up from the termination of the RCA program, the first need would be to purchase musical equipment, which would not have to be purchased each year. The funds freed up could go also towards the salary of another music teacher or professional development.

In response to a question, Ms. Robinson said no BMA or Fairchild Wheeler students attend RCA.

Mr. Walker urged that similar programs be available to district students that students are taking at RCA before any change is made. He said RCA was the closet thing our students have to an arts magnet school.

Mr. Walker noted the visual and performing arts were cut very deep in the district and he said he was glad to see it getting back on its feet.

The next item was on the proposed text selection for the Perspectives on Race course. The book's title is, *Race: Are we So Different?*

Jay Lipp said the committee was looking at that text very strongly, along with curriculum from Los Angeles Unified District. He said one of the grants being used to fund the program requires the district to use technology such as online activities.

Mr. Lipp said teachers for the course have been nominated by most of the schools and identified. On the third Wednesdays of the month the teachers are going to work on curriculum as part of their department.

Mr. Lipp said the committee was looking at other books for the African-American and Latin American studies. Dr. Canton from Connecticut College was at the meeting on Friday and will be recommending other books.

Mr. Walker said he owns the proposed text. He noted it was not a very expensive book. Mr. Lipp said some books are in the range of

\$80 to \$100. He said texts are a great reference, but the course will use online and primary sources as well.

Mr. Lipp said so far there is not a very good university connection for the Latin American element.

In response to a question, Mr. Lipp said the downside of e-books is the license is associated with the student and then disappears. He said the price of proposed text is \$20.32 on Amazon and a bulk bookseller in Oregon is being investigated for a lower price. He added e-versions could be purchased for the staff.

Mr. Sokolovic said he loved the selection because it not only covers history, but prepared the kids for the future with science, online and technology pieces.

Mr. Walker said this was the first time that a textbook was in front of the committee for approval by the board. He said he would have a conversation with Dr. Johnson about the actual mechanism for approving textbooks.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 6:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod