

Tuesday, December 18, 2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held December 18, 2018, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. Present were members Chair Ben Walker, Maria Pereira, and Joseph Sokolovic.

Ms. Pereira moved approval of the minutes of the November 20, 2018, meeting with edits. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic. Corrections were noted. The motion was unanimously approved.

Veronica Lenzen reported on special education complaints. She said the complaint at Park City Magnet described last month has been responded to by the district and the case has been closed by the state. She said there are no further complaints pending, outstanding, discussed or brought to the district's attention.

Mr. Walker said the special education report has been a standing item on the committee's agenda. He said special education has been coming out of disarray under the leadership of Mr. DiDonato. He said we were now seeing the benefits of the work of Mr. DiDonato and his staff, which includes training of principals.

Ms. Lenzen said she was proposing starting in January there be updates on reorganization in the office of specialized instruction and out-of-district placements and plans in that area.

Mr. Walker said if students can be brought back to the Bridgeport from out-of-district placements a tremendous amount of money could be saved. He added he was in support of anything that would help students with special needs.

The next item was on a parent concern from Betty Lizardo regarding bus transportation. Mr. Walker said students with special needs are near and dear to his heart.

Raul Laffitte, director of transportation, was present. Ms. Pereira said the issue was the special education students are only able to be picked up and dropped off at their homes, but Ms. Lizardo delivers her child to daycare because she has to be at work early in the morning and Ms. Lizardo is requesting the pickup and drop-off be at the daycare site.

Ms. Lizardo said the site is an in-home, licensed daycare. She said she didn't have this problem last year. She said her other three children walk to the bus stop, but her son has special needs. In response to a question, she said the daycare site is about three or four blocks from her home.

Ms. Lizardo said We Transport had been giving her issues and Mr. Andrew yelled at her at one point. She said her son reported her driver was being nasty towards him. She said she has had to pay someone to stay at her house in the morning for pickups.

Mr. Laffitte said he always tries to follow the policy of the board. When it was learned the child was being transported to a babysitter it was stopped. He said the issues with transporting to babysitter include liability concerns and the efficient routing of buses. He added drivers are paid for extra

stops according to the agreement with the bargaining unit. He noted there was one occasion in the last 24 years where an exception was made when Paul Ganim went in front of the board and the board voted 4 to 3 to have his child picked up at his door.

In response to a question, Mr. Laffitte said he did not know why the pickup at the daycare was authorized last year, but he could not approve it. The only one that can approve such a pickup is the board.

Mr. Walker said he believed the policy was written as a blanket policy to protect against all instances. He noted there was a provision that indicates the board may grant exceptions when there are hazardous conditions based upon reasonable judgment. He said he would be in favor of the full board granting this exception.

Ms. Pereira suggested the board's counsel draft a letter of release to be signed by the parent in exchange for drop-offs at the babysitter's location.

Mr. Laffitte said special needs children have to have an adult at the bus stop. Ms. Lizardo said the children had been at the same daycare provider for four years, so it would not likely change. Mr. Laffitte asked that Ms. Lizardo provide a copy of the daycare provider's license.

Ms. Lenzen said the student's IEP indicates that he gets special transportation which is provided by the board because he is in an out-of-district placement. Mr. Laffitte said all the students on his bus were ACES students.

Ms. Pereira said the release that Ms. Lizardo would sign would preclude her from being able to sue the board. Ms. Lizard said she understood.

Ms. Pereira said Ms. Lizardo would have to be patient because the board would not meet again until January 14th and the motion would have to pass by two-thirds because it would be a suspension of a rule.

Ms. Pereira moved that *“we recommend to the full board that we suspend transport rule number 1, second paragraph, under “Reside,” and allow this child to be picked up and dropped off from mom’s daycare center and that we request the superintendent contact Berchem & Moses to draft a release for the parent holding the board harmless from anything that might occur based on her request to have her child picked up and dropped off from her daycare provider of choice.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Walker said the next item was a presentation from the Justice Education Center requested by Dr. Johnson.

Barbara Mazzonna, education consultant for the Justice Education Center, said the center has been involved in providing technical education to urban youths since 2014 in New Haven. She said the effort was funded through the technical high schools and the federal government.

Ms. Mazzonna said in 2015 an after-school program began at Bullard Havens, which included the district’s Career & Craftsmanship School. The funding source was federal funding and The WorkPlace’s federal grant. In 2017, there was a collaboration on a construction program with the New England Laborers at Hillhouse High School in New Haven.

Ms. Mazzonna said this year the focus continues on students at Bassick High. The Laborers' Union is giving a comprehensive curriculum to nine students. A culinary arts program is also offered. The WorkPlace funds both programs. Students receive ten credits towards graduation for completing their coursework.

Ms. Mazzonna said every student in the program is sponsored by The WorkPlace and they must meet the federal standards of the grant, including financial qualifications and a second barrier such as parenting, an IEP or being judicially involved. So the program is not open to every Bassick student. She added students are eligible for paid internships and summer employment.

Ms. Mazzonna said there were six students in the culinary program, with another nine for the second part of the year. She said the current grant covers next school year as well.

Mr. Walker said the Safe Serve certification the culinary students receive would permit them to work in a restaurant kitchen.

Ms. Mazzonna said she had 35 years of experience in the Connecticut technical high schools system. She noted that Principal Raiola at Bassick had been very supportive.

Michael Traficante, director of governmental affairs for the New England Laborers' Union, said the program was fully accredited in Massachusetts and Rhode Island before it was brought to Connecticut. He said the program is aimed at providing the students with a good career, not just a job. He noted the population in the construction industry was aging and graying, so new workers are needed. He said students

who complete the program are sent to training academies for apprentices.

Mr. Walker said he was happy to see this kind of an opportunity for students. He noted his father got into a similar program which led to a career path.

Mr. Traficante urged the board members visit Bassick or the program at Hillhouse. In response to a question, he said the hourly rate for a laborer is about \$19 an hour. He noted the students are explained the benefits of union employment, including two pensions and full benefits. Mr. Sokolovic said he worked in a construction trade in New York City.

Mr. Traficante said there was a huge shortage of apprentices, especially in the Northeast. Mr. Walker described a local young man he met as an apprentice who now owns a brake service establishment.

Ms. Mazzonna said she would like to expand the partnership in the new Bassick.

In response to a question, Ms. Mazzonna said she has set up after-school programming throughout the state for students who were unable to get into technical high schools. She said the expansion to Bridgeport occurred after a conversation with Superintendent Rabinowitz in collaboration with the Justice Education Center.

Ms. Mazzonna said another representative present, Lauren Costello, was supervisor of the career corridor at Bassick for the Justice Education Center.

The next agenda item was on the ABCD enrollment hierarchy.

Assistant Superintendent Janet Brown-Clayton said Mr. Young was not present because he was in Hartford all day at the state Department of Education. The representative of ABCD was also not available.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said the documents were submitted by Ms. Vidal, but when she discovered some edits had not been made she made additional changes.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said she planned to make the corrections in red immediately after the meeting and send the document to the committee electronically.

Ms. Pereira said she wanted Ms. Brown-Clayton to know we are getting frustrated. She said the minutes indicated that Mr. Walker asked the staff to return at the next meeting with a completed policy. She said her comments indicated she wanted the document provided to the committee well in advance of the meeting.

Ms. Pereira asked, since the policy had been under review since Harding opened, how does this happen and who is responsible for this.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said it was corrected by Ms. Vidal and sent to herself. She said she believed the document was corrected when she received it Monday, but in the process of review she saw some changes that were needed. She said the draft was reviewed by Mr. Young.

Mr. Walker said he didn't see any problem with items 1, 2, 3 and 4 concerning the priorities.

Ms. Pereira noted she was not supporting the two positions for staff members over people in the community due to the absence of NYAEC-accredited preschools in the area. Mr. Walker said he didn't think it was necessarily the role of the Bridgeport Public Schools to provide that for the community. Ms. Pereira said she would take the matter to the full board, particularly since most of the district's teachers don't live in Bridgeport.

Ms. Pereira noted there were spacing issues on page 2. She said the school should be referred to as "Warren Harding High School" not "Harding" in the written policy.

Ms. Pereira said the provision on eligibility allowing for children up to age two seemed in conflict with the discussion at the committee indicating students could be taken up until age three.

Dr. Melissa Jenkins said she believed once a child is approximately two years and nine months or two years and ten months old they are eligible for preschool, which would not be at the Harding site.

Dr. Jenkins said she would need to check on the exact age at which children are eligible for preschool.

Ms. Pereira said the primary purpose of the program is so public school students who are parents do not drop out. She said everything else in secondary.

Mr. Walker said the hierarchy was not addressed in the document.

Ms. Pereira noted the language about strongly encouraging a grade of C was updated in the document.



Ms. Pereira said she objected to the student parents being sent to another ABCD program as proposed at the previous meeting to create an opening for a newly entering child of a staff member or community member.

Mr. Walker said he believed the entrance hierarchy was students, then staff, and then community, and the bumping should be in the reverse order.

Ms. Pereira said she did not understand why this was not addressed in the document after we spent so much time talking about it.

Ms. Pereira said ABCD should not be listed in the policy, with the exception of the agreement between BPS and ABCD, because they may not always be the provider.

Ms. Pereira emphasized the official name, Warren Harding High School, should be used.

Ms. Pereira said she was frustrated. She noted children have been in the day-care center since September, but board policy had not been created.

Mr. Walker said the policy should say in the event that all the slots are taken and not all of the enrollees are children of school-age parents, and an additional school-age parent's child needs to be enrolled, they will be bumped in under the criteria in the policy. He said it should not necessarily be last in, first out. He said children of staff or community members could be first in, last out.

Mr. Walker said he believed the district had notice of children being born to district students three to six months ahead of

time, which will provide ample time for notice to any community member or staff member whose child has to be bumped.

Ms. Pereira said the reference on page 1 to maintaining a child's continuity in education is contrary to what the committee requested.

In response to a question, Ms. Brown-Clayton said Harding was under her jurisdiction, and Mr. Young had worked with Ms. Vidal on the document.

Ms. .Pereira said there needed to be a policy number on the document before it goes to the board.

Ms. Pereira said there used to be a preschool site at Harding and there might be something on the books already in the policy. Dr. Jenkins said she would look through the 5000 series.

Dr. Jenkins said there was a reference to students seeking employment in the policy. She asked what would be the policy if the students were in adult education at night.

Ms. Pereira said night school students might be working during the day to provide for the child. Dr. Jenkins said she had recently been involved with the maternal infant child care homes visiting program. Ms. Pereira suggested the reference be to school-aged parents who are not attending school or the adult education program.

Ms. Pereira said she believed the committee received information that there's never been over 24 young parents just at Harding, so students from another school should not be an issue. She said we may want to prioritize parents who

attend traditional education over those in adult education. She suggested: "School-aged parents who are attending our traditional school day programs will have priority over school-age parents attending the adult education program."

Ms. Pereira said the point about adult education was an excellent point and we should be supporting them in their education. She said the reference to school-age would preclude a student who was 24 or 28 years old and going back to get their diploma. She said Mr. Young should have brought this point up.

Ms. Pereira suggested the reference in the document be to Warren G. Harding High School.

Mr. Walker summarized the priorities as school-age parents attending regular school programs; second, school-age parents attending adult education; third, two Harding staff members.

Mr. Walker said if the committee could get the revised document three or four days prior to the next meeting it would benefit everyone.

Ms. Brown-Clayton said she would like to have a meeting with all of the parties before submitting the next version to the Teaching & Learning Committee.

In response to a question, Ms. Pereira said the policy should cover anyone enrolled in school, so they could be as old as 21.

Ms. Pereira said she believed the title of the agreement should just be "Attendance Agreement," without reference to the year.

Mr. Sokolovic left the meeting.

Ms. Pereira asked that if Dr. Jenkins finds policy in the 5000 series to send it to the committee immediately.

Brianne Bresky, history teacher at Bridgeport Military Academy, was present to discuss a proposed international field trip. She said the trip had been planned since last year. She said a lot of the students in the school have never been out of the country before. She said Italy, Rome and Florence were chosen because of interdisciplinary opportunities in terms of history, art, and architecture.

Mr. Walker said he had taken students to Rome and Florence and been on a number of student trips internationally. Ms. Bresky said the tour company is Education First and she provided background on the company. Students will create a project that they learn about over the course of the trip and they can earn one semester of high school credit.

Mr. Walker said he would like to see the information packet and further research the company.

In response to a question, Ms. Bresky said 14 students would be going, with the cost being \$3,335 each (including airfare), with a \$200 discount for those who signed up early. She said the company provides a donation page to each student to solicit money to reduce the cost.

Ms. Bresky said the trip will not take place during April break. When the trip was first planned, the dates did fall in April break, but the dates changed. She said this year's break is Holy Week, which would not be a good week for the trip. She

said the students will be out for five school days. She said she would chaperone the trip along with an art teacher.

Ms. Pereira noted the district would have to provide substitute coverage for the classes.

Mr. Walker said that on every international trip he took the students received a very rich educational experience that gave them a different perspective on the world and themselves.

Ms. Bresky described the insurance that would be in place for the trip, including if there are unforeseen circumstances. She said she would provide further information about the trip insurance policies.

Ms. Bresky said all the students have passports. Mr. Walker urged she check the passports, particularly if they are within six months of the expiration date, as well as having the chaperones retain possession of the passports during the trip.

In response to a question, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Christiana Otuwa said she will make Dr. Johnson aware the trip will be taking place during a school week and let Ms. Siegel know about the need for substitute coverage.

Mr. Walker suggested the students be informed that are they subject to the school's disciplinary policies while on the trip because they are technically in school 24 hours a day. Ms. Bresky said the students have been so informed.

Ms. Pereira moved that Dr. Otuwa send an e-mail to Dr. Johnson, Marlene Siegel, Ms. Soares, Ms. Bresky and Mr. Walker that you're letting them know the Teaching &

Learning Committee wanted to make sure that you're aware that this is planned and that our children will be out of school for five full days, and the school district will have to pay for two substitutes for five consecutive days. (No action was taken on the motion.)

Ms. Bresky said she was using the precedent of Fairchild Wheeler's trip to Brazil when she proposed the trip be held over a school week.

Mr. Walker suggested the students read Dante's *Inferno* before the trip.

Dr. Otuwa said she will speak with Ms. Soares tomorrow to see if she can cover the two teachers. Ms. Bresky said our teachers are very used to covering for each other.

In response to a question, Ms. Bresky said she believed all 14 students were Bridgeport residents. Ms. Bresky said, in regards to the expense, that students have the ability to make payments of about \$200 a month and she was able to obtain some Donors' Choose funding for a visit to the Roman Catacombs. She said a few hundred dollars had to be raised to cover tips to the guides.

Mr. Walker said Ms. Bresky had done an excellent job of preparing this and answering the questions.

Mr. Walker said he would bring this to the full board under his committee report.

Ms. Pereira noted the board gave \$3,000 to a football team that had nothing to do with the Bridgeport Public Schools, while Bassick High's proposed honor society and Ms.

Graham's music events have to be funded through fundraisers.

Ms. Bresky said the meeting had been very educational for her.

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

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

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod