

Wednesday, June 4, 2025

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held June 4,
2025, via Microsoft Teams, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Present were members Chair Jennifer Perez and Willie Medina. Board members Albert Benejan Grajales and Robert Traber were present. Committee member Maritza Estremera Jimenez and board members Joseph Sokolovic and Andrew Woodson joined subsequently as noted.

Interim Supt. Dr. Royce Avery was present.

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m.

Mr. Medina moved approval of the committee's minutes of May 21, 2025. The motion was seconded by Ms. Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on central office staff positions that were eliminated in the fiscal year 2025-26 proposed budget.

Dr. Avery said some positions were not solidified yet, and he would further present on Monday with the full board. He said he would expand how he would like to reorganize the district in the future. He said the cost savings would be presented as a line item in the budget.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez and Mr. Sokolovic joined the meeting.

The next agenda item was on the budget gap cost-saving measures regarding two administrators on special assignment; four assistant principals; one counselor; and one supervisor of alternative education.

Dr. Avery said he wanted to emphasize the board has already approved elimination of these positions, but he is asking to postpone elimination until June of 2026. He said there are three to four administrators that will be looking to retire in the fall of 2025. He said cancelling the elimination will only cost about \$8,000.

In response to a question, Nestor Nkwo, chief financial officer, described the process of the net savings of \$46,000 per year from forcing a Kelly Services teacher out because of bumping.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said the intention of the administrators to retire is verbal, not written, but they are stable, reliable employees.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed the balanced budget was based on numbers that are not clear at this point from discussions at the state level. He said we eliminated over a hundred positions. He said the board should have ranked the priority in retaining services that were eliminated in the budget, and there has not been discussion on this. He said the decision should be paused until the board created the hierarchy of services.

Mr. Traber said letting seven of the employees work for part of the year would be only cost a fraction of the \$1,000 less they would receive for bumping into a teacher position.

Mr. Woodson joined the meeting.

The next agenda item was on the 2025-26 operating budget.

Mr. Nkwo said the board and the committee has voted on all the line item and program cuts intended to be implemented next year in order to have a balanced budget. The total is about \$33 million. He said the total budget for next year is \$296,890,192.

Mr. Traber said the legislature process is still ongoing at the state, and we're waiting to learn what the reality is that we're living with. He said he didn't know how we can vote on this, although he respected what Mr. Nkwo presented.

Mr. Nkwo said numbers are flying all over and it depends on who you ask. He said there does not appear to be a significant change related to the Bridgeport district. Mr. Traber said he believed there could be additional millions for the district. Mr. Nkwo said we know the city gave an additional \$3.125 million next year, which is included in the budget. He said he was assuming a \$10.4 million increase in ECS and \$5.8 million for special education. Mr. Traber

said we're hearing higher numbers than that, so it will change some and we will know by Monday's meeting.

Dr. Avery said the board has done a great job working with the administration to cut the budget, and we're at rock bottom in what we're providing children. He said any dollar we get above the balanced budget will allow the board to rank the things to be brought back. He said the Commissioner of Education expressed concern with him that we have not passed a budget. He said he told the commissioner of the hard work that has taken place. He said he hoped there would be a more positive light on the budget by Monday.

Mr. Nkwo said a budget this tight without a contingency amount is very scary.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was not as optimistic as Mr. Traber on funding. He cautioned the board against pressure from the state of rushing through a budget, which could cause irreparable harm.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said nobody can say the board, Dr. Avery, and the cabinet did nothing. He said we showed them what our district wants, and if they don't give it to us, that is the shame of Hartford.

Mr. Traber said we have the flexibility to be cautious and maintain our options, so we maximize what's best for our district.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez moved *“to refer to the full board the fiscal year 25-26 operating budget.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on painting at the JFK Campus.

Jaimie McCarvill, finance manager of the facilities department, said she was presenting two new contracts. The JFK painting will consist of the swimming pool ceiling and walls. It was put out to bid and there were two bids submitted. The city attorney finalized the contract with the lowest bidder, which is capital funded.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez moved *“to move the JFK Campus painting of swimming pool room and ceiling contract.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Perez and unanimously approved.

Ms. McCarvill said the Hallen School first-floor restroom renovation was also put out to bid. There were three attendees at the walk-through and one bid submittal for \$88,788. She said this is also capital funded.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez moved *“to move the Hallen School restroom first floor to the full board.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Perez and unanimously approved.

Tony Pires of the business office said the next item was on a contract with Relay HUB. The purpose of the contract is to help the district recover the maximum amount for

Medicaid reimbursement activities. He said the current provider was short in meeting our needs to claim all the activities that we perform. He said the state technical assistance team referred this company, which represents over a hundred districts in the state.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires said things such as social work services and speech service are reimbursable, provided the student is Medicaid-eligible.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires described the reimbursable costs paid to Relay. He said they work on a percentage of the funds collected.

Mr. Medina moved *“to move to the full board the student Medicaid billing reimbursement.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the RFP for the board’s legal services.

Mr. Pires said the board has had the same legal firm for the last seven years, and according to ordinance, it is supposed to be put out to bid. The contract has been extended beyond the five-year period.

Dr. Avery said the process was going to happen last year, but the previous administration and the board decided to do an extension. He said the board would have the opportunity to collaborate with the city attorney’s office in

selecting someone. He said ultimately the board has the final decision.

Ms. Perez said this is for outside counsel when we can't use city attorneys. The outside firm would be used if there are things the city attorney cannot handle or there are conflicts of interest. She said the goal is to reduce the cost significantly from what we've paid in the past.

Mr. Sokolovic said we should have been using city attorneys for routine matters all the time. Ms. Perez said she agreed. Mr. Sokolovic said the city cannot bill the board for the use of a city attorney. Mr. Pires said for the most part we use city attorneys to review RFPs, some contracts, and lease agreements. He said we have to be a good traffic cop in deciding what to use the city attorneys for.

Mr. Sokolovic said the RFP had some deliverables such as training and professional development that we get with CABA. Mr. Pires said those items could be removed, but he wanted to allow flexibility.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires described the posting as boilerplate.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires said he believed Supt. Perrin extended the contract last year.

Mr. Traber noted we have negotiations this fall with BCAS. He said the RFP seemed standard and appropriate to see

what is out there in terms of law firms. He said last year a great deal of time was spent with a lawyer who proved to be quite frustrating. He said there was a plethora of law firms vying for board of education business.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez moved *“to refer this to the full board for the RFP of the BBOE legal services.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Perez.

Mr. Woodson asked if we were in the same type of transition as when Ms. Perrin was superintendent. Ms. Perez said Supt. Perrin left in June of that year.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires said seven years ago when there was a transition to the current law firm, the previous law firm handled some outstanding cases they have, and the new firm picks up the new cases.

The motion was unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod