

Wednesday, April 24, 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April 24, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic, LaMar Kennedy, and Joseph Lombard. Board member Maria Pereira was present.

Mr. Lombard moved to approve the committee's minutes of April 11, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic. Corrections were noted. The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was an update on science programming. Angela Bhushan, director of science, and Assistant Superintendent Dr. Christiana Otuwa were present.

Dr. Otuwa noted she was not informed of the meeting until Monday. Ms. Bhushan said the materials she was providing were in the last committee packet.

Ms. Bhushan this year's Next Generation Science Standard(NGSS) testing starts in May. She said the goals were to introduce new methods of instructional strategy which include phenomenon, a driving question and a lesson sequence. She said she strongly pushed collaboration among teachers.

Ms. Bhushan said she met with Grade K to 5 teachers early in the school year to launch the draft curriculum, which incorporated NGSS, and based on recommendations of teachers it was tweaked.

Ms. Bhushan said Grades 6-8 use a book from iQuest. She said there was been great feedback from use of the book in classes.

Ms. Bhushan said Grades 9 to 12 cover physical science, biology, environmental science, chemistry and physics.

Ms. Bhushan said the curriculum was in draft format because she did not know what testing would look like. The draft allows teachers to tweak it after use in classrooms.

Ms. Bhushan said assessments began in November and also took place in February and March. Testing has moved away from multiple choice questions to answering questions based on stimulus.

Ms. Bhushan said the testing for Grades 5 to 8 will take place on May 6th to May 10th; and for Grade 11 from May 20th to May 24th. She said the tests are not timed, but generally take about 90 minutes to complete.

The tests follow the format of the SBAC, which is also an untimed test.

Ms. Bhushan demonstrated a lesson involving a phenomenon.

Ms. Bhushan said one document demonstrated her goals for 2020, which include changing the curriculum draft into a full NGSS-aligned science curriculum. She said she wanted to

see assessments based on what the teachers are teaching with an emphasis on phenomenon-based learning and problems.

In response to a question, Ms. Bhushan said the teachers love the new textbook. She said the students have online access to the textbook. She said Blackham School purchased some of the kits to be used with books.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested a comparison going forward of the assessment scores between schools with kits and those without kits. He said he definitely would like to see the kits purchased. Ms. Bhushan said another option is to buy only the non-consumable kits.

Ms. Pereira said she recommended last year that teachers who needed kits start a Donors Choose page. She noted that every Donors Choose project in the district was funded this year. Ms. Bhushan said about four of the teachers did create Donors Choose pages. She said she brings it up at every meeting with teachers. Dr. Otuwa said she would reinforce that message because it has to come from the principals. Mr. Kennedy suggested doing it at professional development,

Ms. Pereira said it was not okay that the teachers did not create Donors Choose pages because a billionaire funded all the requests.

In response to a question, Ms. Bhushan described the K-5 textbook, *Science Fusion*. She said there was a fear of science in teachers at that level. Mr. Sokolovic said the jobs of the future will be in the STEM fields.

Mr. Lombard said he believed the phenomenon approach would help a teacher otherwise intimidated by the facts of science because it involves exploration.

In response to a question, Dr. Otuwa said support for teachers was needed and she expected Ms. Bhushan to further develop the process this summer.

In response to a question, Ms. Bhushan said the K to 5 textbooks are not fully aligned to NGSS. She said the curriculum was still being developed because the questions have been studied this year and there is a learning curve involved.

Mr. Kennedy said it looked like a good job was done developing the curriculum, but he could not speak to implementation and adoption. Ms. Pereira said she was troubled because it was four years later. Ms. Bhushan said the K to 5 curriculum needed to be fleshed out further.

Mr. Lombard said it's a common misconception that standards are the curriculum. He said curriculum had to be created around standards, and that's what is happening here.

Ms. Bhushan noted in 2017-18 the district was still using CMT and CAPT testing. She said last year the testing was considered low stakes, with this year "counting."

Mr. Sokolovic said he could speak to a 5th grade class and they are on pace with the draft curriculum.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed there could be more promotion of the science department and science. He said science needed to be marketed like arts and sports. He said

he almost forgot about the science fair and it could have been marketed better. Ms. Bhushan said it did need to be put more to the forefront.

Mr. Sokolovic said the science fair was basically the championships for the students, but it wasn't celebrated as much as the basketball players. He said more people would be successful in life feeding their families through STEM than through music or sports.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested STEM could be implemented across the curriculum with collaboration with all the directors as was done with reading. He said more scientists could have been highlighted in Black History Month. He said it wouldn't cost anything to have more Lewis Latimers and less Jackie Robinsons.

The next agenda item was incorporating a gardening program into the science curriculum.

Ms. Bhushan said the gardens were discussed at the Facilities Committee meeting. The principals were given four options, including school leadership, community gardens, and aquaponics. She said an updated chart has been provided. Ms. Pereira thanked Ms. Bhushan for adding the revision date to the document.

In response to a question, Dr. Otuwa said the culinary person at Bassick will be hired in the summer. Ms. Pereira said that person would likely be responsible for the garden.

Ms. Pereira said she found it disturbing that some of the schools in the most impoverished area are not moving forward with gardens. She said students at those schools could really benefit.

Dr. Otuwa noted the gardens were a different initiative than the science curriculum. She said the idea is to get the schools to own the gardens.

In response to a question, Ms. Bhushan said NGSS incorporated earth science, but gardens do not directly fit in. She said it might fit under characteristics of living things in 1st Grade.

Cristina Sandolo of Green Village Initiative said the lesson plans developed with Sacred Heart University have Next Gen standards right in the lesson plans for K to 6. She said there was a sense that sixth grade might be the sweet spot. She suggested picking a grade to see if gardening could be implemented into the curriculum. Ms. Bhushan said she wasn't sure about limiting it to a grade because it should be available for everyone.

Ms. Sandolo said perhaps Sacred Heart could assist with writing the curriculum. Ms. Bhushan said she would welcome help, but would not do curriculum without teacher input.

Mr. Lombard said it sounded like there was not a direct connect between the gardens and the curriculum. Ms. Bhushan said she did not believe it could be housed in the science curriculum, so it would have to be integrated across the disciplines.

Ms. Pereira suggested a model where the community growers would operate a garden and the school would receive a parentage of the sales. Ms. Sandolo said she didn't know if a farmer would be interested in such an arrangement because profit margins are not high. Ms. Pereira said this would incentivize principals and schools to

participate. She said she was discouraged about the schools not participating in gardening.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested having a gardening club in schools. Ms. Pereira said she agreed the best way to go was through a club.

Ms. Bhushan said she had talked to the Lighthouse Program about curriculum and books. Mr. Sokolovic said if Lighthouse was involved that would get those schools involved with the gardens in the summer.

Ms. Pereira said the policy about students earning extra credit for community service currently is bad because it only includes the high school level and might not cover the gardening.

Robert Halstead said Harding's garden was about a thousand square feet with twelve inches of new topsoil in raised beds. He said there is a collaboration with the culinary program and volunteers. It is currently planted with cold weather crops. He said it would work because it is large; while the other school gardens may be too small to be cost-effective.

Ms. Pereira said credit should only be given to students who participate in the gardening over the summer.

Ms. Pereira said a policy was needed to incentivize elementary, middle and high school students to be engaged in a gardening club year round. She offered to meet with someone to help write the policy.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was not sure who could take the lead on the effort since the administrative staff had been

devastated by budget cuts. Dr. Otuwa said the work done so far had been very time-consuming and she had to get involved to assist Ms. Bhushan. Mr. Sokolovic said the work done by Ms. Bhushan took away time she could have used for science curriculum.

Mr. Lombard suggested looking at the goals of the proposal. He said if it is a club there is not a connection to credit. If it is community service, then credit might be available.

Ms. Pereira said the goal is to get children off technology and outdoors, learning how to grow their own food. She said this was particularly important in impoverished communities.

In response to a question, Ms. Sandolo said the best gardens in the district were probably Read, Beardsley, Hallen, Discovery, Waltersville and Harding. Mr. Halstead added Black Rock as well.

Ms. Pereira said she would ask Dr. Johnson for permission to meet with Ms. Sandolo and Mr. Halstead and the persons supervising those gardens at the schools with the best programs and brainstorm about the best way to incentivize participation in gardening clubs, including over the summer. Ms. Pereira said the group could come up with a draft policy to present to the committee.

Ms. Bhushan said on April 9th the garden at Harding was successfully started. She said today Classical Magnet is receiving an aeroponics tower where things will be grown in an 8th grade classroom.

Mr. Sokolovic said there is a lack of personnel and funding to carry out making gardening part of the curriculum.



The next agenda item was on reverse suspensions. Dr. Otuwa said she met on March 20th with principals and teachers. She said she shared a YouTube video about the concept. She said she met with parents and students on March 21st.

Dr. Otuwa said the biggest concerns of teachers and principals were student safety and the vetting of parents who would be present with students. Another issue is protecting student privacy. She said a BEA representative was present and it would have to be presented to the BEA for further discussion.

Dr. Otuwa said parents and students were in favor of the idea, but the parents raised concern about the vetting process of parents. She said students had a mixed reaction to what they heard.

Mr. Sokolovic said parents are already able to volunteer in classrooms without being vetted and they do not have to show ID to get in the school. He said an undocumented parent would be restricted if this was not the case. He said he understood teachers do not want an extra set of eyes in their classroom. He said he was undecided on the issue, but that should not be the determining factor.

Mr. Kennedy said parents come into schools for meetings, but don't normally go into a school and follow a child for seven periods. He said it would open up a huge legal gray area. He said he personally welcomes parents to his classroom, but all teachers do not feel that way. He added the child would not act the same way they usually do because their parent is present.

Ms. Pereira said reverse suspensions were started in West Virginia and are being looked at in Maine. She said you can never tell a parent they cannot be present with their child in a school under Connecticut state law. She said the intent is to have children with disciplinary issues be mortified at the prospect of their parent following them around for a whole day. She said there was great success in West Virginia with the policy. She said parents who go into a classroom would develop a great appreciation for what a teacher goes through in teaching. She said there were no privacy issues because what goes on in a classroom is not private.

Ms. Pereira said no parent would be mandated to participate in reverse suspensions. She added it would cost nothing to implement the policy and would help increase student attendance and academic achievement, as well as lowering disciplinary issues.

Mr. Kennedy said the presence of parents could disrupt the learning process and create more challenges.

Dr. Otuwa said parents would have the right to say anything about what they observed in the school, including about other children. Ms. Pereira said that would not be a violation of a law. Mr. Kennedy said a parent could report on social media about what they observed in a classroom. He said he saw the proposals as a distraction.

Mr. Sokolovic said a parent who has to take time off from work for their child's behavior would be more likely to correct the behavior in the future. He said some racial groups have higher rates of suspension and when students are out of the classroom is time they aren't learning.

Ms. Pereira said the board could decide what sort of reduction to a student's suspension would occur if a parent follow their child in school for a day.

In response to a question, Dr. Otuwa said she did not include any social workers or psychologists in the discussion. She said the principals and teachers suggested more social workers and psychologists to support students and reduce suspensions. She said there were no teachers or principals who were supportive of the proposal.

Ms. Pereira suggested the proposal be piloted at a school with a principal open to the idea next year for the first quarter. Mr. Sokolovic said he had a school in mind where it could be piloted.

Dr. Otuwa noted the policy would have to be written into the Code of Conduct.

Ms. Pereira said she believed Dr. Otuwa was not communicating the policy correctly to principals and teachers. Mr. Kennedy said the biggest issue was the level of comfort with persons being a classroom for a full day with their child. Ms. Pereira said parents are currently allowed to shadow their children throughout the day.

Mr. Sokolovic said the discussion would be resumed at the next meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was in favor of the pilot program. Mr. Lombard said he was not in favor of that yet.

Dr. Otuwa said she wanted to look at the policies about parents entering the school.

There was a discussion of whether or not parents have to be vetted to come into schools.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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