

Tuesday, July 15, 2025

MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held July 15, 2025, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:06 p.m. Present were chair Willie Medina and members Joseph Sokolovic and Maritza Estremera Jimenez. Board members Andre Woodson\* and Akisha Cassermere\* were present. Board members Robert Traber\*, Albert Benejan Grajales\* and Jennifer Perez joined subsequently as noted.

(\*remote participation)

Interim Supt. Royce Avery was present.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of the committee on May 14, 2025. The motion was seconded by Ms. Estremera Jimenez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was interviews of candidates for assistant superintendent. Mr. Medina said invited to participate were Lizzette Martinez, Danielle Cauchon, and Dr. Avery if necessary.

Mr. Sokolovic said the meeting was called abruptly, and he was not in receipt of any resumes or any knowledge of the candidates to be interviewed. He said this was always provided in the board portal, which are not public documents. He said it was important to get off on the right start when we're doing hiring because over the last year and a half hiring has not gone according to policy and procedure.

Mr. Sokolovic said the board policy calls for three candidates to be interviewed for executive positions, but some of the positions on the agenda did not have three candidates. He suggested tabling the items and getting it into compliance.

Dr. Avery said everything he has done is through the advisement of the city attorneys and he tries to comply with the rules as superintendent. He said it was important to do things the right way.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was not trying to be combative, but the attorneys give the board advice which the board is free to take or not. Dr. Avery said he took the attorneys' advice, and the resumes were not provided in the board portal due to legal things we need to be mindful of.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said there were three internal candidates who applied for the position of Bassick High principal.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “*to go into executive session for the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction with the three candidates that will be presented to us.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Estremera Jimenez and unanimously approved.

Members Traber\* and Benejan Grajales\* joined the meeting.

The executive session began at 6:19 p.m.

The committee resumed in public session at 8:32 p.m.

Ms. Perez was now present.

Mr. Medina said the committee’s recommendation on the three candidates would be forwarded to the superintendent.

The next agenda item was on the interview of candidates for the assistant superintendent of human capital.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez moved “*to go into executive session for assistant superintendent of human capital.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

Invited to participate were the candidates, Board Chair Jennifer Perez; and Lizzette Martinez, Danielle Cauchon, and Dr. Avery as needed.

The executive session began at 8:34 p.m.

The committee reconvened in public session at 9:37 p.m.

The next agenda item was on the Bassick High principal position.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to go into executive session for the interview of the Bassick High School principal.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Estremera Jimenez and unanimously approved.

Mr. Traber said he would have been opposed to tabling this item because if there was any question it should be dealt with through the union in a grievance procedure.

Invited to participate were the committee, Ms. Perez; and Dr. Avery, Lizzette Martinez, and Danielle Cauchon as needed,

The executive session began at 9:39 p.m.

The committee resumed in public session at 10:04 p.m.

Mr. Medina said the committee would forward its recommendation to the superintendent.

Mr. Sokolovic said he discussed the need for more than one interviewee for a position, but this was a special case because this person should have never been removed from the position in the first place. He said going forward the committee expects more than one interviewee for the position of principal and adherence to the policy.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “*to move items four, five and six up in place of three.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was approval of the position of assistant chief of special education.

Michelle McKinley, chief of special education, said the agenda should be worded as assistant chief of special education.

Ms. McKinley said she was requesting the position to address the department’s needs related to IEP compliance, charter schools, out-of-district placements, and chronic absenteeism. She said the position was needed to maximize the focus on specific areas related to compliance. Two positions would be eliminated, therefore there will not be an additional financial impact. She said the anticipated savings with legal fees and compensatory services will also sustain the position.

In response to a question, Ms. McKinley said there are currently two directors in the department: director of psychological services and director of speech, hearing and OT. There are six supervisors that address instructional services, and one supervisor each for Skane, BLC, and the early childhood assessment team.

Mr. Sokolovic said he has trouble with eliminating on-the-ground personnel in favor of administrative personnel. Ms. McKinley described the behavioral support positions that will be eliminated.

In response to a question, Ms. McKinley said there should not be a gap in services for students. She said the new position would assist her in monitoring out-of-district placements and charter school services. She described the tracking of compensatory services and the need to fill certified positions.

Dr. Avery said the district has been dealing with out-of-compliance issues such as legal fees. Ms. McKinley said data indicates there has been a maximum of \$4.7 million in compensatory services on the high end.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said the state is still working through the additional special education funding that was provided as to what services qualify for the utilization of those dollars. He said the goal is to provide more services to the children, so we have

to do things differently. He said the state is looking at what we're doing, and providing funding that is not even publicized for things like training and curriculum.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said this position was specifically discussed with Dr. Abbey of the state assistance team.

In response to a question, Ms. McKinley said currently the special education supervisors spend between 60 to 70 percent of their time facilitating PPT/IEP meetings, which takes them away from campuses and providing support to teachers, especially new teachers. She said charter schools need monitoring of IEPs, just like any out-of-district placement, and this position would help with that.

Dr. Avery said he would like the special education compliance piece to be a part of Mr. Traber's academic committee. He noted there were currently 15 vacancies in certified special education teachers in the district, while a month ago there were 35.

In response to a question, Ms. McKinley said the two positions to be eliminated were vacant last year.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said there was a federal complaint on compliance in 2021, and it later was not addressed. A corrective action plan was implemented, which is being monitored. Ms.

McKinley described how noncompliance is determined.

Mr. Sokolovic said money can only be spent once, and we were not in a position to add positions, even though this is a necessary position. He said the state grant is directed at expanding special education services. He suggested holding off on eliminating the two positions.

Dr. Avery said he will look at adding those two positions back via the grant, if employees can be found, but he said, with his background in special education, he was all in involved in special education and the timing of this is of the essence.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez moved “*the assistant chief of special education to the full board.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and approved by a 2-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Medina and Estremera Jimenez. Mr. Sokolovic was not present.

The next agenda item was on agreement for 2025 Catalyst CT Assessment at Bassick High School.

Margaret Hughes, executive director of school turnaround, said two items were omitted from the Catalyst presentation that was done several months ago. The contracts were located in the grants department. She said this is for work that has been done in the past school year. A schoolwide



assessment to develop recommendations to improve schoolwide interventions and climate at Bassick was done.

In response to a question, Ms. Hughes said it was funded through Title IV. She said the total was \$35,002.

Mr. Sokolovic said we need to create a five-year calendar of expiring contracts so we can make sure these things don't happen. Dr. Avery said it sounded like a great recommendation. Mr. Traber said he agreed with Mr. Sokolovic.

In response to a question, Ms. Hughes said he did not believe there was a rollover provision in this contract.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said we have been working on getting the board chair to sign off on all contracts. Mr. Medina said he favored a living, breathing calendar of contracts.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *"to the full board an agreement for fiscal year 25 Catalyst CT assessment at Bassick High School."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on an agreement with Catalyst CT for SEL programming at Bassick High.

Ms. Hughes said Catalyst coordinated and carried out a SEL program from March 1st to June 30th. She described the program, including transition services for 9th graders.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve to the full board the agreement for the fiscal year 25 Catalyst CT SEL programming at Bassick High School.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Estremera Jimenez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on discussion of compensation of various executive level positions.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to go into executive session to discuss compensation of various executive level positions, A through H.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina.

Mr. Sokolovic said because it involved contracts it does qualify for executive session.

Invited to participate were committee members, Ms. Perez, and Dr. Avery.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The committee reconvened in public session at 11:18 p.m.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 11:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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