

Tuesday, January 15, 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held January 15, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:01 p.m. Present were members Chair Ben Walker and Joseph Sokolovic. Board member Maria Pereira was in attendance. Board member John Weldon arrived subsequently as noted.

Mr. Sokolovic moved approval of the minutes of the December 18, 2018. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker. A correction was noted. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Walker reported on Veronica Lenzen's communication on Complaint C19-0036, filed on 8/2/18, by a parent at Park City Magnet regarding failure to conduct an annual review. The complaint has been closed with no further corrective action required. Ms. Lenzen's communication indicated that as of the date of the report there are no further special education complaints pending.

Mr. Walker said he had been chairing the committee for four years and he thought this has been the first time he's been able to report the great news that all pending complaints are closed.

The next item was a presentation on the Carver Foundation after-school program at Classical Studies Magnet School.



Assistant Principal Lindsay Davis and Georgeann Stewart, the lead program coordinator, were present. Ms. Davis reported that everything was going well with the program, which services 149 students in Grades 3 to 6 of the 199 students in those grades. She said the program is held from 3:10 to 5:10 p.m., Monday through Thursday, with the first hour devoted to academic tutoring, and enrichment activities in the second hour.

Ms. Stewart said the program started in November. She said students' iReady data is used for the tutoring. Fourteen staff members work in the program, including twelve certified teachers. She added there had been great reviews from students and parents. She said the enrichment includes instruction in coding, Lego competitions, and robotics. There will be upcoming sessions on the stock market and children's fashion. Twenty-eight students are involved in marital arts.

Ms. Stewart said there were challenges in the beginning pulling teachers in, but now teachers are asking if they can join.

Ms. Davis said the program is run off the Extended School Hours Grant, with Carver as the community-based partner. Carver raises additional funds for the program. She said Carver runs several programs in Norwalk and Classical Studies follows their model.

Mr. Sokolovic said he liked the STEAM focus of the program. Mr. Walker said with the school being in charge of the after-school program it helps keep the curricular focus on academics.



Mr. Sokolovic said this type of curriculum should be in all the district's after-school programs. Ms. Pereira said the board should be running the after-school program as most other districts in the state do.

Mr. Walker said he liked to shine the spotlight on positive things such as this that are happening in the district.

John DiDonato, chief of specialized instructional reform, arrived. Mr. Walker said the time of the meeting had been moved up and noted the committee had read the written report on special education. Mr. DiDonato said Ms. Lenzen would be leaving the district on February 1st.

The next agenda item was on ABCD enrollment hierarchy.

Assistant Superintendent Janet Brown-Clayton said the document contained the corrections suggested by Mr. Walker. Ms. Pereira said some of the edits were not in the updated document such as references to Warren G. Harding High School.

Ms. Pereira referred to the minutes of the last meeting. She said she had indicated there had to be a policy number before it went to the board. She added Dr. Jenkins was supposed to go through the 5000 series to see if there were any existing policies in this area, particularly given a prior early learning center at Harding in the 1980s.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said she did not see an existing policy about early childhood education in her review of the 5000 Series. She said she thought the proposed policy number would come from the committee.



Mr. Walker said the 5000 series includes attendance, progress-records, student discipline, welfare, civil and legal rights and responsibilities and bus conduct. He said he believed the policies should go under A, attendance, perhaps 5116(h). Mr. Sokolovic read the current policy on married students, which contained references to pregnant students.

Dr. Melissa Jenkins, director of literacy and early childhood education, arrived at the meeting. She said the only reference she found in the policies on school-aged parents was the policy read by Mr. Sokolovic.

Ms. Pereira said a reference to faculty should be changed to staff on the second page of the red-lined version. She said an edit should be made to indicate "all remaining spaces should be made available for members of the community."

Natisha Vidal said she wasn't sure about including the provision about neighborhoods because ABCD has a point system and might not be willing to distinguish between neighborhoods in Bridgeport. A child in the Bassick district might have a greater need than a child in the Harding neighborhood.

Ms. Pereira said ABCD can't tell the board what to put in a board policy. She said the policy should be general and then the board would contract with the provider.

Ms. Pereira said there had been a prior discussion about students in adult education. Mr. Walker said he believed the current language regarding eligible students includes adult education.



There was a discussion of the age limit for enrolled students. Mr. Walker said he didn't think any parents with children who are two years and ten months would enroll in the program knowing they can only stay for two months. Mr. Sokolovic said any number we pick will be arbitrary.

Ms. Vidal said children can stay past age three because ABCD does not allow them to be unenrolled with nowhere else to go. They would finish out the school year with a transition plan. She said there would be an attempt to accommodate children who were two years and eleven months old entering the program at another site. She recommended the policy state 2.11 years old be the absolute last month that a child could be enrolled.

Mr. Walker said it appeared the policy was very close to being concluded. Ms. Pereira said she wanted to be sure the attendance agreement was different from the policy.

Ms. Vidal said she indicated in the November meeting that Head Start, the funder of ABCD, does not allow bumping, unenrolling or expelling a child. Ms. Pereira said children of district students had to have priority for a slot in the program. Ms. Vidal said a seat might not be available immediately, but they will gain entrance as older children transition out of the program. Ms. Pereira said she would check the regulations regarding Head Start.

In response to a question, Ms. Vidal said because the center is licensed by the Department of Public Health there can only be 24 children in the program. Ms. Pereira said it appeared the documents presented tonight by Ms. Vidal did not address bumping rights. Ms. Vidal quoted another document where the Department of Health and Human Services indicated the policy is for preventing and severing



limiting expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood centers.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested language that students be transitioned out of the program in a certain hierarchical order. Mr. Walker said he agreed; it should be done in reverse order of admittance. Ms. Vidal said the hierarchy on existing children would be based on birthdates. Mr. Sokolovic said Ms. Vidal was discussing a worst-case scenario. Mr. Walker said the policy would be written to provide a priority for children transitioning out into another program before a child of a Harding student. He said even though ABCD was currently running the program, there might be another provider in the future, and the board wanted to take care of its students first.

Mr. Walker said there should be another policy in between number 7 and 8 in the draft. He said it should state: If at capacity and the need arises, students will be transitioned out in reverse order of hierarchy of being transitioned in. Ms. Pereira said this means children of community members would be transitioned out first, followed by children of staff members.

Mr. Sokolovic said this would satisfy ABCD and the Head Start program.

Mr. Walker said the obvious changes he made in the draft were to switch all references to teens to school-aged parents, capitalization of Teen Pregnancy Social Worker, and the addition of the Oxford comma. He said if Ms. Pereira comes across anything else that does not change the substance or the content to send the changes directly to Ms. Brown-Clayton.



Mr. Walker said he believed the policies would be ready by the next meeting.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said the draft would reference “staff” not faculty and the reference should be to “members of the community” spaces, not “neighborhood.” Mr. Walker said that was the case.

The next agenda item was on mandating college preparatory courses and college applications for all high school students as a graduation requirement . Mr. Walker said in his career in education there began a movement to call for every student to be career and college ready. He said he disagreed and believed the purpose of public education was to prepare an educated citizenry who can vote, run for office, serve on a jury, and to provide a workforce, along with higher education. He said higher education is not for everybody. He said a lot of students do not need liberal arts degrees to do things like change the oil in his car. He described how a young man in auto service in his neighborhood who graduated from the district’s public schools and went from an apprentice to the owner to the brake shop without a college degree.

Mr. Walker noted the increasing costs of higher education in recent years and the large amount of debt many students incur.

Mr. Walker said the agenda item put forth by Mr. Bradley comes from a good place in his heart, but he did not believe it is appropriate. He added money would have to be found to fund college applications if it was mandated.

Mr. Walker said he would like to report to the board on the opinions of the administrators present.



Bill Morton, the district's I-3, early college director project director, said the goal of the project is to give district students more opportunities for dual enrollment. He said it has been found that high school students involved in college-level work are kept more focused and enthusiastic.

Mr. Morton said the programs in the district to collaborate with colleges are free to urban districts like Bridgeport.

Mr. Weldon arrived at the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic said he understood the spirit of what Mr. Bradley proposed. He said he grew up in the Bronx and never thought of college as an option because he did not have people around him that went to college. He said often people don't learn what they are best suited for until much later in life. He noted he went to college about ten to fifteen years after leaving high school.

Mr. Walker said he agreed with Mr. Sokolovic, but said he objected to the proposal put forward because it called for a mandate. He said students needed more contact with guidance counselors and more counselors needed to be hired.

Mr. Walker said he did not have access to a guidance counselor as a high school student. He said the district could not mandate students to take college preparatory courses and apply to college. He said there would be pushback from students as well.

Mr. Morton said there were tools in the district to help students find out what their interests are and give them a career pathway to start on. He said the district uses



Naviance software for college and career readiness in about fifteen schools. He said the software has even a greater reach than a school counselor.

Mr. Weldon said it could be required that students at least be shown how to go about the process of going to college. Mr. Walker noted the state now mandates the SAT for high school students.

Mr. Walker said he wanted to see energies directed to another place, not where the district will be misdirected.

Ms. Pereira said the district is severely understaffed in guidance. She said the national recommendation is a counselor for every 250 students, while the district has one for every 350 students. She said the district had lots of opportunities for non-college-bound students such as BMA, culinary arts at Harding, and the future advanced manufacturing program at Bassick. She said she agreed with providing students more information about college opportunities, but did not believe in Capstone projects and testing requirements to graduate.

Ms. Pereira said when she was in high school she was told about college opportunities, but just made her own decision to enter the workforce. She said she was totally opposed to Mr. Bradley's proposal.

Mr. Morton said there is a college and career readiness course currently being offered at Central and Harding, which involves exposure to college and the use of Naviance. He said completing the course provides credit towards graduation. He said Bassick will also offer the course next year. Assistant Superintendent Dr. Christiana Otuwa said



Fairchild Wheeler and BMA are not offering the course because they are magnet schools with a pathway.

Mr. Morton said the Naviance software costs about \$2.50 per student. Middle schools pay for it out of their school budgets.

Ms. Pereira asked the administrators present if any agree that we should require all our students to apply to colleges and universities in order to graduate. No one present indicated so.

Mr. Walker said our students are individuals with individual interests and needs who don't always fit into a mandated program. He said he would report to the board about the college and career readiness course. He said he believed the district had a committed staff from the superintendent down to the first-year teacher in classrooms.

The next item was on the RFP for expelled students.

Mark Anastasi from the city attorney's office was present.

Mr. Walker said the committee wanted to make sure the students in the expelled program were looked after as if they were in the regular school program.

Atty. Anastasi said his involvement had been somewhat limited. Atty. Ron Pacacha, who worked on the matter, was a part-time contract employee and not available. Atty. Anastasi said he had met with staff and he had primarily looked at the issues around criminal backgrounds.

Mr. Walker said the committee looked at the vulnerability of the young people in the program because they were not the



average high school student. He said they may need additional protections. He said the committee started with the same criteria for a classroom teacher and then added additional language.

Mr. Walker said the committee was interested in hearing why some of the language was changed after the legal review.

Ms. Pereira said the committee had been working on this since late May of last year. She said the problem is that under state law when students are expelled, the students' records transfer to the off-site facility without a single board employee supervising them.

Atty. Anastasi said Atty. Pacacha was an expert in contracts, but not necessarily in screening and human resources. He said C.G.S 46a-79 and 46a-80 protect the interests of persons with criminal records. Ms. Pereira said hiring teachers is determined by state statute and the Connecticut Department of Education.

Mr. Walker noted the district had an incident involving a substitute teacher in the past.

Mr. Walker asked Atty. Anastasi if he would be willing to look at the RFP developed by the committee and then report back.

Ms. Pereira said the history of the effort was that when the RFP went to the full board there were two board members who had a lot of questions about the language about moral turpitude and similar issues. She said the committee did not insert that language, but it came from the version Mr. Pires and the city attorney's office worked on.



Mr.. Weldon said he believed the superintendent found that the document submitted by Mr. Pires had not actually gone back to the city attorney's office. She then sent it to the city attorney's office for a final review.

Ms. Pereira said the entire RFP had been completely revised again, which the board did not request. The board members just wanted to ask the attorney questions at a special meeting. She said this is problematic because it is not the document the board has been working off of.

Ms. Pereira said she had issues around criminal backgrounds on the new version labeled 1/3/19.

Atty. Anastasi said screening is a way of obtaining information; hiring decisions are the process that uses that information. He said the RFP did not seem to talk about how the hiring decisions are going to be made.

Atty. Anastasi said the language used by Atty. Pacacha is typical language that is used to make sure nobody in the company has done something nefarious that reflects on the business side of it.

Mr. Walker said the committee needed someone to help write the RFP to put requirements on the company and requirements on who the company can employ to render the services.

Atty. Anastasi said there should probably be a section about the officers, directors and employees of the entity and in order to be a responsible, responsive bidder they can't have had any criminal history that relates to the business stuff.



Mr. Walker said the committee wanted language for employees that looked back five years after the conclusion of any probation. Atty. Anastasi said he did not believe there could be a hard and fast rule because the state statute said you have to consider the nature of the crime and the relationship to the time.

Mr. Walker said he was all for a second-chance society, but it doesn't mean that you get to work with certain protected classes. Atty. Anastasi said the city had faced similar issues in its hiring.

Atty. Anastasi said he did not know off the top of his head whether employers can adopt objective criteria like a five-year look-forward provision as opposed to having to analyze each and every applicant on the basis of the particulars associated with them.

Ms. Pereira said the sexual type offenses in the draft of the RFP would preclude a person from being hired by the district. She said the language comes from the state Department of Education standards.

Ms. Pereira said there was someone who really wanted to bid on this who has pled guilty to nine charges of harassment in the second degree. Mr. Walker said he did not want to get into a discussion of that.

Atty. Anastasi said the screening criteria should be separate from the hiring criteria.

Mr. Walker asked if Atty. Anastasi could rewrite the RFP for the committee. Atty. Anastasi said he could do so by next month's meeting. Mr. Walker said he thought Atty. Anastasi



understood the committee's wishes to protect this vulnerable population.

Atty. Anastasi said the five-year look-back might not pick up activity by immigrants in another country. Ms. Pereira said that is why the board limited some hires to those who have been in the country for at least a year.

Atty. Anastasi said the complication was trying to satisfy multiple masters – most importantly, the students, but also state and federal rules.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod