

Tuesday, January 18, 2022

MINUTES OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held January 18, 2022, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Christine Baptiste-Perez, and Joe Lombard. Board members Erika Castillo and Albert Benejan joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Lombard moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of November 16, 2021. The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was a special education update. Dementred Young, director of social work and interim executive director of specialized instruction, was present.

Ms. Castillo joined the meeting.

Mr. Young said the numbers for special education students in charter schools have been updated. He said the overall count had decreased slightly from October to January.

Mr. Young said the total number of evaluations conducted in the school year is 544, of which 109 did not receive services.

Mr. Young's next slide displayed the current count of students with disabilities. The numbers included a demographic breakdown.

Mr. Young displayed a slide with a district snapshot on special education, including a racial breakdown.

Supt. Testani said as of January 1st the district was 30 percent African-American; 9.5 percent are white; and 56 percent Hispanic-Latino. He said the number of special education students in charter schools seems disproportionately high compared to the city. He said he has been speaking to the state Department of Education about this. He said the special education supervisor is monitoring the PPT process at the charter schools to be sure over-identification is not going on.

Mr. Benejan joined the meeting.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said among special education students who are coming back to the district from charter schools the largest trend is for behavioral issues such as emotional disturbance and ADHD. The superintendent said the counseling of students out of the charter schools occurs after October 1st, which is the date that funding is established for schools. He said it was easier for the charter schools to counsel students to return to the district than to deal with the behavioral issues.

Mr. Young then discussed out-of-district placements. There are five new placements since November 1. He also provided information on in-district self-contained classrooms.

Mr. Young said there will be IEP quality training with 30 slots allocated to train lead special education teachers. This will include training on the new state-sponsored IEP platform. Administrators are undergoing training on elements of an

IEP and data collection. He added there will be a special education audit of the entire district.

Supt. Testani said the finalized RFP will be going to the Contracts Committee soon on the special education audit. He said it has been quite a number of years since the department has been reviewed by an outside entity. He said in some cases there is a disconnect at the school level where IEP and service hours are not reflected out in data.

Mr. Young described some internal audits that are being carried out.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said there are currently no new state complaints. The superintendent said he gave a lot of credit to Mr. Young, who stepped into the role after Mr. Arnold's illness. He said there has been a real focus on trying to improve the delivery of services for kids.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the new state platform is designed to be a uniform IEP for oversight statewide. He said the large districts, including Bridgeport, have requested an additional year for the transition, but the request was denied.

In response to a question, the superintendent said because of collective bargaining there will be a posting and an application process for the 30 lead teachers, with the criteria being at least one in each building. It would be similar to the lead teacher program being used this year. He said the selections will be made by the principal with input from the special education supervisors.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said there would be data migration to the new state-mandated platform, and he will be working with data management on this.

The next agenda item was a pre-K report. Terese Maguire, director of early childhood education, was present.

The superintendent said it was great to have Ms. Maguire in the position and the director position back in the district. He said Ms. Maguire had jumped in and done an amazing job.

Ms. Maguire said there are currently 890 students total enrolled. Funding comes from the Smart Start (4 schools) and School Readiness (22 schools) grants. She said the current attendance rate is 85.97 percent. There are currently only five open seats in the district. She described the steps she takes to be proactive to fill seats.

Ms. Maguire said the website has been updated to provide more information for families regarding preschool enrollment. Flyers and Parent Square blasts are also used.

Ms. Maguire said the teaching staff is full, but there are concerns about paraprofessional staffing. The state requires twelve credits for the position, which some in the district lack. A waiver has been requested from the state.

The superintendent said the district is in the early process of developing a program for early childhood with Housatonic Community College, which will include contributions from federal funding.

Supt. Testani said the district's attendance approach and its supportive angle had really helped to improve attendance in preschool.

Ms. Maguire said preschool report cards have been updated to use the same format as K to 8 and are done in electronic format. She said there are two Read to Grow coordinators (at Marin and Bryant) that work with families. The new Footsteps to Brilliance and Clever Kids University apps have been launched. She described some of the features of the apps.

Ms. Maguire said the preschool family handbook is being updated to cover current practices. She added that four programs are currently undergoing national accreditation.

In response to a question, Ms. Maguire there are about ten paraprofessional slots being filled by temporary employees. The superintendent said he believed that the majority of paraprofessional employees were from Bridgeport.

In response to a question, Ms. Maguire described the case-by-case manner in which attendance is looked at. She said there was an attempt to shift the mindset of parents who view preschool as a type of babysitting as opposed to learning experiences and preparation for kindergarten.

Ms. Castillo suggested paraprofessionals could be recruited through early education programs at local universities.

In response to a question, Ms. Maguire said her communications are sent out in several different languages. The superintendent noted notices in Parent Square can be translated.

In response to a question, Ms. Maguire said the goal is to have the new family handbook out around the timeframe of the new application period in March.

In response to a question, Ms. Maguire said Beardsley has gone undergone NAYEC accreditation process and the decision is awaited. Park City Magnet, Dunbar, and Marin will be the next schools.

The next agenda item was on the Educators Rising program to include Bassick, Central and Harding.

Supt. Testani said he hoped to table the item because the academics office is gathering more information. He said Central was in the process of developing a similar program with Sacred Heart University, while UConn is in the process of offering three similar coursework options for students interested in the teaching profession. He said further data was needed on Educators Rising prior to full implementation.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she would like to see broad college opportunities available to our students so they are not limited to the college credit at just one university, which they may not want to attend. The superintendent said all the dual enrollment courses at district high schools are transferable to other colleges and universities.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she wanted to see equal access to programs for all students. The superintendent said the dual enrollment programs had existed for a long time in the district. He said previously the dual enrollment program was a failure when it was expanded in a large fashion by a prior superintendent. He said if students did not do well in a dual enrollment course it remains on their transcript. He said President Gliniecki of Housatonic Community College was very selective about which students would be accepted in the program, but it was still challenging for many students.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said while she was in New York she earned college credits while in high school through the City University of New York, but it was up to universities whether to accept the credits.

Ms. Castillo said the credits are widely accepted at universities. AP courses are also often eligible for college credit.

Mr. Lombard said some courses may not fall into a degree plan at some universities. He said he liked the idea of making all courses available to all students.

Mr. Sokolovic noted one of the board's student representatives expressed the desire to have the proposed program available at her school. He said we need to be an equity-driven board and district.

The superintendent said ECC (early college credit) courses are available at all high schools and there are specific pathways that have been established by some high schools. Harding has the CNA program; Bassick has advanced manufacturing and an auto program in partnership with Gateway Community College. He said teachers have to be identified who want to teach the courses.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the program has been approved by the board and other schools could always be added. He said data on enrollment and how many students stayed with it could be looked at after the first semester. He said teachers are not given anything extra to teach the course and it could not be guaranteed they would not leave the district at some point.

In response to a question, the superintendent said Central High has more AP courses than other high schools because of the magnet program. Students have to achieve a certain score on the AP exam to earn the college credit.

In response to a question, the superintendent said the first semester of the 2022-23 school year ends in January of 2023, at which time data on the course will be available. He noted there are 20 slots available in the course.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she believed all students should have equal access to college credits through AP classes regardless of what school they attend. Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to look at that through the Educational Diversity Committee this month.

Ms. Castillo said there is an extensive process involved to create a new program in higher education. She said new AP courses would have to be staffed. She said if there is interest in courses that is measured, it would be worthwhile to staff such courses. Supt. Testani said it comes down to the number of students in the course and the staff willing to commit. He said there would be a cost factor because AP are not going to be heavily requested in certain buildings.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said we won't know the level of interest until the students have access to the courses. She said students often need encouragement to try courses.

Mr. Lombard said in his work a lot of things are becoming universal regardless of location. He said remote learning offers some possibilities to expand courses. The superintendent said some opportunities may develop in 2022-23 once the state releases guidance on remote



learning. He said he believed remote options would be allowed to be used for cases like this.

Mr. Benejan suggested the committee receive a list of all AP and ECC courses by school. Mr. Sokolovic said he would look at that in the Educational Diversity Committee this month.

Mr. Lombard moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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