

Monday, September 16, 2024

MINUTES OF THE POLICY, PERSONNEL & CONTRACTS COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held September 16, 2024, via Microsoft Teams, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 4:46 p.m. Present were members Chair Christine Baptiste-Perez and Tiheba Bain. Board members Willie Medina and Albert Benejan Grajales were present. Board member Robert Traber joined the meeting subsequently as noted. Committee member Andre Woodson joined subsequently as noted.

Ms. Bain moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of July 25, 2024. The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the continuation of the graduate internship agreement with the University of Bridgeport.

Michael Brosnan said he works with university partners in placing student teachers and developing partnerships to help staff schools.

Mr. Brosnan said the contract is the same contract with UB that goes back about fifteen years. Interns spend the entire school year working with district teachers and helping out in the schools for a discounted master's degree. Eight thousand dollars per semester is paid to UB. He said there was an error on the sheet as the cost is per candidate, which he said could be adjusted if presented to the full board.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the committee chair may recognize non-committee members. She said in the interests of time and the next meeting, she would not open the floor up for non-committee members.

In response to a question, Mr. Brosnan said the figure of \$250,000 is not accurate. He said we have approved up to ten interns and we have budgeted up to ten. Currently, there is only one intern.

In response to a question, Mr. Brosnan said the interns are enrolled in a master's of education program. They complete their coursework in the evening, while during the day they're working in our schools. He said the candidates are sent to him for a meeting to figure out the best placement for them in schools.

In response to a question, Mr. Brosnan said the partnership has been successful. Interns follow this year with student teaching, and then the district is able to hire them. He said when interns are placed in buildings where they can have a good learning experience, they return for student teaching, and an awful lot of UB graduates are hired.

Ms. Bain moved *"to refer to the full board for approval, with the correction, of the continuation of the graduate internship agreement with the University of Bridgeport."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on continuation of the resident teacher agreement with Sacred Heart University.

Mr. Traber joined the meeting.

Mr. Brosnan said the Sacred Heart agreement is similar to UB's in tuition remittance. There is also a living stipend available. He said UB is working in this direction to create a more residency-focused program. He said Sacred Heart has been a partner for many years.

Mr. Brosnan said the program pairs a Sacred Heart master's of education student with a district mentor for the entire school year. He said students reap the benefit because they have two practicing adults in the same classroom for the entire year. The graduates are returned to the district as teachers of record for a fulltime position. He said Sacred Heart has a strong special education program, which is an area where the district struggles to hire. He said it offers exceptional preparation for those who become new teachers.

In response to a question, Mr. Brosnan said the primary difference with UB is Sacred Heart can provide special education candidates. He said there has been some attrition of interns. The original contract called for a three-year commitment to the district, which caused some difficulty with recruitment. The modified contract has a one-year commitment. He said most of the first cohort are still here. He said candidates who have local roots are sought. He said over 50 percent of the two cohorts are still with us five years later.

In response to a question, Mr. Brosnan said this is the first year we've had special education candidates. Only one of the ten is a special education teacher, but there are others in shortage areas.

Ms. Bain moved “*to refer this to the full board for approval of the continuation of the resident teacher agreement with Sacred Heart University.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the N2y digital curriculum.

Mr. Woodson joined the meeting.

Michele McKinley, chief of special education, requested purchase to continue the licensing and use of N2y. It is a special education and solution that is used for students with communication needs. She said they are symbol sticks for students with communication disabilities. She described it as a library of icons that is used districtwide.

Ms. McKinley said the cost of the licensing is \$39,404.35.

In response to a question, Ms. McKinley said the cost in 2021 was \$47,811 for three years and the program is purchased every year. She said the proposed agreement was also for three years.

In response to a question, Ms. McKinley said the program is funded out of the operating budget. She said the program was critical to students who don’t have language.

In response to a question, Ms. McKinley said the company has extended the license until we can get this approved.

Mr. Woodson moved “*to refer to the full board for approval of the N2y digital curriculum.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was to renew the subscription with Thought Exchange.

Dr. Royce Avery, deputy superintendent, said this was a renewal for the board to consider.

Mohammed Hassan of Thought Exchange said he was the single point of contact of the firm with Bridgeport.

Mr. Hassan said Thought Exchange is an AI-powered engagement platform to help connection with all key stakeholders. He said the platform can collect both quantitative and qualitative data and analyze the data. He said this saves the district days and weeks of time otherwise spent in analyzing data.

Mr. Hassan said last year over 9,000 participants were engaged. He said on average each person spent about seven minutes being engaged. He said this saved about 63,000 minutes or 131 days of time.

Mr. Hassan described the school calendar engagement that was done in March, which engaged over 1200 staff members. He said the AI summarized the five top topics or themes that came out of the discussion.

In response to a question, Mr. Hassan said the engagement is completely anonymous, but the system can disaggregate the data based on community, teachers, students, grade levels, ethnic groups, and roles of staff.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said a survey was done on break times. She said one survey created a report on the most common words that came up. Mr. Hassan said the data can be provided in real time.

In response to a question, Mr. Hassan said there is a standard five percent increase each year and the additional discount applied was reduced a little bit.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said as the board chair she believed Thought Exchange was important to engage the community in surveys and was a critical tool.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez moved “*to refer to the full board for the renewal of this subscription with Thought Exchange.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Woodson and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the lease agreement between the archdiocese and the board for the lease of St. Peter’s School.

Tony Pires of the business office said this was an addendum to the existing lease between the board and St. Peter’s School, which houses Classical Studies Academy. He said this is a three-year lease with the option of termination every year with sixty days’ notice. The cost is \$75,000 a year, which is consistent with last year, and contains a three percent increase every year.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires said if the lease was not extended, the agreement would convert to a month-to-month lease and the archdiocese could basically kick out the district. He said he did not think that was likely, but we don’t want to engage in that kind of relationship when we need the space until a future home for the school is found.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires said the school year has started with the students on site there. He said three-year

contracts are not unusual and it is how we secure a favorable rate. He said we were careful to add a termination clause into this addendum. He said if the district became a month-to-month tenant there is a chance the rent might increase.

Nestor Nkwo, chief financial officer, said the addendum had a provision reimbursing the landlord the liability insurance, which was not part of the previous agreement. He said the amount was \$10,000. He said this is why he asked the board to table the contract in the last board meeting.

Mr. Pires said he did not know if the insurance cost escalates into subsequent years. Mr. Nkwo said he was fine with the rent increase, but the \$10,000 was not paid in the past.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said this was a critical conversation because we do not want to be a month-to-month tenant. She said she would like to engage in discussion with the full board.

Mr. Pires recommended moving this to the full board with the condition that item 3 will be removed. He said in the interim we can negotiate with the diocese on that item, and the results can be presented at the board meeting.

Ms. Bain moved *“to the full board the lease agreement between the archdiocese and Bridgeport Public Schools for St. Peter’s School with the removal of Item number 3.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Woodson and unanimously approved.

Ms. Bain moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Woodson and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the committee on October 22, 2024