

Wednesday, July 30, 2025

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held July 30, 2025, at Jettie Tisdale School, 250 Hollister Avenue, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Present were Chair Jennifer Perez, Akisha Cassermere, Willie Medina, Maritza Estremera Jimenez, Andre Woodson, and Robert Traber.

The meeting was called to order at 5:54 p.m.

Ms. Perez said the purpose of the community forum was to gather input on the board's formulation of a vision to put towards a long-term strategic plan.

Eric Torres of Elevate Bridgeport was the facilitator of the meeting. He said he would pose questions to the members of the public in attendance.

Ms. Perez said the board would largely listen to the members of the public and stay in the background.

Deborah Sims said the flyer publicizing tonight's meeting should be more inviting for parents. Andre Baker made similar points, including how to attract busy parents to meetings.

Ms. Sims said she struggled with coming tonight. She said there was a problem at this school a year ago with

rats. She said when schools are not clean, it feeds into the way the schools are perceived. She said the schools should be spotless because the kids deserve so much more. She said we had to figure ways to support parents and grandparents with their children.

Mr. Baker said the experience of initially walking into the building and the quality of the lunch experience are important for the children. He noted when he pulled into the parking lot there was trash out there.

Mr. Torrres said it was important for principals to greet students at the door. He noted the first comments were not on academics or curriculum, but how to create a space for students to feel safe.

Ms. Sims said teachers often have to fix things that can't be fixed at home, and they have to act as social workers as well. Mr. Baker said that we have to figure out a way to give parents more support. He described the engagement with parents at his son's school, Notre Dame.

Lamond Daniels said he wanted to comment on the broken glass syndrome. He noted the adults set the culture in a school. He described the positive impact of a teacher on his daughter at Geraldine Johnson School.

Ms. Sims described her daughter's experience as a principal in Texas in improving a school. She said we

need to bring in rich people in Fairfield County to adopt our schools.

In response to a question by Mr. Torres, Ms. Sims said we need to be targeted in an adopting schools initiative. She said social clubs could be approached as potential partners.

Mr. Baker said there were social clubs right down the street from Tisdale School, and he suggested events such as a clean-up on weekends. Ms. Sims also suggested engagement with churches.

Scott Hughes said he has worked for Goodwin University and the University of Bridgeport (UB). He said we need to pursue institutions in lieu of taxes. He described the dental hygiene school at UB, which was an opportunity to have dental clinics in the schools. He noted the Bridgeport Military Academy and the new Bassick were on the UB campus. He said career pathways for kids were needed. He described his son receiving a welding certificate through Goodwin University. He described welding scholarships that were available and the high retention rate of that program.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said something as simple as a flyer of available resources in the community was effective in her work in New Haven. She said something could be done similar with a focus on education.

Mr. Daniels described the prior home-school coordinators and their work. He said diversity was the greatest strength of the community. He said the problems are not unique to Bridgeport. He noted there is a different experience from school to school. He said it was important for principals to greet students at the door. He said we had to get good stories out like building the airplane at Bassick.

Ms. Sims said equity was needed in Bridgeport between schools in different neighborhoods.

Mr. Woodson said a school like Discovery where the principal greets all the students is not like other schools where there may be security issues. He says more resources are needed at a school like this.

Mr. Daniels said when she wanted to bring a debate program to Johnson School, teachers were very honest to say they didn't have the time and could not commit extra hours.

Mr. Torres said he gathered that the strength of our district is great teachers, great staff, who are stretched but they're doing the best they can with what they have. The diversity of the district is strong and there are great stories that need to be highlighted some more to inspire and motivate others.

In response to a question on challenges, Mr. Baker said the board does not get enough support. He noted that he has served on the board, and he knows what it is to not get the support. He said when he went door-to-door, many people would ask what was going on with the Board of Education. He said the domino effect of a poor education would impact the entire city.

Mr. Daniels said our families have a lot of deal with in an urban center. He said he received a list of items that he has to buy for his children, including a full ream of paper. He said he can afford it, but that is a lot for an average family. He said he just drove by two police cars on Stratford Avenue, which is not a healthy environment, and it is right near where students walk to school.

Ms. Sims noted parents are asked to send soap to schools, which she said sometimes leads to parents to stealing items they can't afford.

Mr. Baker said he would like to see support for grandparents who are bringing children up, and then the grandparents don't have the proper authority

Mr. Torres said the next question was, what would you like to see in our schools in the next three to five schools, or the vision for our students.

Ms. Sims said every kid should be able to read at a 5th grade level.

Mr. Daniels said a safe environment at every school was important. He said a clear message of the vision, whatever it is, was needed. Mr. Baker suggested having a theme goal for a year in a particular school, which would lead to greater school pride.

Ms. Sim suggested a session with a mothers' group who have lost children to gun violence because those incidents started with school.

Ms. Perez said the use of community partnerships is an important takeaway from the session.

Ms. Cassermere noted the importance of finding resources for families such as those with domestic violence. She described her work with DCF.

Mr. Traber discussed the issue of mandated reporters. He said part of the equity among schools was that some schools are better at getting resources.

Brian Glynn, a teacher at Tisdale, said he has taught at the school for 18 years. He described the importance of long-term continuity in the area of curriculum.

There was a discussion of teacher pay in Bridgeport compared to surrounding towns. Mr. Glynn described student loan programs for teachers in urban centers.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:09 p.m.,

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod