

Tuesday, April 17, 2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April 17, 2018, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:32 p.m. Present were members Chair Ben Walker and Joseph Sokolovic.

Mr. Sokolovic moved approval of the committee's minutes of March 20, 2018. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

John DiDonato, chief of specialized instructional reform, said the state Department of Education compliance update remains unchanged. No new complaints have been filed. The current complaint involves the previously discussed charter school issue. Some charter school parents have contacted Mr. DiDonato about the district's letter to the parents informing them of their ability to return their children to the public schools.

Mr. DiDonato said we're taking a hard look at the high school AIM program, which is for students with significant management problems. He said self-contained classes for that population have been determined not to be the most effective. He said staff are looking at incoming 9th graders next year to determine which students might be appropriate for an alternative, more integrated program. He said a team from Bridgeport Learning Center will visit the middle schools to help identify students who might be candidates for such a program. He added the integrated program will be piloted at one school next year.

Mr. DiDonato said one of the challenges in the SOAR program is differential diagnostics have not been done as much as we should have. He said all students will have an annual review conference and he hopes to give the opportunity to the students to advocate for

themselves. He said all of our schools should have a continuum of services so students have a range of options in their zoned school.

The next agenda item was the proposed text selection for the African-American history course.

Assistant Superintendent Deborah Santacapita introduced committee members present: Ms. Alicia Robinson, director of performing arts and music; Dr David Canton, a consultant from Connecticut College; Jay Lipp of Fairchild Wheeler; Angela Bhushan, science director; Dr. Melissa Jenkins, director of English and Language Arts; and Heminio Planas, director of mathematics. She said Dr. Anekwe of Central Magnet, another committee member, and Mr. Morton, a high school teacher, were not present tonight.

Dr. Santacapita said the committee revisited the issue since the last meeting. There is no change in the Latin American studies textbook.

Dr. David Canton congratulated the district for having the course be a graduation requirement. He said Bridgeport was the second school district in the country of 13,500 districts to have such a requirement.

Dr. Canton said in every course in high school students are not getting everything. He said students he sees in college have at least been introduced to concepts they learned in high school. Beyond college, advanced studies can take place in graduate school.

Dr. Canton discussed the proposed textbook by Henry Louis Gates. He said Dr Gates is not a historian; his Ph.D. is in literature. Dr. Canton said knowledge is political and Dr. Gates has received much grant funding.

Dr. Canton then discussed the approaches to African-American history by Molefi Kete Asante, Robin Kelley of UCLA, Nell Painter, recently retired from Princeton University, and Clayborne Carson, a scholar who specializes in Martin Luther King. He noted Kelley and Painter have their PhDs in history.

Dr. Canton noted some of the writers start their treatment of African-American history from Ancient Egypt. He said where to start was a

choice of individual writers. He said when African-American studies as a discipline started in 1968 it was argued that we should start in one place. He described it as a choice, traditionalists vs. originalists.

Dr. Canton discussed Jacob Olson, a Connecticut teacher and minister from West Indies, who wrote a pamphlet called "The Search for Truth" in the 19th century. He said in 1816, the African Colonization Society was founded to take free black citizens to Liberia, which was advocated by Abraham Lincoln, among others.

Dr. Canton said the first black newspaper appealed to ancient history and used the Bible and Greek and Roman sources to prove Egypt contributed to Western civilization.

Dr. Canton said was not until 19th century that they started flipping the script, and now Egypt was out of African. There was a belief Africa had no history. He said under African-American studies in the 1960s writers put Egypt back in Africa.

Dr. Canton noted that African-American writers W.E.B. Du Bois received a PhD from Harvard from 1895 and Carter G. Woodson, the father of Black History Month received a PhD from Harvard in 1912. He described PhDs as certificates that come with rules of the discipline regarding sources and the like. John Hope Franklin also graduated from Harvard. These writers started the story of African-Americans in Africa.

Dr. Canton said in the black segregated schools the approach tended to be that black people are Egyptians who helped create Western civilization. He said when schools become desegregated the mainstream approach emphasized African-Americans' heritage in West Africa.

Dr. Canton noted there are very few Egyptologists, a discipline which requires knowledge of Latin, Greek, and hieroglyphics. This was one reason for the shift to the emphasis on West Africa.

Dr. Canton said we can always supplement with other books and fill in topics not covered in a given textbook. He said the debate about

the textbook were rehashing the debates of Egyptology and other historical approaches that are out there.

Dr. Canton said student protests in 1968 revolved around demands for more black history and black faculty, which led to study of Ancient Egypt, Nubia, the pre-Christian world and West African kingdoms.

Dr. Canton described the approach as a choice. He said he starts African-American history from one point, while Kelley & Painter decided to start from another.

Dr. Canton described his approach to African-American as narrative, resistance and hope. He asked if students who leave the class will remember the emperors they are taught about. He said a lot of the ancient past is important, but he didn't have to go back 9,000 years to find role models.

Dr. Canton described some myths of black history which he described gloom and doom. He said it was not true that more black men are in jail than enrolled in college or that more black boys grow up without fathers. He said the poverty rate and black teenage pregnancy rates are at all-time lows. He said something is working.

In response to concerns about white teachers teaching the courses, he said if you're a professional teacher, there are rules on how to teach information. He said with the right training and workshops the teachers can improve.

Dr. Canton said he believed in deconstructing a lot of the liberal interpretation taught in high schools. He said his approach is about history and black agency, and black people are at the center of their history. He said there were good white people involved in the civil rights movement, but the movement was largely black.

JoAnn Kennedy was recognized. She said her thing was to tell the truth. She said the history predates colonial times. She said the premise is to instill pride in our children and you definitely have to know about West Africa, Moors and Mail tribes. She praised the documentary *Hidden Colors*.

Dr. Canton noted there is totally wrong stuff available on the internet in addition to valid information. He described African history itself is a discipline and he questioned whether you're not going to get extensive information on Africa in high school.

Dr. Canton decried the approach that limits African-American history to 12 famous people and noted lesser known black leaders like A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin. He said there is great richness in African-American history. Likewise, the approach should be through a wide range of individuals – not just elites, but working class people and middle class people. He said more history of women should be incorporated.

Dr. Canton said the core of African-American history was resistance and hope; there are just different strategies on how to approach it.

Ms .Kennedy said she talked to eight students, some of whom were from Africa, and the majority said they wanted to learn more about Africa.

Dr. Canton said he wondered who is trained to teach African history in the high school system. He agreed we should start with African history with supplemental material. He said he understood the cynicism.

Dr. Canton pointed to Robert Williams, an African-American who advocated self-defense. He said he will train teachers from the viewpoint of black agency and deconstructing the African-American history of pathology and gloom and doom. The theme will be resistance and hope

In regard to Caribbean history, Dr. Canton said as an example is knowledge about Haiti is limited - he knows about Toussaint, Duvalier and that's about it, but that's not the whole story. He said just as in his field he would be offended if only twelve named black people summed up African-American history.

Alicia Robinson said the course approved is African-American history. Ms. Kennedy said she has the grant and she talked to Nadira Clarke who said the grant was broad.

Mr. Lipp said he believed Ms. Kennedy was talking about the grant, not what was approved in the committee about African-American history.

Mr. Walker said he felt honored he was able to bring this to the full board. He said Ms. Baraka's dream would be a series of courses. He said Dr. Canton is saying there is not a single course we can offer to cover the entire history. He said this is not where it ends, but where it begins because it is an introductory course. He noted his own educational deficiencies include African history.

Mr. Lipp said the grant that funded what has been done here has been approved out of Washington with federal funding. He said future grants will probably be able to complete the vision of Ms. Baraka, but we've got to get the ball rolling.

Ms. Kennedy said her only concern was where we are starting. She said the curriculum should start in African because we're trying to empower our children.

Mr. Walker said the textbook is only a guideline and the curriculum is what drives the course. He said you can't cover the history of Africans in America without discussing where they came from.

Dr. Canton said the approach by scholars to slavery currently is to talk about resistance, such slaves starting their own churches. He said the resistance approach is not all gloom and doom and refutes the belief that slaves liked slavery.

Dr. Canton said recent scholarship on inequality has uncovered the New Deal's use of redlining in housing policies, which he said was just as important as Ancient Ghana – yet he never heard about it until graduate school.

Carolyn Graves was recognized. She said the board was making decisions on behalf of community. She claimed there had been closed-door meetings on this issue. Mr. Walker said we don't have closed-door meetings. Ms. Graves said it would be nice if the community was involved.

Ms. Kennedy noted this is the second district in the country to make it a graduation requirement. She said there are black publishers that have books available for use in the course.

Mr. Walker said he had been involved with this for about two and a half years and it's been on the agenda about ten times. He said we have a committee of experts who know how to develop a course and train teachers. He said Ms. Kennedy's input was valuable and the committee had certainly heard it. He said he would still be here for another year and a half and would move the effort forward and be a champion for it.

Mr. Walker said the board stuck its neck way out here to make a graduation requirement; it would have been so easier to make it an elective class. The children will have three choices of courses. He said the committee had done a magnificent job of organizing the class, along with an eminent expert.

Mr. Walker said it didn't matter what the textbook is as long it's factual and truthful. What matters is what the teacher is doing with the textbook. He said in other districts some courses are taught without textbooks using online curriculum. Supplemental materials will go along with the course and perhaps ease Ms. Kennedy's concern. He said the committee had seen a master teacher who is passionate about the subject matter that he is teaching who will be training our teachers. He said we must trust our district that we are doing the right thing.

Mr. Walker thanked the committee and Dr. Canton.

Mr. Graves said she didn't want to make it sound she was not grateful for the work that has been put in. She said she believed the decision has already been made. She said she most honorably respected that there was a black male, Latinos, people of color, to represent our children. She said there should be a survey and more voices of parents.

Mr. Walker said Ms. Baraka worked on this for twelve years and he did not know all the survey and questions she asked. He said all he

did was spearhead the committee to move it forward. He said he was sorry Ms. Graves felt it was a done deal; if it were, the textbook would have been approved long ago.

Mr. Walker said at the next board meeting he would make a motion that we accept this textbook, with the caveat that the curriculum incorporate more than just the chapters that are in here, so that we can take the next step forward of training our teachers.

Dr. Canton said he had a colleague who teaches African history and he can consult with her on how to add more of that portion to the semester. He said he agreed there should be more African history. He said Molefi Kete Asante would agree that when you teach slavery from the gloom and doom perspective it ignores the resistance, community and activities that give a whole different perspective with a rich history.

Julie Hayducky, a student, was recognized. She asked why we can't have a textbook that's more representative of our final goal. Mr. Walker said he believed the curriculum along the textbook will accomplish the goal.

Ms. Robinson said the new textbook selection – the one presented by Ms. Baraka – was fully agreed to by Dr. Canton. The book is *From Freedom to Slavery*, 9th edition, which covers 500 B.C. through current.

Mr. Lipp noted the cost of this book is much more than the previous selection, so some will be purchased this year and more next year with the grant. Mr. Walker asked that the committee send him a breakdown via e-mail.

Mr. Walker noted he missed the deadline to submit the textbook items to the board's agenda for the next meeting. He said he would make a motion at that meeting to add items to New Business. The motion would require a two-thirds vote to add to the agenda. He said he hoped Dr. Canton could be at the board meeting on April 23rd. He said he apologized for not recognizing Dr. Canton at the last board meeting and would make sure he was included in the discussion at the next board meeting.



The next item was the committee's textbook selection on Latin American-Caribbean studies. Mr. Walker noted no opposition had been received to the choice of textbook for the course.

Mr. Walker said any teacher that just teaches out of a textbook needs to find another line of work because they lack passion. He said the textbook is just a guideline.

Mr. Walker said we had been a little bit hung up on this and said he obviously did not present it well. He said he hoped tonight's conversation would ease some concerns.

Mr. Walker said he would move both textbooks forward if it was okay with the committee.

The next agenda item was a report by Angela Bhushan, director of science, on STEAM.

Ms. Bhushan said STEAM, was science, technology, engineering and math, all grounded in the arts. She said a scientist put it well when he said creativity is imagination in a straight jacket unless it is loosened up by the arts.

Ms. Bhushan said as a result of adopting the Next Generation Science Standards(NGSS) curriculum from 2015 the district has expanded the teaching repertoire to including the arts in a more interdisciplinary approach. She said the NGSS makes it a point to address art in the curriculum.

Ms. Bhushan described some STEAM events. She said Claytor Magnet, Park City Magnet and Discovery Magnet have held STEAM nights. At Claytor, a STEAM school, students study coding skills, Lego projects, animation, robotics, and origami.

Ms. Bhushan said it's not that the other schools are doing it, but they haven't figured out they're doing the arts when they're doing NGSS. She said this year the NGSS curriculum has been implemented in a big way in Grades K-5.

Ms. Bhushan said students are doing things under the NGSS curriculum, so by default they are doing STEAM; they just don't call it that right now because it's embedded.

Mr. Sokolovic said one of the motivations for him to get involved in the board was because Park City Magnet was attempting a shift from science to social studies as a theme under a prior superintendent.

Mr. Sokolovic said he had visited every school in the system and noticed progress, but there is still an institutional deficit sometimes in regard to science. He said he assumed the great majority of teachers have history, sociology and other degrees, not science degrees. He said some teachers have told him they don't find it easy to teach science because it's not a comfortable subject. He said it's important to get the students in K to 5 interested in science because this is where jobs are going to be. He noted the big underrepresentation of minorities in science.

Mr. Sokolovic said showing science experiments to students while they're young would spark their interest in science. He said he would be harping on this for the next three and a half years.

Ms. Bhushan said this is exactly how she feels. She said she believed teachers with a background in history or literature would add a depth to the science they don't seem to understand now.

Ms. Bhushan said the NGSS is very intimidating. She said there is professional development through the textbook company Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, which was started in August. She said the professional development is becoming more personalized as a result of feedback received from teachers and principals.

Ms. Bhushan said it was a work in progress. She said we're trying to get the teachers first comfortable with the text and the standards, and then focusing more on the delivery.

Mr. Walker said he sees this reluctance in the average K-5 teacher because we're so focused reading and writing. He said if science and music and art can't be incorporated in that reading and writing, we're going to be in trouble. He said the NGSS just needed more examples

like that given by Ms. Bhushan, where a teacher incorporated the science of teepees into a lesson.

Ms. Sokolovic suggested the Black History Month events include writing assignments about African-African scientists and architects, not just President Obama and Michael Jordan.

Mr. Walker said we have to learn how to adapt in education and make the curriculum integrated. He envisioned a school in the future that would have an all-day session that incorporates all core subjects.

The next item on the agenda was on new textbooks for Grades 6-8 aligned to the NGSS. Ms. Bhushan said the previous books were misaligned. The HMM online license for Grades 6-8 expires in June. She said a committee was formed and looked at various options; the winner was a vendor iQuest.

Ms. Bhushan said the cost of the books is \$395,000. She said each book addresses one quarter by way of topics.

Ms. Bhushan said iQuest was selected because it matches the approach the district is currently taking.

Ms. Bhushan said there was a request by teachers for kits, meaning materials, to accompany the books. She said this had not been factored into the purchase, but we need to consider it because they would supplement the content.

Mr. Walker asked where the funding would come from.

Ms. Bhushan said the CFO could talk more to that, but we do not have the money for it right now. There was discussion of a payment plan to pay half the amount this year.

Mr. Walker said approving the textbook was a no-brainer, but Ms. Siegel would be needed at the board meeting to address the financing. He said Ms. Bhushan would be needed at the board meeting to discuss the merits of the textbooks. He suggested the board move forward on the textbooks and if further action is needed on the kits that could be handled at a later time.

Alicia Robinson presented a report on performing and visual arts. She provided an updated written report to the committee.

Ms. Robinson said the second annual Arts Count Day was held on April 4th. She displayed pictures from the event. Over 60 artists from Fairchild County and beyond were dispersed into every 6th grade classroom. Artists included barbers, painters, producers, DJs, photographers, musicians and authors.

Ms. Robinson said the district Black History concert took place on March 28th, in collaboration with the Department of Literacy, including the Carter G. Woodson essay contest. There were performances by Hall, Read and Harding students. Harding contributed their choir and their drum line.

Ms. Robinson said in March an all-magnet band – comprised of students from High Horizons, Multicultural and Park City Magnet as well as Madison School – marched in the St. Patrick's Day Parade. This was the first participation by district schools since 2010. She said there is one band director, Troy Williams, for all three schools.

The Rockwell Dance Center donated 200 tickets to Bridgeport students, staff and parents to attend a scholarship benefit at Trumbull High which featured a performance by Jenna Ushkowitz who was on *Glee*.

Ms. Robinson said the Harding choir under the direction of Sheena Graham will be performing with the Greater Bridgeport Symphony Orchestra on April 28th at the Klein Memorial.

Ms. Robinson said sneaker designs were submitted for the contest – the two themes were off the wall and local flavor. The first prize for the winning design is \$75,000.

Ms. Robinson said the NASA patch statewide contest was held. Students from K-12 at select schools were asked to design a patch. The winning patch will launch on a shuttle to space. BMA had three winners for the high school category, Roosevelt had winners in K-8.

Ms. Robinson said on March 24th there was a Links event and ceremony for students and teachers who participated in the national poster contest. First through third places winners were recognized at Housatonic Community College. She thanked Mr. Weldon and Mr. Taylor for attending.

Ms. Robinson said fifteen students from five Turnaround Arts schools went to Washington from a Friday to Sunday. In addition to the performance at the Kennedy Center, cultural aspects were incorporated into the trip. About \$10,000 was raised to fund the trip. The students received a standing ovation. Mr. Robinson said the Bridgeport group was the only ensemble performing group that had their own instrumentalists.

Ms. Robinson said Hall students will be featured on a Google blog as a part of a young architect program.

Ms. Robinson said Turnaround Arts has announced an expansion and Bridgeport will go from five schools to six, welcoming Bryant School to the program. A Love Train video has been released.

Ms. Robinson said there are new early college experience courses planned for 2018-19. A music appreciation course will be available at Central and drawing at Fairchild Wheeler.

Mr. Walker said it was an uplifting presentation by Ms. Robinson. He said sometimes the arts are the way you reach kids in schools. He said he remembered when the district had competitive marching bands and we need to stop limits on the arts.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod