

Tuesday, May 15, 2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 15, 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 and Joseph Sokolovic. Member Maria Pereira arrived subsequently as noted.

Mr. Sokolovic moved approval of the committee's minutes of April 15, 2018. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

John DiDonato, chief of specialized instructional reform, said the current single complaint that is outstanding is against the New Beginnings Charter School and the district. He said the state has informed us that it is the responsibility of the charter school to resolve it. There continues to be a teacher vacancy. A summer program has been discussed with the charter school to provide compensatory education for students who have not received services this year.

Mr. DiDonato said he has re-notified the parents of their right to enroll their students in the district and receive special education services.

Mr. DiDonato said this is the time of year that projections are looked at for next year. After preliminary reorganization work, it is believed there will be a need to open four additional self-contained classes based on IEP meetings during the annual review period. It is believed there will be excess resource teachers to fill these classes. If everything stays the same, any growth will be maintained without additional resources.

Mr. DiDonato said he believed in many ways the SOAR classes in place are not in the interests of students. He said he was uncertain if we have the capacity to address reorganization of those classes. He said there needs to be a recognition that if we identify kids that need

more services, we have to get a way to give them more or down the road it is going to become more expensive. He said from his reading on brain science young people develop habitual patterns of behavior and there is a need to intervene with supports.

Mr. Walker said he hoped he could convey this to the rest of the board in the way Mr. DiDonato has touched the committee and informed us of the need for early interventions.

Ms. Pereira arrived at the meeting.

Mr. Walker said he can only imagine the fear and anxiety a parent has when they deal with special education for young children.

Mr. DiDonato said unfortunately the capacity of the district to deal with parents who are overwhelmed leads to situations that become contentious.

Mr. Walker said he took four or five child and adolescent psychology courses to get his degree, yet he feels totally unarmed when dealing with children with special needs.

In response to a question, Mr. DiDonato said the new classes would probably be needed in Grades 3 to 5. He said the classes will probably consist of students who are emotionally disabled or are on the autism spectrum. They typically need speech and language services.

Mr. DiDonato said if the students are not able to communicate, they begin to have behavior management issues. He described a successful program at Johnson School. He said the district knows what to do; it is a question of the resources.

Ms. Pereira said Ms. Siegel made a recommendation for a massive cut to the Bridgeport Learning Center, which she said she would not support. She said Mr. Walker defended it beautifully. Ms. Pereira said she called Mr. DiDonato, with the superintendent's permission, who informed her that he did not know about the proposal. Ms. Pereira said Mr. DiDonato developed and created the program and is in charge of it.

Mr. DiDonato said in some quarters in the district there is a belief that every problem has a fiscal solution and there is a built-in prejudice against things you can call expensive. He said decisions like that will continue to cause special education to be a drain and a target by those quarters in the district for the failure of special education.

Mr. Walker said this is one of the reasons he has Mr. DiDonato on every agenda. He said he speaks on Mr. DiDonato's behalf at every board meeting.

Mr. DiDonato said the initial savings from creating an in-district program is not a first or second year thing. He said he told Mr. Bradley that the SOAR program in reality is not saving money because it is not working.

Mr. DiDonato said the Bridgeport Learning Center(BLC) is very expensive because it is staff-rich. Mr. Walker said it is less expensive than the alternative, which is sending students out of the district.

Mr. DiDonato said there was a SOAR class established at Columbus School for Grades 3 and 4. The class included three students probably awaiting placement for home services and other students who had behavioral issues. The class had four different teachers. One child had severe behavioral problems and was going to class in his own car for \$300 a day. There were revolving teachers and paraprofessionals in the class. At one point, the students had to be distributed into general education classes, disrupting the school. Mr. DiDonato said the class was moved to Bridgeport Learning Center with the agreement of the parents, with a consistent teacher and consistent paraprofessionals, in a contained environment. He said the BLC can be our laboratory to do things on behalf of kids.

The next item was on the Bassick advanced manufacturing magnet pathway. Mr. Walker noted the matter was also considered at the Students & Families committee.

Asst. Superintendent Dr. Christina Otuwa said we want the program to be a magnet. It will consist of pathways in advanced manufacturing

and automotive; construction technology and culinary and medical and health careers.

Dr. Otuwa said Mr. Wallack told her the Bassick projects is envisioned as a rehabilitation of the buildings.

Dr. Carmen McPherson said there are Bassick students currently in the third year of the Housatonic Community College(HCC) dual enrollment advanced manufacturing program.

Dr. McPherson said when the freshmen students enter Bassick they will do core courses and a language, but will have the opportunity to sample the career pathways. The selection will be made at the end of the freshman year.

Dr. McPherson said the students in the advanced manufacturing classes leave Bassick in period five and go by bus to HCC. She said she would provide the amount of college credit the students receive to Mr. Walker. Mr. Walker said one negative is it takes students away from enrichments available at Bassick.

Mr. Walker said before the term college and career ready came about school was about producing good citizens literate enough to vote or serve on a jury and who would be productive in the workforce. Mr. Walker said you don't have to go to college to have a career.

Mr. Walker noted the automotive program had been in existence for a long time at Bassick. Dr. Otuwa said the program can be reorganized with the new pathway. Dr. McPherson said Mr. Blume had been with the automotive program for a long time and much equipment has been invested in it. Mr. Walker said now that he was retired he would like to tour the automotive shop at Bassick.

In response to a question, Dr. McPherson said Bassick has about a thousand students. She estimated there would be about two to three hundred students per pathway. She said she could provide more details going forward.

Mr. Sokolovic asked how the students would be selected if there is an excess of applicants.

Mr. Walker said students who choose a pathway should get priority for those classes over general education students. Dr. Otuwa said it is envisioned that students will be in one of the three pathways. Mr. Walker said he believed if a student did not choose one of the three pathways, there should be a fourth for students intending to go to college.

Mr. Sokolovic and Mr. Walker said further clarification was needed on the numbers of students that could be accommodated in the pathways.

In response to a question, Dr. McPherson said Bassick was probably currently underutilized capacity-wise. She said the old building was designed for a thousand students and it might have been as high as 1500 students in the past. Ms. Pereira said she believed there might have been 1200 students in 2009.

Mr. Sokolovic said he had concerns about every student having to choose one of the pathways, which could pigeonhole a student too early.

Dr. McPherson said the idea is to attract students to Bassick, but the concept still needed to be fine tuned. Dr. Otuwa said thought had not been given to students not in one of the pathways. She noted at Fairchild Wheeler everyone has a pathway.

Dr. McPherson said for the construction technology and culinary pathway course requests for seniors have been put in for next year, which are to be funded by the Justice Education Center. A cohort of students are attending a course at a downtown restaurant. In the fall, 12 seniors will participate in the culinary pathway offsite and 18 will participate in the construction pathway at Bassick.

Dr. McPherson noted there was an introduction to arts course in Grade 9 and music, art or ceramics in Grade 10. She said there is no reason those can't run through all four grade levels.

Mr. Walker said the construction pathway does not have dual enrollment. Dr. McPherson said the laborers' union is working with

the Justice Education Center on construction technology. PSEG has met with seniors and their goal is to offer some students work experience or internship over the summer, which will result in successful students being offered jobs.

Regarding the medical and health careers pathway, Dr. McPherson said there is a cohort of about 15 sophomore students in their second year at St. Vincent's Hospital. They attend St. Vincent's five days a week for basic medical career courses such as medical terminology. For this pathway, the students would take the core studies for graduation and also electives.

Dr. Otuwa said the three programs are currently being operated now in limited fashion but it is limited because of the space, equipment and resources.

Ms. Pereira noted that the Harding High nursing program was very successful in the past and she hoped that was still happening due to the proximity of the school to Bridgeport Hospital.

Ms. Pereira said it was better to go narrow and deep than shallow and wide. She said she's rather do three things very well than a lot of things not so well.

Dr. McPherson said she will look further at similar programs at Hillhouse and Wilbur Cross in New Haven.

Mr. Walker said he wanted to see a situation where a student who is not on one of the three pathways sees that they're on an alternative pathway to get them to what their needs are.

Dr. Otuwa said board approval would be needed to move the application forward to the state. The application is due sometime in early June according to Mr. Wallack.

Ms. Pereira said the city has already committed to bond for 20 percent of the Bassick project. She said the issue is now with the state at the Bond Commission.

Mr. Walker said there would probably be some questions at the Board of Education meeting about this. Ms. Pereira said some board members will not read the minutes, attend the committee meetings, and then be Monday morning quarterbacks. Mr. Walker said he believed the three committee members would vote in favor of what we have here.

Dr. Otuwa said more things have to be added to make the committee feel comfortable about approving it.

Mr. Walker said he could put the item on the Regular Meeting agenda for May 29th. He suggested the committee meet again on May 23rd to deal with this matter.

Mr. Walker urged Dr. Otuwa and Dr. McPherson be prepared to answer all questions at the board meeting on May 29th.

Ms. Pereira said it is required by state statute to present this to the School Governance Council(SGC). She said it would be important to tell the board the SGC has agreed to it. Dr. Otuwa said Vernon Thompson is the chair of the SGC. Ms. Pereira urged the student members of the SGC be involved.

Ms. Pereira noted if the application deadline was missed it would delay Bassick by a full year.

Ms. Pereira said years ago when Bassick went to a new configuration of principals it was done without the permission of the SGC and there was a major controversy.

Ms. Sokolovic said he got involved with an SGC just to block a school change.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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