

Wednesday, May 28, 2025

MINUTES OF THE INSTRUCTION AND SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 28, 2025, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Present were members chair Robert Traber, Andre Woodson*, and Albert Benejan Grajales. Board members Joseph Sokolovic was present.

*remote participation

The meeting was called to order at 5:46 p.m.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of April 23, 2025. The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the Hill for Literacy for school year 2025-26.

Margaret Hughes, executive director of school turnaround, said the proposal is to return the Hill for Literacy to the district in the areas of instructional leadership, assessment, instruction and professional learning in reading for Grades K to 6. She said the Hill has been working with the district for summer school training, funded by the state in the amount of \$47,000.

Ms. Hughes said the proposal is for the Hill to pick up where they left off in 2023-24. She said the state Department of Education would fund \$364,000 and the district would fund, probably through the Alliance Grant, \$437,000.

Dr. Darcy Burns, executive director of the Hill for Literacy, presented. She described the focus of the program, including engaging families. She said the district literacy leadership team will be reinstituted. There will also be data meetings, in-class coaching, teacher training, and the Connecticut Literary Model project.

In response to a question, Dr. Burns said the previous partnership was for two years. Ms. Hughes said the years were 2022-23 and 2023-24. The current proposal is for one year.

In response to a question, Ms. Hughes said the feedback from principals and staff has been favorable on the Hill for Literacy. She said she could give the board a tentative professional learning plan.

In response to a question, Ms. Hughes said the request is for the committee is for the Hill for Literacy to return to the district for the amounts provided. Mr. Traber noted a contract was not available yet, but he would not hold it up at the committee level because the full board is going to vote on it.

In response to a question, Dr. Burns said there is mileage reimbursement for facilitators traveling to school for coaching.

In response to a question, Nadira Clarke, director of grants, said it was appropriate to bring the proposal without a contract because if the board decided not to proceed, the time spent on the contract would have been wasted. Mr. Traber and Mr. Sokolovic said they were comfortable with proceeding.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved *“to bring action to the full board of the Hill for Literacy for school year 2025-26.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and approved by a 2-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Traber and Benejan Grajales. Mr. Woodson was opposed.

Dr. Cheryl Faga, director of SEL and student affairs, requested an item be added to the agenda.

Mr. Traber moved *“to add to the agenda discussion and possible action to the full board of the Bernard Buddy Jordan Foundation Brothers Table Mentoring Program.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

Dr. Faga said the foundation has been in our district mentoring boys. The proposal is for the 2025-26 school year.

Natasha Noel of the foundation introduced Mike Jordan, the brother of Buddy Jordan, who was murdered at Newfield Park twenty years ago. She said the mission of the foundation is to improve or impact the lives of children, youth, and families by addressing trauma unique to urban communities.

Ms. Noel said the foundation has a virtual therapy and yoga program for adults; an arts program in conjunction with Westport Country Playhouse; and the Brothers Table Mentoring Program.

Ms. Noel said the document presented was created for an ad hoc Board of Education Committee on Males of Color, which she sat on with Mr. Sokolovic and others. She said the committee met for about a year and a half, discussing what our boys need in areas like graduation rate and test scores.

Ms. Noel said the committee held a wonderful community event with over 300 people in attendance. She said the result of the event was the need for mentoring as a strategy that our boys need. She said Brothers Table started from the community conversation five years ago. One goal is to have boys see each other as allies, not enemies. She said when we're established in the schools for a full year partnerships like M & T Bank will be established.

Ms. Noel described the community-based models being used, which are meetings for middle-school boys on Saturdays, and a school-based program in two middle schools and a high school.

Ms. Noel said licensed clinicians run the sessions, although it is not therapy. She said the goal is to get the boys to share what is happening. The sessions are run by a facilitator and one or two adult men. She said since 2019, 75 men have been engaged, and the school-based program has existed since 2024 in three schools. Over the summer, the program will start in Lighthouse with six additional schools. She described the work with Harding High athletes and the foundation's podcast.

Ms. Noel described the sessions that are held in the schools, including the use of community circles and small mentoring groups. She described the modules that are used in the program and the requirements in order to be a mentor.

Dr. Faga said we want to be strategic about the schools in which to utilize the program so we can track data. She described the success of the program and positive data at Harding High. She said we will be looking at the feeder schools for Bassick for next year.

Dr. Faga said the funding would be through the Title IVA grant for social-emotional learning.

In response to a question, Ms. Noel said the program started at Harding, Bridge Academy, and Dunbar. The six schools with Lighthouse this summer are Batalla, Columbus, Curiale, Madison, Marin and Read. She said there may be three additional schools.

In response to a question, Ms. Noel said the program currently works with 25 Harding student-athlete leaders, and it is hoped to be expanded. Dr. Faga said the feeder schools for Bassick are Curiale, Claytor, Black Rock, Johnson, Roosevelt, Columbus, Batalla, and Bryant.

In response to a question, Dr. Fala said the after-school program will cost about \$2,500 per school, and a total of about \$81,285 for eight schools. Ms. Noel said the program includes field trips.

Mr. Sokolovic said this is an important foundation to address disparities in things like AP courses and expulsion/suspension data. He said he sat in on some of the mentorship meetings in the past. He said it was a shoestring budget for a major impact on students.

Mr. Traber said he discovered working while with juvenile delinquents that they weren't the problem, but that society was failing them. He said he couldn't agree more about the value of mentorship.

Mr. Traber moved “*to move to the full board the Bernard Buddy Jordan Brothers Table mentoring program for a vote on the full board.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales, and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the suspension rate of special education students.

Mr. Traber said he and Angel Resto met with Dr. Faga and Dr. Sackey last week. He said it was hoped to have procedures in place for next year.

Dr. Faga discussed suspension and expulsion data for special education students. Mr. Traber noted the number of ELL and SPED total almost half of the district’s student population. Ms. Hughes said there are about 1,000 students multilanguage that are in SPED.

In response to a question, Dr. Faga said she would provide a copy of the consent letter to the committee.

Dr. Faga discussed data on distinct suspensions. She said we learned from the data that most of our students who are suspended are not repeat offenders. She said reevaluation of the rules and adjusting training is planned to address the suspension levels.

Mr. Traber noted it was beyond his ken that a teacher would ever suspend a teacher for ten days. He said the purpose of discipline is not to punish, but to encourage children to behave well.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested the use of a proportional graph. Mr. Traber said he was happy to see the data in multiple formats.

Mr. Traber said the data is not broken down by schools because it is the administration's job to manage such things. He said comparing school data to district data will be pressure point for the administration to apply. He said he believed the administration had identified some schools, though he was not asking for that information.

Mr. Traber said he would like to see regular reports on personnel hirings/transfers at board meetings in the future.

Angel Resto was recognized. He thanked the committee for its work.

The next agenda item was on PAC/PTSO data.

Ms. Clarke said the data was updated as of this afternoon. She said high schools are at 95.5 percent of their funding utilized. She noted Bassick also has a School Improvement Grant that includes parent involvement funds. Mr. Benejan Grajales said he was shocked because he has spoken with the Bassick PTSO leaders and the principal, and he was told they spent all their money. He said the data on Classical Studies seemed off as well.

Mr. Traber said he was also surprised to see Classical Studies had not spent all its money according to the data because of his knowledge of the PAC president, and her

offers to help other schools spend allocated funds. He noted we were spending past the spending deadlines.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke described how schools could spend over 100 percent of allocation.

Ms. Hughes said Barnum has SIG grants and a Commissioner's Network grant for parent engagement, and they may have misclassified it to the wrong code.

Mr. Benejan Grajales discussed the P10, which tracks the expenditure of parental engagement funds and should inform the PAC leader and the principal how much money is left.

Dr. Faga described planning for next year, including a meeting that was held with about twenty PAC leaders. She said budgets and actions plans were discussed. The leaders were able to suggest vendors to be used. She said PAC elections were also discussed.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said he did not know why it takes so long to pay vendors, which leads to losing vendors. Ms. Clarke said schools with grants have to submit forms with a different designation.

Mr. Benejan Grajales described the requirements for PAC leaders' signatures on P-10s. He said he was still waiting for the action plans from all schools. He said he wants to see who the vendors are and if expenditures are for

education for parents. He said he would go through them one by one, and he was here to help.

The next agenda item was on ELA benchmarks.

Michelle Zanauskas, director of literacy, said preliminary data was available, but the testing window is open until June 4th. She said data for DIBELS for K-6 and Reading Plus for Grades 7 to 12 was available.

Ms. Zanauskas said the percentage of students in kindergarten below benchmarks has decreased from 62 percent to 47 percent this year. She described students making substantial progress relative to benchmarks, except in Grades 4 and 5. She said she believed the return of the Hill for Literacy next year would address that. Sixth grade data is better.

Mr. Traber said 4th grade seemed stagnant. Ms. Zanauskas said the shift in 4th grade is not unique to Bridgeport.

Ms. Zanauskas displayed Reading Plus data separately for Grades 7-8 and 9-12. She said the percentage of students reading five or more years below grade level decreased in Grades 7 and 8 from 51 percent to 36 percent. The percentage of students reading at grade level increased from 17 percent to 33 percent.

Ms. Zanauskas said the high school percentage for reading five or more years below grade level decreased

from 51 to 34 percent. She said because of the semester-based schedule, it is not the only measure of growth.

In response to a question, Ms. Zanauskas described the use of WIN blocks for students.

In response to a question, Ms. Zanauskas said 4,200 students enrolled in Grades 9 to 12 have taken Benchmark 3 so far compared to 8,000 enrolled at the beginning of the year. There was a discussion of the difficulty comparing data in Grades 9 to 12.

In response to a question, Ms. Zanauskas said she could provide an update after June 5th.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod