

Tuesday, May 27, 2025

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 27, 2025, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science and Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Present were chair Jennifer Perez, Vice Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Secretary Albert Benejan Grajales, Willie Medina, Maritza Estremera Jimenez*, and Akisha Cassermere*. Robert Traber and Andre Woodson* joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

Interim Supt. Dr. Royce Avery was present.

*remote participation

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:

Ashley Beckford of the Aerospace School at Fairchild Wheeler reported on her school. Among the items she highlighted were the school's recognition as a distinguished high school; a recent multicultural night; the successful trip to Disney World; and upcoming final exams.

Christian Bica of Central High reported on his school. Among the items he highlighted were the honor roll ceremony; a meeting on school meals; a visit by U.S.

Marine Corps recruiters; the upcoming prom; and recognition of scholar-athletes.

Mr. Traber and Mr. Woodson* joined the meeting,

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of May 12, 2025. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and approved by 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Perez, Benejan Grajales, Traber, Medina, Cassermere, Woodson, and Estremera Jimenez. Mr. Sokolovic abstained.

CHAIR REPORT:

Ms. Perez said the board has had five training sessions. She said she sent the final draft of the board's performance goals discussed at the last training meeting to the board tonight. She said goals include strategic plans, enhancing student achievement, fiscal responsibility, board-superintendent relationship, and board subcommittees.

Ms. Perez said the next training will take place on June 2nd.

Ms. Perez said the district Talent Show is this week at the Klein.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Ms. Perez said the Finance Committee met last week and moved an item to the board on the Catalyst grant. CABE membership was also moved to the board.

Mr. Sokolovic referred an item on the order of budget-cut reversals in light of additional funding from the city, and a possible legal opinion on the city's attempt to skirt the MBR.

Mr. Traber said the Instruction & Support Services Committee will meet tomorrow night.

Mr. Medina said the Policy & Personnel Committee did a lot of work at the last meeting and brought items forward. The next meeting date will be announced.

Mr. Sokolovic referred call for resolutions to be submitted to CABE.

Ms. Perez said the date of the next Facilities Committee meeting will be determined.

Mr. Traber referred public input on the East End school.

Ms. Perez said the legislative wrap-up for CABE will be on June 10th at the Capitol. Board members should contact Ms. Cauchon to attend.

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT AND AGENDA:

Dr. Avery said student projects from the Alan Wallack STEM Center were displayed in the room.

John DeMattia, board member of the Hall Neighborhood House, said Alan Wallack, who worked for the city and the board for 37 years, was his best friend. After Mr. Wallack retired, he spent another 17 years in the maintenance facilities department as a consultant. He said Alan was dedicated to the kids in Bridgeport. He said along with Steve Salem, the executive vice president of the Cal Ripken Foundation, he made a commitment to honor Alan by introducing STEM learning centers in conjunction with the foundation and Hall Neighborhood House. He said over a million dollars was raised. The goal is to have a learning center in every K-8 school in Bridgeport, with long-term sustainability in mind.

Robert Dziernda of Hall Neighborhood House said the program is currently in 22 schools, with six more to be up by the end of June. He said \$40,000 per school includes support to teachers, schools, and students. Science educators assist the teachers in implementation. There is no cost to the board or the city.

Dr. Avery said he saw the program deployed at the Juvenile Detention Center and he observed those students being engaged.

Mr. Dziernda said the intent is to continue this on to high schools.

Mr. Sokolovic said Mr. Wallack was a great guy and he described him helping his son get a playground at Park City Magnet and providing updates on the progress.

Mr. Traber described his experience in seeing students engaged with a STEM program put on by the Bridgeport Library in the past. Mr. Dzuernda described the effect on students' learning coding, problem-solving, and critical thinking.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said he worked closely with Mr. Wallack for twenty years and he was amazing person.

Dr. Avery played a video on the Bridgeport Day at the Capitol. He said there were about 200 students, staff and community partners in attendance, along with state and local officials.

Dr. Avery said upcoming events include a Math Meet at Sacred Heart University; the district Talent Show; a teacher recognition ceremony at Harding High; and the June 13th graduations at Kennedy Stadium.

Ms. Cassermere said she had a lot of fun learning at Bridgeport Day, including speaking to vendors.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said he believed Capt. Grech's overtime is paid by the city. Margaret Hughes, executive director of school turnaround, said curriculum writing for health classes is planned for this summer. Paul Catuccio, athletics director, said there are currently health

classes at the high schools. Dr. Avery said the curriculum needed to be revised.

Ms. Cassermere pleaded with parents to ask board members important questions out in the community. She noted five board seats are coming up in the election. She urged parents to consider courses on internet addiction, reading to their kids for twenty minutes a day, attending their local PTSO and PAC meetings, and asking open-ended questions of children. She also suggested volunteering on field trips, attending board meetings, and voting for the right candidates.

Dr. Avery said principals engage parents in their individual campus buildings as well.

Ms. Cassermere said she understood board members don't have to pay to come to the district talent show. She encouraged board members to pay the \$25.02 for two talent shows if they are really concerned about the financial health of the district.

Mr. Traber said speaking to state reps and senators about money from Hartford is still important. He noted the legislators were still fighting with the governor about the allocation of money for education. He said the educational cost sharing formula needed to be fixed. He said a prior proposal would have meant \$57 million extra for Bridgeport. He said the state has realized a surplus in

recent years, and it now exceeds \$6 billion, so they can afford it.

Mr. Sokolovic said he will be attending the talent show, but not be paying. He said that he was on a fixed income, and it was not fair to insinuate those not paying do not care about our children. He said this is what CAFE tells us we should not be doing.

Dr. Avery introduced a video about Alan Wallack STEM labs and Hall Neighborhood House.

In response to a question, Ms. Perez said the cost of the talent show is \$25 for both shows.

NEW BUSINESS:

The next agenda item was on the SEL climate program with Catalyst at Barnum, Bridgeport Military Academy and Dunbar.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve the continuation of agreement form SEL climate program with Catalyst CT with Barnum School, Bridgeport Military Academy, and Dunbar School.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on action on Grievances 2890 and 2891.

Mr. Traber moved *“to go into executive session with Dr. Sackey, Ms. McKinley, Dr. Avery, Mr. Costello and Bekah*

Saxon from the union.” The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and approved by a 6-1 vote.

Voting in favor were members Benejan Grajales, Cassermere, Woodson, Medina, Traber, and Estremera Jimenez. Ms. Perez was opposed. Mr. Sokolovic abstained.

The executive session began at 7:26 p.m.

The meeting resumed in public session at 8:29 p.m.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “*to reject Grievances number 2890 and 2891.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the 2025-26 CABE membership.

Ms. Perez said there is a membership tier called CABE Express as an option, which also covers various workshops that cost extra with the standard membership for \$400 more.

Mr. Traber moved “*to approve the fiscal year 2025-26 CABE membership with the express membership.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

Ms. Perez noted the CABE convention is not included in the membership.

The next agenda item was on suspending Bylaw 9310.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “to suspend Bylaw 9310 for the purpose of immediate implementation of the following updated, revised polices; number 1, number 2, number 3, number 4, number 5, number 6, number 8, number 9, number 10, and number 11.” The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “to approve the following updated, revised polices: (1) food service personnel standards; (2) charging food service policies; (3) evaluation and employment of coaches; (4) drug and alcohol testing for bus drivers; (5) homeless students; (6) sexual harassment/Title IX; (8) challenging curriculum policy; (9) surveys of students/students’ privacy policy; (10) Title I, parental and family engagement policy; and (11) school climate policy.” The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina.

Mr. Sokolovic said the bylaws had been thoroughly vetted and discussed in committee. He said they are all state-mandated and most of the language is boilerplate.

The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “to add number 7, amendment of Policy 6401 to include updated language provided by CAFE as proposed in internet safety policy/ the Children’s Internet Protection Act to number 1 in New Business for first read.” The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was Policy 6401, to include updated language provided by CAGE as proposed in internet safety policy/ the Children's Internet Protection Act, 6141.323.

Albert Sackey, deputy superintendent, said the current CAGE policy is presented. Mr. Sokolovic said there was one point of contention on this policy. Dr. Sackey said the additional recommendations by Mr. Postolowski were not currently in the policy.

Mr. Sokolovic noted the policy applied to staff and students who could be potentially disciplined for speaking out.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to replace the word in five "critical" to "abusive." The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

Mr. Medina said he wanted to make sure it is clear that we are amending Policy 6401 by adding the state-mandatory policy.

There was a discussion of the policies and possible options regarding wording.

Mr. Postolowski said the original language of the policy was created before social media.

The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Perez, Sokolovic, Benejan Grajales, Traber, Medina, Woodson, and Estremera Jimenez. Ms. Cassermere abstained.

The next agenda item was on the first read of the sexual abuse prevention and sexual education policy, Policy 5145.511

Dr. Sackey said the committee recommended this for the first read. It includes the definition of various terms, along with a prevention and education program and professional development.

Mr. Sokolovic said he preferred opt-in permission to opt-out policies. Dr. Sackey said most districts he has spoken to use an opt-out policy. There was a discussion of the opt-in or opt-out options.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve the sexual abuse prevention and education program, Policy 5145.511 as presented by Dr. Sackey for a second read at the next board meeting.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on comparability of services, Title I, equivalence in instructional staff and materials, Policy 6161.3.

Dr. Sackey said this is another mandated policy regarding parental involvement. He said he was still awaiting further guidance on whether some language can be changed. He said the policy is based on a state statute, so it is not recommended to change the language suggested by CABE.

Mr. Sokolovic said he did further research, and CAGE has policy which addresses his concerns regarding the word “equity.” He said many districts modify policies to fit their needs.

Dr. Avery suggested adopting the CAGE policy in the interim because we’re trying to complete the mandated policy.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to refer the item to the Policy Committee. The motion was not seconded.

Mr. Traber moved “*to approve comparability of services, Title I, equivalence in instructional staff and materials, Policy 6161.3 as a first read.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would reach out to CAGE.

The motion was approved by an 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Perez, Benejan Grajales, Medina, Traber, Woodson, Cassermere, and Estremera Jimenez. Mr. Sokolovic was opposed.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said the spelling bee last week at Multicultural Magnet was amazing and the students did a great job. He said Mr. Medina was in attendance also. He said he was also proud of the principal and staff at Barnum School

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the board on June 9, 2025