

Monday, February 25, 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held February 25, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. Present were members Chair Ben Walker and Joseph Sokolovic. Board member Maria Pereira was in attendance.

Mr. Sokolovic moved approval of the minutes of January 15, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker. A correction was noted. The motion was unanimously approved.

John DiDonato, chief of specialized instructional reform, reported on special education. He said there are no outstanding state Department of Education complaints at this time.

Mr. Walker said he believed this was at least three months in a row with the same report. He said when he first became a member of the committee the district was receiving complaint after complaint. Mr. DiDonato said one thing he has attempted to do is to create a greater sense of expectation on the part of school leaders for supporting and supervising issues that arise at the school level. He said he had established a relationship with the advocacy community where they feel comfortable reaching out to him. He said the creation of the position as a chief represents an opportunity for one person who has line authority over principals.

Mr. Walker said he knew Mr. DiDonato has provided a tremendous amount of training to principals and provided them protocols to follow.

In response to a question, Mr. DiDonato said the special education referral rate has been rising. He said it is related to viewing special education as an off ramp to get additional services to kids. He said the referral rate is over 20 percent in Hartford and the district's rate is about 19 percent.

In response to a question, Mr. DiDonato said he could probably get the acceptance rate into special education data for the committee.

Mr. DiDonato said about half of the identified students are learning disabled, which is a subjective assessment. He said many students do not receive necessary interventions when they enter school.

Mr. Walker said he believed many kindergarten students begin school too early.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action on special education students not attending district schools or out-of-district placements. Ms. Pereira said she was receiving information that there were quite a few students at home. She said Mr. DiDonato told her that was not accurate. She said she was disturbed by the eleven students listed as pending out-of-district placement.

Mr. DiDonato said out-of-district placements don't always go as quickly as we'd like. The out-of-district school's review of the packets sent to them are not always rapid due to the nature of the placements, which are sometimes complex. He said because of the need for safety of the child and others,

the child is often placed on homebound instruction pending placement, while other children wait for the placements in their classes. He said he believed the district was complying with the new increased time for homebound instruction in state law, but said he would check.

Mr. Sokolovic moved that Item 5 be handled in place of item number 4. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

The agenda item was on the ABCD hierarchy policies. Mr. Walker said he had read the draft numerous times and all the changes he requested have been made.

There was a discussion with Assistant Superintendent Janet Brown-Clayton about further edits to be made. It was clarified that the transitioning out was based on community members first and staff members second. Changes will be made to references to school-aged parents and references to infant and baby will be changed to child or children

Ms. Pereira said she believed the policy was ready to be submitted to the board. Ms. Brown-Clayton said she could go to her office now and update the document.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve Policy 5016(h) with the discussed edits to the full board for approval.”*

The reference to ABCD will be removed from the policy.

Mr. Walker seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the RFP for expulsion.

Atty. Mark Anastasi of the city attorney's office was present. He said he referenced the information sent by Atty. Tedesco of the Connecticut Department of Education in the proposed draft. He added he met with Frank Chester, the board's HR director, as well. He said the board has individual guidelines for hiring people. He added C.G.S. 46a-79 and 46a-80 talk about individualized assessments of people with convictions and criminal records. He said the statutes are only advisory for municipalities and the private sector. He said the board's hiring policies for teachers seemed to adopt 46a-79 and 46a-80. The statute requires the employer not to consider crimes until after an offer of employment has been made.

Ms. Pereira said there is a statute that specifically addresses board employees.

Atty. Anastasi said it was confusing because the screening versus the evaluation is difficult.

Ms. Pereira said the issue revolved around supporting giving felons a second chance, but not by placing children at risk. She said crimes of sexual nature, anything violent or related to DUI should be a bar to working with children in the district.

Atty. Anastasi noted the Bridgeport Police do not hire anyone with a felony record or an A or B misdemeanor because convicted felons can't carry weapons.

Mr. Walker noted the draft includes a criminal background check, federal and state fingerprinting, judicial court search, DCF background check, and sexual offender registry search. Atty. Anastasi said a provision could be added to reference any other applicable laws governing the hiring of school board employees.

Atty. Anastasi noted it was illegal to have a residency durational requirement in the state.

Mr. Sokolovic said the change in the laws on marijuana may impact the policies that are created. He said he would love to adopt a standard such as used by the police department for the board.

Atty. Anastasi said the board's counsel, Berchem Moses, agreed with him that the board is not mandated to be subject to 46a-79 and 46a-80, which means the board is not mandated to do an individualized assessment and can adopt higher standards.

Ms. Pereira and Mr. Walker said they wanted a five-year look-back on most offenses, but want to institute exclusionary categories such as DUI, drug trafficking or sexual convictions.

Ms. Pereira said the five-year period begins after completion of serving a sentence, parole or probation for felonies.

Atty. Anastasi described the five-year period as an extension of a clean period, not look-back.

Mr. Walker said the input provided to Mr. Anastasi should bring us closer to what we're looking for.

Mr. Walker noted the phrase moral turpitude was not in the document. Ms. Pereira said it was in the state statute for teachers.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Taylor objected to language referring to litigious

Ms. Pereira said she disagreed with Mr. Taylor's belief that it was the board's job to give convicted felons job opportunities. She said she did not see that as the board's responsibility in the statutes or elsewhere.

The next agenda item was on reverse suspensions. Ms. Pereira said she had been reading about reverse suspensions on a national basis. Parents of students who are suspended are offered the option of spending an entire day in school with their child. Since most children do not want this and probably are mortified by the idea, the use of it has reduced discipline problems and suspensions. She suggested the board look at the concept. She said it would cost nothing to implement reverse suspensions.

Mr. DiDonato suggested a district committee look at the issue. He asked Ms. Pereira to forward him information. He said he would research it and discuss it at the next committee meeting.

Mr., Sokolovic said he believed it should be left up to the discretion of the superintendent regarding whether to offer such a suspension to a given student. Ms. Pereira said she agreed students who commit Type III offenses should not qualify.

Ms. Pereira said the district could be the first to offer it in the region. Mr. DiDonato said he suspected some principals already do it informally.

The next agenda item was on the board vacancy created by Dennis Bradley's resignation. Ms. Pereira said the resignation would create a vacancy on this committee. She said she was troubled by the announcement that the replacement would automatically go on this committee and

the Finance Committee, which might lead to a complete novice being on the Finance Committee.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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