

Wednesday, July 9, 2025

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held July 9, 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, Andre Woodson, Willie Medina, Maritza Estremera Jimenez, and Robert Traber. Akisha Cassermere joined subsequently as noted.

The meeting was called to order at 6:06 p.m.

Ms. Perez said this was one of four community forums to be held, and the purpose is to gather input for the board's project to create a strategic plan.

The board members introduced themselves and described their tenure on the board.

Faith Villegas, executive director of the Bridgeport Public Education fund, was the facilitator of the forum.

Eunice Rosa provided translation into Spanish.

Ms. Villegas said the community members would sit with board members at separate tables and the board members would listen to comments and opinions.

Ms. Villegas said there would be a captain at each table, primarily board members, in a nonspeaking role, along with a notetaker.

There were six tables, with each containing a board member.

The discussions at the tables began at 6:19 p.m.

Ms. Cassermere arrived at the meeting

The general meeting resumed at 6:49 p.m.

Nicole Nelson at Table 1 summarized the opinions, emphasizing parents caring about the school district and the dedication of staff and teachers. The discussion said the biggest challenge was the lack of resources, including to specialized students. Fiscal responsibility and accountability were discussed as a needed change, along with stability in leadership. She said goals for vision include postsecondary success, navigation for parents and families, transparency in leadership, rigorous instruction, collaboration with city leadership, and proper allocation of resources.

The summary of Table 2 indicated schools could be more welcoming and have more parent involvement, not just when parents are mad. The strengths identified were the district's teachers and the security guards, and the multicultural nature of the district. The biggest challenges identified were money; the infighting on the Board of

Education; the need to educate parents; and too-frequent changes in curriculum. Changes sought include a stable curriculum and school equality. The table's views on a vision were using schools like the Aquaculture School and others to teach trades, and life skills like financial management. Middle school students should be more aware of what our high schools have to offer.

Al Ramirez reported on Table 3. He summarized strengths as teachers with empathy and patience, encouraging students to ask questions. Families should respect teachers. Changes sought include hiring more teachers who live in Bridgeport and more teachers of color. He highlighted diversity in the district as a great asset. The challenges were identified as funding, temporary subs, and the need for teachers and principals to live in the community. He said a challenge is the way adults talk negatively about Bridgeport, students, and teachers, along with the need for financial literacy and entrepreneurial courses. Also identified was the need for exposure of students to trades and mentor programs.

Bobbi Brown reported on Table 4. She said many of the previous comments also came up at the table. Items included rigorous curriculum as opposed to overreliance on online programs and apps; a baseline staffing level; better assessments for ESL students; the importance of diversity and culture as a strength; the structure of PACs;

lack of communication transparency at all levels in the district; and recognizing intergenerational gaps amongst parenting. Sarah discussed the reimbursement formula between the three major cities in Connecticut. Ms. Brown said challenges were obtaining more certified teachers, increasing school spirit; beautifying the schools; and extra circular activities. She said the discussion indicated the vision looked like community, which can be powerful and impactful.

Iziah said Table 5 had a similar vision for our schools, but an additional concern was wanting our children to feel comfortable and reading proficiently.

Ms. Villegas thanked everyone for coming and contributing to the discussion. She said the next community forum would be on July 16th.

Ms. Perez said the three next forums would be on July 16th, July 30th, and July 31st.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod