

Thursday, March 6, 2024

MINUTES OF THE INSTRUCTION AND SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held March 6, 2024, at City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:36 p.m. Present were members Chair Robert Traber and Albert Benejan Grajales. Board member Willie Medina was present. Member Andre Woodson* joined the meeting subsequently as indicated.

*remote participation

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of July 29, 2024. The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the code of conduct with regard to special education students. Mr. Traber said he skip over that item because Angel Resto asked him to put it on the agenda.

The next agenda item was a suspension report for elementary and high school, with race and special education. Mr. Traber said this was also requested by Mr. Resto.

The next agenda item was on the elimination of the position of executive director of school turnaround and referral to the full board.

Mr. Traber said he had asked that the item be tabled to this meeting because of concerns he wanted to discuss with the superintendent. He said he has met with the superintendent. Mr. Traber said he was not interested in referring this to the full board. He asked if anyone else wanted to make a motion.

The next agenda item was on the midyear assessment.

Assistant Superintendent Albert Sackey introduced Margaret Hughes, executive director of school turnaround. She described the interim assessment benchmark (IAB) and the smarter Balanced Assessment (the state yearly assessment) and displayed data.

Ms. Hughes said the FIAD is a very focused, targeted skill within the SBAC. She said the math results appear on scale with last year's results. She said the FIAD is not a full, rigorous assessment of the interim assessment. She said the pacing established for math by the former chief academic officer did not align with the Connecticut blueprint. She said the pacing needs to be redone next year to target the focused areas.

Ms. Hughes said the ELA (English Language Arts) benchmarks are falling short. She described the deeper that dive would be taken next year to give principals and teachers more of an instructional focus. She said summer curriculum work would focus on the comprehensive skills she described.

In response to a question, Ms. Hughes said the assessments are a snapshot in time. She said teachers find the Connecticut portal which the interim assessments are on very useful.

Mr. Traber said with the exception of some 6th grades, there is not a math department in 6th grade, and with ELA it is the same teacher. Sangeeta Bella, executive director of school leadership, said some 5th grades went back to departmentizing. Mr. Traber said 7th and 8th grade does that as a general rule.

In response to a question, Ms. Hughes said we'll be able to see the March results in April.

Ms. Hughes displayed grade level results for math. She described the NWDA assessment, which replaced iReady or HMH Growth. She said the 7th and 8th grades were doing particularly well in this assessment.

Ms. Hughes said fourteen coaches have come into schools through HMH to do specific targeted teacher coaching.

In response to a question, Ms. Hughes said the IAB-1 was administered in December; IAB-2 in February; and the NWBA was in January.

In response to a question, Ms. Hughes described the meaning of the focus results. Mr. Medina said he wanted to make sure we weren't moving any benchmarks down just to get a better grade. Ms. Hughes said most of the math interim assessments were focused, and not full scale, unlike the ELA assessments.

Ms. Hughes displayed results for Grades 3 to 8 in ELA.

In response to a question, Ms. Hughes said staff given assessments for years under Dr. Jenkins. She said we need to do more work with our teachers in using the results of this and working with our students in small groups. Ms. Bella said we want to be more intentional and look at individual students. Ms. Hughes described work with principals.

Peter Karaffa, chief information officer, said there has been discussion of using district data teams, which were used in the past. He said he did not know why the teams went away. Ms. Hughes said during Covid many schools in the state eliminated them.

In response to a question, Ms. Hughes said she believed Grade 3 dropping was the result of many factors. She said we need to provide more of an instructional focus with the Wonders program. She said there are issues in comprehension, drawing inferences and conclusions, and identifying a theme.

Dr. Sackey said there was a big focus this year on aligning our curriculum. Ms. Bella said we had to look at the foundational skills in second grade.

Ms. Hughes displayed high school data. She said this year there is unified curriculum across the high schools. HMH products are used for Algebra 1, Algebra 2, and Geometry 1. Bassick, BMA, and Harding had HMH coaches through the SIG grants. She said there were nice increases in all but one of the schools in math. She noted the Aerospace school is project-based, but you have to be sure you have the content intertwined in there.

Ms. Hughes discussed ELA high school results. She said there were increases in students at or above grade level. Carnegie Learning was at Bassick, BMA, Central, and Harding. She said the Aero results may have been the result of too much time on projects. Ms. Bella said it is possible they are not aligned with the standards.

Mr. Traber said he was an old-fashioned teacher, and a child was much more than a test score. He said he

did not believe in measuring children by test scores, but he knows what the industry says that. He said he would love to have a discussion at a future meeting about a broader picture of student growth. Ms. Hughes said all of the principals put together student plans this year. Mr. Traber said that would be a great discussion.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved “*to table agenda item six on a trip by High Horizons Magnet.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved “*to table agenda item seven on Discovery Magnet overnight trip.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

Mr. Benejan moved “*to table agenda item eight on library refresh.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

Mr. Woodson* joined the meeting.

The next agenda item was on the student discipline data and the code of conduct.

Mr. Traber said he was asked to put this on the agenda by Mr. Resto. Mr. Traber said the state guidelines refer to how to deal with special education students.

Michele McKinley, chief of special education, said when there is a violation of the student of code of conduct administrators have the authority to look at discipline on a case-by-case basis. She said we look at whether students have a behavior intervention plan or the cognitive ability to understand reasons for suspensions. She said when students with disabilities receive suspensions and expulsions, they still have to have access to their services.

Dr. Sackey said he can schedule follow-up conversations. Mr. Traber said he'd like to have a meeting with Mr. Resto between now and the next meeting.

Dr. Sackey displayed data on expulsions and suspensions up until February 28th. He said the highest level is at the 9th grade level. He said we are asking how to strengthen the transition from 8th to 9th grade because students get freedom and flexibility in high school that they did not have in earlier grades.

Dr. Sackey said programs are being piloted in some schools to see if that makes a difference. He said a summer component is being explored with CT Rise.

Dr. Sackey displayed the data broken out by race and ethnicity. Mr. Traber said to his eye it seemed a disproportionate number of blacks were being suspended. Dr. Sackey that is something for us to look into. He said ELL students are 21 percent of the

in-school suspensions, 18 percent of out-of-school suspensions, and 12 percent of expulsions.

Mr. Traber said 28 percent of students are black or African American. Mr. Karaffa said 7.42 percent of students are white.

Mr. Sackey said of the 30 expulsions, 11 were special education students, or 37 percent. He said there were three ELL expulsions, or about 10 percent of high school expulsions.

Dr. Sackey displayed data on out-of-school suspensions at the high school level. He said 39 percent of those were special education students. ELL students were 18 percent.

The next slide was on in-school suspensions at high schools. Dr. Sackey said 35 percent were special education and 27 percent were ELL.

Dr. Sackey said last year we were cited by the state for not having in-school suspensions. He said the issue was addressed and there was now a good number of in-school suspensions.

Elementary school data was displayed next. Dr. Sackey out-of-school suspensions totaled 399. Special education students were 46 percent and ELL were 14 percent.

Elementary school in-school suspensions were 648. Special education students were 34 percent and ELL were 16 percent.

Mr. Traber noted that some schools have more special education programs than other schools. There was a discussion of special education classes at various schools. Mr. Karaffa said there are different categories of special education students.

Mr. Traber said the ability to have a qualified, competent professional in the classroom makes all the difference in the world in controlling the learning environment. He said the district lost some 15-to-25-year veterans last fall.

In response to a question, Dr. Sackey said in-school suspension students are supposed to go to a room, and teachers check with their students and send work to the students. He said there is also a restorative piece with a counselor or social worker.

Dr. Sackey described out-of-school suspension. Students have to be home for the day. There are some programs where the students can go somewhere for a period of time to get some work done.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa said by state law a student who receives suspension has that include in their record, but the information is not

provided to anyone. He said it gets removed on graduation.

In response to a question, Mr. Traber said a student can be suspended for one, two, three, or more days.

In response to a question, Dr. Sackey said it is hoped that a child learns from a suspension and does not repeat the same behavior. Ms. McKinley said a suspension can affect a child making progress on their IEP. She said we always want any type of discipline to have an effect so they're not going to repeat it. She said different strategies are needed with repeat offenders. Dr. Sackey said starting at the elementary level, the goal is to have the student learn from that experience.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said he finds sometimes a ten-day suspension is not necessary for a special education student. He said sometimes students do not provide the suspension letter to their parents. Dr. Sackey said Mr. Benejan Grajales could share specifics about a case with him.

Dr. Sackey described the use of Effective School Solutions at five schools. He said it was an additional layer of support, which he believes minimized some behavior issues. Ms. McKinley said the program consists of a social worker that provides wraparound services.

Dr. Sackey said there is support for newcomer groups at Batalla, Madison, Read, Johnson, and Blackham in the STRONG program.

Dr. Sackey described C-Bits professional learning for social workers and the work of Life Bridge at high schools. He said Catalyst CT provides restorative practice at Bassick. He described professional learning provided by the Community Mindfulness Project.

Dr. Sackey discussed behavior intervention plans, safety plans, and plans for a newcomer orientation course in 2025-26 for high schools to help with the transition. He described peer mediation that is used in high schools, and SEL curriculum in health classes.

In response to a question, Dr. Sackey said tonight was big picture, high-level information. He said Mr. Planas could come back another night and present on math.

In response to a question, Dr. Sackey said when students are suspended at the school, parents have the ability to appeal to his level. He said he would want to hear more about a possible ten-day suspension for walking in the hallway.

In response to a question, Dr. Sackey said the code of conduct governs suspensions. He said principals would have to be aware of out-of-school suspensions.

Ms. Bella said suspensions are a collaborative decision in buildings.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said the principal or staff should find out what's going on with that student and what happened.

The next agenda item was on Hanover Research. Julie Schenefield and Matt Ragone were present.

Ms. Schenefield said her role was to make sure the partnership with Hanover was being maximized and that the district is happy.

Mr. Ragone, the senior director of K-12 research, displayed the research priorities that have been conducted in Bridgeport.

Ms. Schenefield described Hanover's work in the district in research queues. She said the research uses multiple methodologies, and the quantitative team can build out dashboards and executive summaries.

In response to a question, Mr. Schenefield said Hanover has been with the district for one year. She said the district has access to the Hanover research portal, which is outside the custom research for the district.

Ms. Schenefield described advisory services and the educator learning center for teachers.

Mr. Ragone said he would present how we aligned our research with priorities that the district let us know about. He said eight formal projects have been delivered to the district. He said there have been monthly meetings with district leaders and the superintendent. He said presentations have been made to the Board of Education. He said support was provided to the district's special education grant submitted last fall.

Mr. Ragone displayed part of a report on teacher compensation compared with other districts. He said good research will reveal additional, new questions. He displayed recommendations for continued research with regard to resource allocation. He said the program evaluation process can see if programs that do not show return on investment whether the result is the program or the programming implementation.

Mr. Ragone displayed a summary of work in special education. He said the key challenge was the misidentification of students as special education. He said this is a very common, very national problem. Educators tend to label students as special education when there might be other things going on, which takes resources away from the special education students that really need support.

Mr. Ragone summarized recommendations as continuing to assess the problem; conduct needs assessments of staff; cultural inclusiveness and studying implicit biases can help with misidentification; monitoring progress towards goals by collecting student outcome data; and support from external organizations or community partners.

Mr. Ragone described work on the special education grant application. In response to a question, Dr. Sackey said he would provide information on the outcome of the grant application to IES. Mr. Ragone said special education surveys are important, but in-depth interviews provide more answers.

Mr. Ragone described research on climate, culture, and social-emotional learning. An examination of school counseling models was conducted on the use of counseling resources. Steps were suggested that Bridgeport might want to take with its school counseling programs.

Mr. Ragone said one of the first projects was partnering with the SEL and the culture and climate team to get a picture of each school's climate and culture. As a summary, he said the district is demonstrating a good commitment to fostering positive school climates. He said it was pretty clear that staff are motivated to making school climate a real priority. The need was identified for a districtwide

SEL or positive climate initiative that is evident in all schools. He added that this was done at the beginning of the work in the district, so these might be already in place.

Mr. Ragone described the comprehensive annotated bibliography which is to provide resources on research-based best practices for various topics.

In response to a question, Mr. Ragone said links to studies on counseling ratios were shared, as well as student achievement and student mental health. He said there were a library of links available.

Mr. Ragone said that we suggest monitoring of climate, culture and SEL frequently because it changes quickly.

Mr. Ragone said some of the potential priorities are work on revising a strategic plan. He said districts that use Hanover for their strategic plan use us to collect and analyze student outcomes and performance indicators, and to monitor progress towards the goals in that plan.

Mr. Ragone displayed the recommendations referenced in the report on continuing the work with Bridgeport, including instructional audits, human resources, and family engagement, and the bigger priority of resource allocation.

In response to a question, Ms. Schenefield said professional development is done through the educator learning center platform, which has thirteen modules. She said there is also an implementation advisor.

In response to a question, Mr. Ragone said the special education toolkit referenced was just delivered a couple of days ago.

Interim Supt. Dr. Royce Avery said Hanover came in under the previous administration, with board approval. He said over the last year, especially in the last three months, he has utilized Hanover to help with salaries and special education. He said it has been a huge help for decision-making behind the scenes. He said he would be sharing the toolkit with the board soon and provide it to the special education division.

Dr. Avery said every report provided to the district will be given to the board before Monday's meeting. He said it has been very helpful to him, although he had not used Hanover prior to last year.

Mr. Traber said he heard a lot about links, but he did not hear much in the way of work product. He said because the teacher negotiations won't begin for another two or three years, salaries are not really relevant to us right now. Dr. Avery said there is a report on administrative salaries as well.

Mr. Ragone said more specific reports are listed on the slide displayed.

Mr. Traber said he did not understand anything in the salaries, other than administrative salaries, that has to do with anything we need right now. He said we would see the special education toolkit later this week. Mr. Ragone said the best practices in K-12 counseling is a full report.

In response to a question, Mr. Ragone said eight research projects will be shared with the board. Dr. Avery said the board members would understand it better once they see it.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said sharing the reports with the board was the most important thing to do now. He said there would be a renewal opportunity that he would like the board to consider.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said this was a one-year contract and we are up for renewal. Ms. Schenefield said we wanted to show what we've been doing and then discuss what the partnership will look like going forward. Dr. Avery said he would like the full board to hear the presentation.

In response to a question, Mr. Traber said the presentation had to be sent to the board portal. Dr. Avery said it was an overview for the presentation,

and he would provide the individuals projects out to the board.

Mr. Woodson moved that “*the Hanover Research presentation be referred to the full board for Monday night.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the committee on March 26, 2025