

Wednesday, April 23, 2025

MINUTES OF THE INSTRUCTION AND SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April 23, 2025, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Present were members chair Robert Traber and Albert Benejan Grajales. Board member Willie Medina joined the meeting subsequently as noted. Committee member Andre Woodson* joined subsequently.

*remote participation

The meeting was called to order at 5:34 p.m.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of March 26, 2025. The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

Mr. Traber moved *“to add to the agenda a presentation and discussion for possible referral to the full board for the library refresh grant on Sora Electronics Library Collection.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

Lisa Valle and Theresa Welch were present. Ms. Valle described the federal grant, which has already been allocated. She summarized the benefits of books and reading to students. Ms. Welch said the district was moving towards permitting students to borrow books from Bridgeport Public Library with their student IDs.

Ms. Valle described the benefits of digital resources. She said Sora is a digital collection, which will be accessible to students on all devices, including personal devices.

Teachers and librarians will be able to see reading statistics and students will receive achievement badges

Ms. Valle described the management of the collection of books, periodicals, graphic novels, and biographies. She said the proposal includes teacher and staff development for the five years of the subscription.

Ms. Valle said the total cost for the five-year subscription is \$580,000.

Albert Sackey, assistant superintendent, said the grant has to be specifically geared towards books and media for students.

In response to a question, Ms. Valle said the money was locked in.

Mr. Medina arrived at the meeting. Interim Supt. Royce Avery joined the meeting.

In response to a question, Dr. Sackey said he would provide the amount of money left in the library refresh grant. Ms. Valle said the district had received extensions on the grant and the money must be spent by September 2025. Mr. Traber said extensions in Connecticut granted under the previous administration were taken back by the current administration.

In response to a question, Ms. Valle said Sora covers materials all the way from K to 12th grade. She answered further questions about the program, including a reference

to a 20 percent discount, the availability of popular books, and interlibrary loans via the public library.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved “*to approve and refer to the full board for the refresh grant of Sora digital library.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on black or African American suspension rates with more specific data than in the prior meeting.

Dr. Sackey said the data to be discussed has been uploaded or copies provided. He said this data is reviewed weekly, with a deeper look quarterly. He said the data is school level; individual teacher data was not requested because that should be addressed at the building level. He said the data covers all the demographics.

Cheryl Faga, director of SEL and student affairs, presented. She displayed ISS, OSS and expulsion data by grade. She discussed the data, with most expulsions in 9th grade. She said 9th grade also had high numbers of OSS and ISS.

Dr. Faga said the district was now a Tier I school, or one with a low suspension rate and disproportionality, which represents growth from a prior Tier IV status. She said state data was available on EdSight.

Dr. Faga displayed suspension rates by ethnicity from 2019 to 2024. In response to a question, she described how the tiers are calculated and offered to send the methodology sheet to the board members. She discussed

statistics on total suspensions and suspensions by distinct students, which seemed to indicate there are a lot of students being suspended repeatedly.

Dr. Faga said the demographic information was broken down by school. She noted the numbers in some cases are lower in the magnet schools. She discussed data at Bassick High and meetings with the state on this issue.

Margaret Hughes, executive director of school turnaround, noted Kelly substitutes staffed the ISS rooms this year.

Dr. Faga said the discrepancy between ISS and OSS was less at K-6 schools. Dr. Sackey said each school has an ISS room.

In response to a question, Dr. Faga said the district's eleven restorative practice specialists have been eliminated. She named the schools where they had been deployed.

Ms. Hughes said state law will mandate that district staff, not Kelly, cover ISS rooms next year.

Dr. Faga said we need to strength the transition between 8th and 9th grades. She described work being done, including with CT Rise.

There was a discussion of unique vs. total students suspended at Bassick High.

Mr. Traber said oftentimes more support is needed for teachers and principals who are dealing with students who are suspended. Mr. Benejan Grajales described his experiences in this area. Dr. Avery said he agreed with many of the comments, and he said accountability with

principals was important. Mr. Traber described his experiences with potential suspensions. He said the resources we're trying to get from the state would be critical in this area for more academic intervention and social intervention.

Mr. Traber said in the remaining meetings of this year he would like to see how many of the total suspensions are repeat offenders.

Mr. Woodson* joined the meeting.

Mr. Traber said the issue would be addressed in the next meeting after the receipt of the updated data.

The next agenda item was a follow-up report on PAC/PTSO expenditures and plans for the District PAC/PTSO convention.

Dr. Sackey said he held a meeting with Mr. Benejan Grajales and Mr. Medina. He said that some of the information shared by Mr. Benejan Grajales about the PAC/PTSO convention in the meeting was not on his radar and was very helpful.

Dr. Faga said updated allocations for Title I expenditures were provided. She said the percentages are 88.2 percent for elementary schools and 87 percent for high schools. She said the two schools at zero percent were spoken to, and their invoices are in to be processed. She said the business office is talking to principals at schools where the expenditure number is over 100 percent. Mr. Benejan Grajales said it may be possible to move funds from schools that did not spend their entire allocation.

There was a discussion of the meaning of the columns covering expenditures and encumbered.

Mr. Traber said failure to spend Title I money could lead to a reduction of the funds in the future.

Dr. Avery said that we have to do better budgeting, and we have to go back to accountability with principals.

Mr. Traber said the expenditures were a vast improvement over last year.

Mr. Benejan Grajales described the obligations of the PAC leaders. He spoke about the use of vendors by PACs. He said the training of the PAC leaders was very important.

Mr. Traber said he would like to know in the future the reason why some schools were only in the 50 to 70 percent range. Dr. Faga said a PAC retreat is being considered. Mr. Benejan Grajales said this was important because sometimes schools PACs can work together.

Mr. Traber asked if unspent money could be used for training of PAC leaders. Mr. Benejan Grajales said he believed that was not possible.

In response to a question, Dr. Sackey explained Ms. Herron, who works with PAC leaders, was not available tonight.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said he would have a former District PAC president contact Dr. Faga.

The next agenda item was on the third marking period test results and student growth.

Ms. Hughes displayed 2023-24 SBAC testing results for grades 3 to 8, including the percentage of students who met or exceeded grade-level standards. Math and ELA results were displayed: 11 percent of students were at or above grade level in ELA and math was 13 percent.

Herminio Planas director of mathematics, pointed to data in the interim assessment blocks (IAB) showing growth and the number of students who are almost at the benchmarks. Ms. Hughes said as a result of studies she has done in other school districts that she would caution that the entire number of students in green on IAB would not meet the standard. In response to a question, she said the district was significantly below where we were last year, and it was unlikely the district would reach the 25 percent level.

Mr. Planas described the use of the WIN block, which is used for intervention, to help students move forward. He described the use of error analysis with teachers and administrators, which can drill down into individual question results by classes.

Mr. Medina said he would like to see the demographic information on the results.

Mr. Planas said when data indicated some high-achieving students were not improving due to the attention paid to intervention, enrichment tasks were used.

Ms. Hughes described areas of weakness in the ELA testing, which led to looking at revising curriculum to increase focus in those areas.

Mr. Traber said he believed the problems we have with SBAC is not only linguistic, but cultural. He said many of the questions posed to children are not in their realm of experience. Ms. Hughes discussed strategies for differentiating with multilanguage learners. Mr. Planas said the vast majority of questions are very much mathematical, not problem-setting that introduces things that students may not be familiar with.

Mr. Traber noted Ms. Hughes wanted to emphasize student growth. Ms. Hughes said the year-end benchmark to be administered before May will give more of that information.

Ms. Hughes said we desperately need coaches in our schools. She said every urban district in the state has coaches.

Ms. Hughes described the need for the NWEA product which is financially prohibitive now. She said we have another year left on the products we are using now.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

DRAFT