

Thursday, April 16, 2020

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE  
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April 16,  
2020, by video and audio conference call, Bridgeport,  
Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. Present were Chair Joseph Sokolovic, and members Joseph Lombard and Sybil Allen. Board member Albert Benejan was present.

Acting Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Ms. Allen moved to approve the committee's minutes of February 25, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

Supt. Testani presented on the district learning plan for all cohorts, special education and English-language learners, and general education.

Mr. Testani said distance learning planning began immediately after school closure for Phase 1. Phase 2 included more administrator and teacher participation in creating the learning experiences. Phase 3 will begin after April break with teachers working with classrooms and students online.

Mr. Testani said he believed from discussions with colleagues that Bridgeport deserved credit for providing a solid distance learning plan. He said over 4,000 devices had been given out to students and families over the last two weeks. A donation of learning items has been secured from the Lego company for all first grade students.

Mr. Testani said the special education teachers and other support staff are doing the best they can to meet the needs of those students. He said the ESL/bilingual department is also working hard to reach those students.

Mr. Testani said initially many students did not understand the closure would not be this long and they viewed it as an early vacation, but participation in the distance learning has increased.

The superintendent said students can hand in work up until next Monday for the third marking period. There is discussion going on at the state level and with other superintendents about how the fourth marking period will be treated. He said the district would be holding student forums to receive input from students on fourth marking period grades.

Mr. Testani said he believed there were going to be gaps in students' learning so when school reopens there have to be opportunities for enhancement, enrichment, and intervention.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said students have been participating in online AP classes and early college classes as they normally would and he has received positive feedback from teachers and students. He said social-emotional resources available for parents and students are being launched tomorrow.

Mr. Testani said grading options have been discussed that include awarding an incomplete grade and extending the date for submission of work into the fall. There has been discussion of giving the students the option of a letter grade or pass/fail in the fourth marking period.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said specialists, clubs and athletic coaches are engaged in ways of connecting online with students. He said there is a social-emotional aspect to remaining in isolation when you're used to interacting with people. He said the social work department has reached out to students and held virtual groups.

He added he hoped there could be some time in the summer to get clubs or athletic teams together for some limited activities.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the district follows the AP course guidelines, which will include testing at home.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the higher education administrators are being very accommodating to students due to the impacts of the COVID virus. Some are anticipating that students will be attending colleges closer to their home, which could benefit students from the district.

Mr. Sokolovic complimented the district's Phase 2 work, which was much more thorough than Phase 1. He asked that some thought be given to a possible Phase 4 in the event of a flare-up of the COVID-19. Mr. Testani said much depended on whether we could get into the buildings during the summer and if school can start on time in the fall. He said the district would be in a much better position on devices later in the year.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said parents are signing for the devices assigned to the students to take home. He said insurance has been taken out on some of the newer devices that were handed out.

Mr. Testani said he learned Monday from the city that he should go ahead and make the order for the devices the city committed to purchase for the board. It will take some time of receive the approximately 2,100 laptops, which would be in addition to the 5,000 to be donated by the Connecticut Partnership. He said the district itself was looking to purchase age-appropriate tablets for K-2 students.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the amount of packets picked up and dropped off during Phases 1 and 2 have been amazing. He said the students who are disengaged are a lot of the same students who were disengaged prior to the closing of schools. Phone calls and letters home are used to try to re-engage. He said the district is slowly finding some elementary students went to states in the South that had less impact from the virus.

Mr.. Testani said psychologists, special education, speech staff, and language staff are reaching out to students they work with on the Teams platform. He said these services are more effective in a face-to-face manner. He said in Phase 2 principals did mailings of packets to the homes of special education students. Van and nutrition drivers delivered packets as well.

Mr. Testani said holding graduations with only students and staff physically present was a possibility. He said he was willing to explore all options.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said it is planned to have summer school, even if it has to be held remotely.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said beginning next week Fridays will be flex days with teachers available from

9:00 to 2:00 for professional development and planning their online lessons.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said he understood that many elementary school parents prefer written materials to online instruction. He said he was learning packets will be coming from the Connecticut Partnership next week as well. He said the Teams platform is a good way to communicate with parents. He said he understood this is a very stressful time for parents.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said if summer school is held this is not a time to ask families to pay for it and it will be provided at no charge.

In response to a question about numerical grading for students who are very close to the passing grade, Mr. Testani said there has been discussion that if the students put in effort they will be given the benefit of the doubt in determining whether they pass the course.

Mr. Testani said he appreciated all the support he was receiving. He said every day the district is trying to do a little more and it is good to know we are not alone in this.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod