

Wednesday, July 16, 2025

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held July 16, at Blackham School, 425 Thorne Street, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Present were Chair Jennifer Perez, Vice Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Andre Woodson, Willie Medina, Maritza Estremera Jimenez, and Robert Traber.

The meeting was called to order at 5:49 p.m.

Faith Villegas was the facilitator of the meeting, which was a community forum. She noted the information received by the board members would help in building a strategic plan.

Ms. Villegas urged the board members let the community and staff members speak.

There was a discussion of the topics brought up at last week's community forum.

Mr. Traber said the issues at Table 1 in the last meeting was the lack of resources and respect of staff.

Ms. Villegas said the lack of resources came up in every group.

Nicole Nelson said to her the lack of resources means the district not having enough money from the city and the state.

Omar Resto discussed the lack of engagement with community and parents.

Jess Resto said she tried to do a PAC president role this year, but it was hard to engage parents. She said she would like to figure how to bring the community together.

Ms. Nelson said she gets upset at not enough families attending board meetings. She said some of the barriers may be language barriers, as well as working retail hours or second jobs. She said the public does not understand Robert's Rules, which makes it hard to understand what is going on at meetings.

Mr. Sokolovic said what he was hearing was a germination of a vision; that we are failing to meet parents where they are, and we need to work on strategies to get more parents involved.

Ms. Resto said her PAC meetings are held online. She suggested there be the option for parents to call in for public speaking to the board meetings.

Ms. Nelson said the board meetings need to be in centralized location. There was a discussion of possible locations for board meetings.

Ms. Villegas said respectful interactions with each other was very important

Mr. Resto said he believed the board meetings should be held in a consistent location, so there will not be technical issues.

Mr. Medina said one of his visions was for the board to have its own chambers or office.

Helen Quinones said she was a community organizer with Make the Road Connecticut. She said agreed about the importance of parental engagement. She agreed it is hard to get parents to meetings. She said interpretation was needed at board meetings, and the interpreter should be there for the entire meeting.

Ms. Villegas said Ms. Quinones's theme of trust was important.

Mr. Traber said getting parents involved in board meetings is important, but we also need to get parents more involved in the quest for more resources from the city and the state.

Mr. Woodson said the most important thing is the presence of parents at meetings or having a representative of a larger group present.

Ms. Villegas noted the comment that said two minutes of time for public speakers may not be enough. She said that some boards do not allow public speaking.

Mr. Resto said he would like to see the board have an event before the beginning of the school year in the nature of a festivity or a meet and greet.

Eunice Rosa suggested the use of a QR codes at meetings that parents can use. Mr. Resto said a suggestion box could be used.

Daira Marin of Make the Road Connecticut said a suggestion box or an online area to submit questions would be valuable.

Ms. Resto said she would like to see board members respond to the public's concerns at the meetings.

Ms. Villegas said engagement consists of actually being listened to.

Ms. Resto suggested the board hold meetings such as this once a month for parents. She suggested holding board meetings at the new parents' center.

Ms. Villegas noted the board used to have a parents' center on Boston Avenue.

Ms. Perez said the parents' center will be opening this school year at Housatonic, which will also be a welcome center. She described it as a one-stop shop.

Ms. Marin described a new youth group that would be starting up.

Ms. Rosa described the new welcome center as an introduction to our public school district, and the resources that would be available.

Ms. Villegas urged those present to invite friends and family to the next two community forums.

Ms. Perez said the next two meetings on July 30th and July 31st will be noticed soon.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod