

Tuesday, March 19, 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held March 19, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m. Present were members Chair Ben Walker and Joseph Lombard. Board member Maria Pereira was in attendance.

Mr. Lombard moved approval of the minutes of February 25, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker. A correction was noted. The motion was approved by a 1-0 vote. Mr. Walker voted in favor. Mr. Lombard abstained.

The next agenda item was a special education update. John DiDonato, chief of specialized education reform, reported there were no outstanding complaints. Mr. Walker said that report made him very happy.

Mr. DiDonato said he wanted to be sure there was an understanding that the reorganization efforts in the department led to enhanced capacity at the school level for special education. He said three administrator positions were redirected to support for the classroom and they acted in the role of coaches. He said this year a special education administrator position that managed the out-of-district caseload was eliminated, which led to the coaches being diverted to cover some of that responsibility.

Mr. DiDonato said very often out-of-district placements occur because of the inability of schools to manage the most challenging students. He said he had noticed an

improvement in the principals' ability to discuss suspension from the perspective of special education because they have been held to accountable to better understand the process.

Mr. DiDonato said while it is positive that there are no complaints, there are still significant problems and they aren't getting any easier. He said the referral rate for out-of-district placements is not going to change unless we begin to address support for schools. He said the majority of kids with disabilities in the district are either learning disabled or emotionally disabled. He said unfortunately the academic levels of many of our children are such that they are easily identified as learning disabled.

Mr. DiDonato noted the kindergarten retention rates has been growing since the elimination of kindergarten paraprofessionals. He said being retained in kindergarten has lasting impact.

Mr. DiDonato said special education referral rates across the state are approaching 20 percent, which he described as unacceptable because so many brown and black kids are not growing.

Ms. Pereira said Martin Looney had sponsored a bill that the state fund all special education. Mr. DiDonato said when IDEA was passed there was an understanding that the federal government would not fully fund it. In the George W. Bush administration the secretary of education said the money for special education had to be limited because the referral rate would grow if there was greatly increased funding.

Mr. Walker said he hoped the district could find funding for the one eliminated position. He said the system creates

special education kids because they immediately fall behind in the kindergarten and instead of being taught basic behavior lessons they are given an iReady test in the first week of school.

In response to a question, Mr. DiDonato said the change in the hours of instruction was in the expulsion program, not homebound instruction. He said there are two hours a day for homebound students. Mr. Walker said it was coming from above our pay grade and he wished we could afford to give more. Ms. Pereira said it was not acceptable to give a student two hours of instruction a day.

In response to a question, Mr. DiDonato said the number of special education referrals starts increasing about this time of year and going forward. Mr. Walker said this occurs after the third marking period and report card conferences. Mr. DiDonato said there is one K-8 school that has had a big jump and is being tracked.

Mr. Walker asked the monthly data on special education referrals be provided to the committee.

In response to Mr. Walker's thanks for Mr. DiDonato work, Mr. DiDonato said the two assistant superintendents approach their work differently by supervising principals in this area. He said principals for the most part are stepping up; he also mentioned Dr. Johnson's leadership.

The next agenda item was on the RFP for expelled students mandated instruction.

Ms. Pereira said the document received was not in any way what we discussed. Mr. Walker said he would like to have an opportunity to read the document.

Mr. Lombard moved that “*we postpone discussion and possible action on RFP for expulsion until our April meeting.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira said it looked like only about 25 words had changed after the lengthy meeting with Atty. Mr. Walker said after he and Ms. Pereira look at the document he would communicate with Atty. Anastasi for a revised draft.

Mr. DiDonato said Dr. Otuwa made every effort to try to have the document available to board members last week.

The next agenda item was on the RFP for translation and interpretation services. Ana Sousa-Martins, director of bilingual education and world languages, was present.

Mr. Walker noted a lot of district students or their parents don't speak English, so services are provided for translation of documents and interpretation. He said in order to obtain neutral translators, as opposed to district staff, the solution is to hire independent companies.

Mr. Walker said due to the use of a preexisting document language from prior RFPs on legal services and superintendent search firms were in the draft and the document should be edited to remove those.

Ms. Pereira and Mr. Walker suggested corrections to the table of contents, describing the document as an RFP instead of RFQ, the addition of the Oxford comma, and the due date.

Ms. Pereira asked the references to the city attorney be removed.

Ms. Pereira suggested the first contract should be for a year with the option of two more years, so the board could evaluate the situation. She said the contract could not be for five years. She said the one year, followed by two years, was done with the substitute teacher vendor.

Ms. Pereira said the start date should be July 2019. She said LEP should be designated as Limited English Proficiency.

Ms. Pereira suggested the demographics of the student population be added to the document, including English language learners.

Mr. Walker said he was glad to see the video technology included in the RFP because often translation requires the ability to see someone's face.

Ms. Pereira suggested transcripts be added to the section under general services required. She noted the high cost of transcripts in the previous contract.

Ms. Pereira objected to the district being charged 50 percent of the costs for cancellations within twelve hours. She suggesting letting the responding company negotiate that in any contract. She suggested a provision referencing administrative emergencies or inclement weather. Mr. DiDonato said in the law the parent has a right to cancel a meeting. He said the majority of translation requests are for PPTs. Ms. Pereira suggested Ms. Sousa-Martins consult with Ms. Siegel on the language to use.

Ms. Pereira said Ms. Sousa-Martins should create the goals and objectives, but the overall document should have been vetted by Tony Pires because that is his area of expertise.

Ms. Pereira said references to a “firm” should be changed to “provider.” Ms. Sousa-Martins said there was no intention was to limit respondents to the RFP to a single provider. Ms. Pereira suggested the wording to capture this.

In response to a question, Ms. Sousa-Martins said the interpreters would not be I with children alone or offsite. Ms. Pereira said she just wanted to make sure molestation insurance or background checks were not needed.

Mr. Walker suggested the subparagraphs be designated consistently by numbers or letters.

Mr. Walker said we need to know the charges, if any, if PPTs are delayed beyond the scheduled time. Ms. Pereira said she would want to know what would happen if the translator was late for the meeting.

Mr. DiDonato said there was going to be a feedback form on the services to be filled out by the administrator. He said perhaps that form could be used to document the time.

Ms. Pereira noted substitute teachers don’t get paid for travel time and that should be considered in this area. Mr. DiDonato said having the RFP may address things like this to make it a more competitive process.

Ms. Pereira said the capitalization should be consistent in the bullet points.

Ms. Pereira suggested Ms. Sousa-Martins ask Ms. Siegel whether a provision was necessary about holding the district exempt from paying various taxes imposed by the state and federal government.

Ms. Pereira said she wanted to be careful with the award of points. She the board awarded a contract that did not follow the rating that was in the bid and it had to be stopped. She said she was very concerned about the cost of translation, particularly when she saw the cost of 18 cents per word for a transcript.

Ms. Sousa-Martins said she came up with the scoring criteria. She said Ms. Siegel reviewed it and didn't have any questions.

Ms. Pereira said the composition of the evaluation committee did not need to be designated in the RFP

Ms. Pereira said the reference to the Board of Public Purchases or the City of Bridgeport's approval should be eliminated because the ultimate decision will be made by the board.

Ms. Pereira said she believed the RFP was in the right committee. She said she was glad the board was going out to bid because she was very upset with the pricing of Linguistica and Shoreline. Ms. Pereira described the \$10,000 cost savings the board achieved by opening up the E-Rate vendor to bid.

Mr. Walker said no action needed to be taken on the RFP and it will be scheduled again for the April meeting.

Mr. Walker said he had some articles on reverse suspensions, including one that quoted Mr. DiDonato, that he would like to have the committee members read before the next meeting.

Mr. Lombard moved *“to postpone to the next meeting the discussion of reverse suspensions and the possible use of the BPS.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

Dr. Otuwa said she was getting in touch with the parents, the BEA and BCAS to get their input on the issue through focus groups on reverse suspensions. Mr. Walker said that was great. Ms. Pereira said she believed a lot of the staff may be skeptical of it. She said it would be fabulous for parents to see what educators do in the schools every day.

Ms. Pereira recommended a research paper by Dr. Pedro Noguera on Harding High School.

The next agenda item was on mathematics textbooks. Herminio Planas, director of mathematics, was present.

Mr. Planas said the process to choose new math textbook was called the mathematics curriculum renewal. He said the textbook is a conduit for delivering the curriculum.

Mr. Planas said the K-2 licenses for the current textbook are due to expire in June 2019. He said the textbooks licenses for Grade 3 to 8 are due to expire at the same time, following a one-year extension. The textbook was due to be renewed last year, but it was not because of lack of funding. He said the textbooks could be used without the license because it includes a hardcover book and a teacher's license.



In response to a question, Mr. Planas said the curriculum takes into account Common Core. He said it is not Singapore Math-driven, but uses pieces of it.

Mr. Planas said with the current funding K to 2 had to be replaced right away. He said the Math in Focus book can still be used with the current curriculum.

Ms. Pereira said it seemed the illegal school board spent over \$7 million on textbooks and nobody thought about the licenses expiring at the time. She said the same thing happened with more than \$3 million of Chrome Books.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said when a new textbook is bought the curriculum has to be revised.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said the textbooks for Grades 3 to 8 will be kept and the licenses renewed. Grades 3 to 5 will use the same book next year; and a committee will be formed next year about next steps on Grades 6 to 8. He said the gradual approach is due to the financial considerations. He said the full replacement cost would be about \$1 million, so the change will be over several years.

Mr. Walker said from a non-teacher perspective everybody sitting on the board thinks they know how to add two plus two and they think it hasn't changed since Plato's day. He said it would be a hard sell to the board.

Mr. Planas said meetings to develop the plan were held from October 2018 to January 2019. He said science books and materials were purchased before math last year. The committee was composed of about twenty teachers, administrators, bilingual teachers, and special education

teachers. Additional input was sought from people who could not make the meetings.

Mr. Planas said he provided a document that highlights the criteria the committee utilized.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said the choice was narrowed down to the top five vendors. He said the books being used in surrounding districts was also looked at so our students would not be used as guinea pigs. The books were rated according various categories.

Ms. Pereira noted how points were awarded in the various categories in the document. Mr. Planas said each category is worth three points. Ms. Pereira suggested the ratings be added to the document when it is presented to the board.

Mr. Planas said how the books were rated by Ed Reports was also used.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said there were no parents on the committee. Ms. Pereira said the number one complaint she hears from parents is they don't understand homework and can't understand the new math. Mr. Planas said Common Core had been in the district for two years. He said there have been 23 math workshops this year across the district. He said the district is trying to develop an Internet site with links to videos for parents; he described it as his homework for the summer.

Mr. Walker said that would be an awesome development for parents. Mr. Planas said there was a grant being written for math videos by Greg Tang.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said some districts replace their textbooks every five years, which he described as ideal.

Mr. Walker said math teaching philosophy had moved away from learning by rote. He described the new approaches as rewiring the brain to think outside the box. Mr. Planas said math requires procedural fluency, conceptual understanding and problem-solving. The older math instruction was based on spiraling, teaching the same concepts every year; now every grade level has something different to do.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said problem-solving in math involves reading, but procedural fluency, or crunching numbers, does not involve reading. He said concepts are more about how you speak and how you write.

Mr. Planas said after the three best books were selected, stage two was the cost negotiations. There were meetings with all three vendors with Ms. Siegel and Mr. Planas. He said Ms. Siegel is amazing at bargaining.

Mr. Planas said the documents indicated what the price quotes were. Ms. Pereira said she had faith in Mr. Planas when it comes to curriculum, which she would not say about everybody. She said if Ms. Siegel was negotiating price, she did not have any question on the price.

Ms. Planas said the approach is to use Title IV-A money and Ms. Siegel said the expenditures could be made in the next two years.

Mr. Walker said there would be questions about the curriculum at the board level. He noted Mr. Sokolovic was not happy with the Singapore Math approach.

Mr. Planas said most companies are now going into fully consumable books. This is necessary particularly so students in the lower grades learn how to build things. Mr. Walker said in the classes he has been in in Trumbull and Fairfield the math textbooks are all consumables.

Mr. Planas said the recommended text was Ready Classroom, which is very similar to Ready Common Core, so the modifications to the district's curriculum would be very minimal.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said the high school licenses had expired but they have hardcover books and teachers' manuals.

Mr. Planas said Ms. Siegel indicated it is subject to available funding, so if less Title IV money is received changes might have to be made.

Ms. Pereira said the agenda item for the full board should be discussion and possible action on purchasing new K-5 math books. The motion can be much lengthier with detail.

Mr. Planas said the district wanted to buy the textbooks as soon as funds are available.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Walker had not missed the deadline for submitting items to the regular board meeting. She said Mr. Illingworth had a meeting on a Wednesday and the item was on the agenda for Monday.

Mr. Walker moved that *"we approve the purchase of math textbooks to align with our curriculum as discussed this*

*evening with Mr. Planas.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

Mr. Walker said he would ask the item be put on the board agenda.

Mr. Walker moved that “*we table our discussion on translation and interpretation services provided by Linguistica International and Shoreline Interpretation.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod