

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April 9, 2025, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:31 p.m. Present were chair Willie Medina and members Joseph Sokolovic and Maritza Estremera Jimenez*. Board members Andre Woodson* and Albert Benejan Grajales were present.

(*remote participation)

Interim Supt. Dr. Royce Avery* was present.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of the committee on March 4, 2025. The motion was seconded by Ms. Estremera Jimenez. The motion was approved by a 2-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Medina and Estremera Jimenez. Mr. Sokolovic abstained.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of the committee on March 12, 2025. The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina. The motion was approved by a 2-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Medina and Estremera Jimenez. Mr. Sokolovic abstained.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of the committee on April 9, 2025. The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina. The motion was approved by a 2-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Medina and Estremera Jimenez. Mr. Sokolovic abstained.

The first agenda item was on food services personnel professional I standards, Policy 3542.41.

Dr. Albert Sackey, assistant superintendent, said the policy includes the code of conduct for food service staff. He said the policy was reviewed by Jorge Garcia and Keoma Steele. Dr. Sackey said the mandated policy discusses conflict of interest, prohibited actions, and ethical rules. He described other provisions.

In response to a question, Dr. Sackey said he understood there is currently no policy in this area. The department has been policies in terms of best practice.

In response to a question, Mr. Medina said this is a CAFE-recommended policy and state mandated. He said the policy included zero tolerance for the staff accepting gifts. Mr. Sokolovic said he believed there was an allowance for minimum gifts given by students in board's policies.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve food service personnel professional standards policy, 3542.41, waiving the first and second reading, for immediate implementation at the next Regular board meeting.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on charging policy for service, Policy 3542.43.

Dr. Sackey said the district falls under the community eligibility conditions which allows all students to receive free food. He said students would have to pay additional meals. He said this is a standard one-page policy.

Mr. Steele said adult meals and snack bar sales have charges.

In response to a question, Mr. Steele said students would have to pay for a second meal, but it is at the discretion of the cafeteria lead. He said students who are part of Lighthouse or an after-school program can receive food to take home via the supper program.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said he knows a lot of food is thrown away and he has seen it, but we have to charge students for a second meal. Mr. Steele said food is not thrown away in the garbage. He said strict records are kept because that is the only way to

receive reimbursements to allow students to eat for free and to be compliant with the USDA.

Mr. Sokolovic noted sharing tables are used in the cafeterias. Mr. Steele said the sharing tables are not really a policy due to food temperature concerns but are implemented by some schools.

Mr. Steele described the rules for providing meals. He said the policy has to be used or the funding source might be at risk. He said a student can only receive one meal during a meal period.

Mr. Woodson said he understood Mr. Benejan Grajales's frustration, but we run a business and have a bottom line, and we have to follow it. Mr. Sokolovic said we had to follow policies, but we are not a business; we're a nonprofit organization and we have to spend all our money.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *"to approve the charging policy for food services, Policy 3542.4. waiving the first and second read for immediate implementation."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *"to change the order of business by moving up E, L and N for immediate consideration in order, and then returning to the order of business."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the homeless students policy, 5118.1. Dr. Sackey described the homeless policies as trying into get at the barriers preventing homeless students from coming to school.

Dr. Cheryl Faga, director of SEL and student affairs said the policies enables students to remain in their school.

There was a discussion of optional language.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to move to the full board homeless policy, 5118.1, waiving the first and second read for immediate implementation.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Estremera Jimenez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the Title I parental and family engagement policy, Policy 6172.4.

Dr. Sackey said this covers parent outreach, communication with parents, compacts and expectations. He said the major change adds “PTSO” to “PAC.”

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve *“Title I parental and family engagement policy/Title I, 6172.4, waiving the first read and second read.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on school climate policy, 5131.911.

Dr. Faga said this is the result of new legislation, which includes restorative practices that the board has already adopted. She said there will be a district-level coordinator and a school climate specialist at each school. She said surveys on school climate are also included, with a climate plan to be created by December of each year.

Mr. Sokolovic noted the challenges of recruiting community members for school governance councils.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to refer to the full board the school climate policy, 5131.911 as presented, waiving the first and second read for immediate implementation.”* The motion was seconded Ms. Estremera Jimenez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on evaluation and employment evaluation of coaches, Policy 4115.3.

Dr. Sackey recognized Paul Catuccio, director of athletics, for ensuring that Bassick and Harding are now part of the SWC conference for all sports.

Dr. Sackey said the policy ensures there is an annual evaluation policy for all coaches in the district by the athletic director. It will also allow an effective means

for administrators to be able to make recommendations for continued employment where appropriate.

Mr. Sokolovic asked if the provisions on written terminations were in state statutes. Dr. Sackey said he would have to get back to the board on that. Mr. Catuccio said all coaches are at-will employees. Mr. Sokolovic said he was in favor of unions, but he did not want to create additional red tape which is not a mandate. Mr. Medina said there was a reference that seemed to indicate there was state statute.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to refer to the full board for approval evaluation and employment of coaches, Policy 4115.3 as presented, with the recommendation for a waiver of the first and second read.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on drug and alcohol testing for bus drivers, Policy 4212.42.

Dr. Sackey said we do not currently have this policy, but the elements within the policy are built into the district's contract with We Transport. He described provisions of the policy. He recommended the language in the first section and not the alternative version.

Andrew Ifill of We Transport was present. He described the testing and training process. He said the company has an employee assistance program.

Mr. Medina said he has been a CDL driver for over 24 years and he worked with Mr. Ifill for about ten years. He said he knows how the policy works.

In response to a question, Mr. Ifill described the training process, which includes a criminal background check.

In response to a question, Mr. Ifill described the frequency of accidents. He said there had not been a major one recently, and he described the efforts to promote safety. He said there is an extra aide present for students with special needs.

Mr. Medina said he described safety as a six-letter word but a seven-day job. He described some of his experiences.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to refer to the full board for approval of the drug and alcohol testing for bus drivers, Policy 4212.42, waiving the first and second read for immediate implementation.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on sexual harassment, Title IX.

Dr. Sackey said there was another policy on the mandated policy on the reduction in force for certified staff. He said it is already addressed in the collective bargaining agreement, which why it is not on the agenda.

Dr. Sackey said the sexual harassment policy is the exact same policy shared by Mr. Costello previously, and it applies to staff and students. The policy discusses the grievance procedures, timelines, as well as requirements regarding evidence, response, and privacy. There are also definitions of terms.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said we wanted to remove people-specific information and reference their roles. Dr. Sackey said that would be done when it is presented to the board.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to refer to the full board for approval sexual harassment policy/Title IX policy of the Educational Amendment of 1972, Policy 5145.44, waiving the first and second read for immediate implementation.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Estremera Jimenez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was Policy 5145.511 on sexual abuse prevention and education program.

Dr. Sackey said this is another mandated policy that includes definition of terms. Professional development for staff and age-appropriate materials for students

are also covered. Reporting expectations are included, along with opt-out provisions for parents.

Mr. Sokolovic said he preferred opt-ins to opt-outs. Dr. Sackey said there were options in this area; he said CAGE offered both versions of the language. Mr. Sokolovic said he would agree to move it to the full board, but he would not waive the first and second read.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to move to the full board approval of prevention and education program, Policy 5145.511.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on internet safety policy and filtering, Policy 6141.323.

Jeff Postolowski, director of ITS, said the district had a policy in place, 6401, that addressed this. The proposed policy has new language they want introduced into board policies. He said the language has been modernized. He said he created Policy 6402 which covers specifically internet platform filtering.

Dr. Sackey said Mr. Postolowski took the recommendation from CAGE and made sure everything that was mandated was inside our policies. He said Mr. Postolowski looked at other district's policies.

Domenic Costello, chief human resource officer, said CAGE has been rewriting our policies and we've used the CAGE numbers. Mr. Postolowski said in the past we've entered the new policies into our numbering convention. There was a discussion on the numbering of the policies in the board's policies.

Mr. Medina suggested retaining the CAGE numbering because 6401 and 6402 were not on the table now.

Dr. Avery suggested combining what Mr. Postolowski recommended into the CAGE policy. He said we need to get this policy on the books.

There was a discussion of how to number the policy provisions.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested an amendment removing, number five, "material critical of school administration, teachers, staff, students, or anyone associated with the social district is prohibited." He said students would not be allowed to voice their concerns to us or report something such as bullying.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said the language was vague. She suggested clarifying the word "critical."

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski said the language predated his tenure in the district.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez suggested prohibiting student-specific information. Mr. Postolowski noted the language applies to all technology in the district, not just students.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested the language of sending abusive or harassing material referencing school administration, teachers, staff, students, or anyone associated with the social district is prohibited.

Mr. Postolowski said when the policy was created the internet was barely a thing and before social media.

There was a discussion of how the policy should read.

Mr. Medina moved *“internet safety policy and filtering and Children’s Internet Protection Act, Policy 6141.323, to be amended to the 6401 policy reflecting everything that’s inside 6141.323, including the amendment of line at 6401, the rules, rule number five, taking out the word ‘critical’ and adding the words ‘abusive/harassing material.’”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to push to the full board for approval the internet safety policy/filtering – Internet Children’s Protection Act, listed as 6141.323, which is incorporating Policy 6401, 6402, 6403, and 6404 and 6405 as amended, and changing the numbering from Policy 6141.323 to list the policies previously.”*

The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on challenging curriculum policy, 6141.52.

Margaret Hughes, executive director of school turnaround, this is a state Department of Education mandate. Schools will have criteria to identify students in grades 8 and 9 who will be eligible to take or enroll in an advanced course or program, and the requirement that students have an academic plan.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to send to the full board for approval the challenging curriculum policy, 6141.52, as presented, waiving the first and second read for immediate implementation.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Estremera Jimenez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the comparability of services – Title 1.

Dr. Sackey said the policy gives information on Title I and family engagement, at both the school and district levels.

Mr. Sokolovic discussed the use of “equal” and “equitable.” Dr. Sackey said it was language recommended by CAGE. Mr. Sokolovic suggested

checking to see if it was mandated language when the item reaches the full board. He suggested changes of “comparable” to “equitable” and “equivalency” to “equitable.”

Mr. Woodson said the language was neutral from CAFE. He suggested adopting the language because it was possible to amend it in the future.

Dr. Avery said he agreed with Mr. Woodson. He said administrators need wiggle room to implement policies because each scenario is different. Mr. Sokolovic asked Dr. Sackey to see if a change was allowable. He said the phrase “equitable” may give more flexibility than “comparable.”

Mr., Sokolovic moved *“to refer to the full board Item J, comparability of student services Title I, equivalence in instructional staff, and materials Policy 6161.3 to the full board for approval.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The next agenda was on survey of students/student privacy.

Dr. Sackey said this is another mandated policy that we don’t have. He said he would be sending a revised document with tracked changes to redundant items. He said it includes definitions and instructions for administering surveys.

Mr. Sokolovic discussed the opt-in versus opt-out provisions. He suggested matching policy language to the federal requirements rather than trying to weaken the parental permissions aspects. Dr. Sackey described the surveys the district typically does.

Mr. Medina moved *“to the move to the full board, Letter K, student/student privacy, Policy 6162.51 as presented, waiving the first and second reading.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on Series 3000, Section 3310 was a referral by a committee member.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said the referral was the result of board decisions about contracts. She noted the board needs to approve contracts over \$25,000. She suggested that language be included in all employee contracts and a requirement that the board chair sign off on such contracts. She also suggested adding language that employment was contingent on funding availability.

Mr. Sokolovic said the board came out of executive session and stated some contracts were invalid because they were not approved by the board. He said many of the contracts did not call for the board chair's signature. He said requiring this would protect us. He said this would be a simple fix, rather than going through a whole change of personnel policy.

He said it would clarify to the employee that their job is subject to board approval.

Mr. Costello said paragraph three is very far-reaching for the board because the items under \$25,000 are under the superintendent's purview. There was a discussion of union contracts.

Dr. Avery said this is the first time he's looked at this. He said it was important to have a discussion with the full board about this. He said he would like to share his past experience with contracts in future discussions.

Mr. Sokolovic noted there was a quorum of the board at the meeting. He said the policy would last into the future when the board members and the superintendent were no longer here. He said this was the place to have these discussions and the superintendent's concerns should be raised publicly, not privately.

Dr. Avery said Mr. Sokolovic was right and it was important to have public discussions. He said legal should have an opportunity to review policies.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said she viewed this as a conversation-starter. She said contracts are money taken away from our kids.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said it was good to have communication and he was glad the item was brought forward.

Mr. Medina said we want to be sure we are all accountable to one another as a board and transparent with each other. He said as a point of information that he was looking to have a discussion about a proposal to make every board member an ad hoc member of every committee, so that they are allowed to participate in executive sessions. Mr. Sokolovic said the words that should be used might be ex officio.

Dr. Sackey said the first read of Policy 5144.2, use of exclusionary timeout, had already occurred at the first board. He said it was reviewed, but never made it back to the full board. Mr. Medina requested Dr. Sackey send it to him.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod