

Monday, April 21, 2025

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April 21, 2025, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Present were Chair Jennifer Perez, Vice Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Willie Medina, Maritza Estremera Jimenez, and Robert Traber. Secretary Albert Benejan Grajales, Andre Woodson, and Christine Baptiste-Perez arrived subsequently as noted.

Interim Supt. Dr. Royce Avery was present.

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m.

Nick Caruso and Jody Goeler of CAFE were present.

The agenda item was the fourth school board training session facilitated by CAFE, with the topic being finance.

Mr. Caruso said the June 16th meeting would have to be rescheduled. He said the meetings are part of the fees paid to CAFE, but there will be a fee for a future presenter traveling from Boston.

Ed Arum of the state technical assistance team was present. Mr. Arum described his background in school finance, facilities management, consulting work, and as a

superintendent. He also described the cooperation he had received during his work in Bridgeport.

Mr. Benejan Grajales joined the meeting.

Mr. Arum discussed the importance of goals, unfunded mandates, special education costs, and health insurance costs.

Mr. Woodson and Ms. Baptiste-Perez joined the meeting.

Mr. Arum continued his presentation. He said there was a need for simpler budget documents. There was a discussion of steps to be taken when the superintendent and the board disagree on budgetary matters.

Ms. Cassermere joined the meeting.

Mr. Arum discussed enrollment projections and its importance. He said the three of us are working for the benefit of the kids of Bridgeport. He said he has urged the commissioner of education to visit the district.

Mr. Arum discussed other costs impacting districts. He described the board's role in establishing priorities and the superintendent's responsibilities.

Dr. Avery mentioned the lack of modern systems in the district's departments and an inability to interact with other departments. He said in the last twelve years no one in the

district had access to the budget except the superintendent and the CFO.

In response to a question, Nestor Nkwo, chief financial officer, said the board's union contracts are on the district's website. He described budgetary information available on the website. Mr. Sokolovic said as long as he has been on the board, he has never seen a line-item transfer voted on. Mr. Nkwo said the district is still using MUNIS to process all requisitions. There was further discussion of the financial controls used in the district since Ms. Siegel was the CFO.

Mr. Caruso said one of the state's expectations is to see financial processes in place. Dr. Goeler said the intent is to give principals more authority over their budgets.

There was further discussion, including interactions in the district that have taken place with the state technical team.

Dr. Goeler said he submitted policies from the CAFE 3000 series. He said the board had made major process on policy updates so far.

Mr. Sokolovic said the state indicated the board was not properly overseeing the grants. There was a discussion of the status of this directive. Dr. Avery said he believed the district was in compliance.

Mr. Caruso said the next meeting would include discussion of the board's vision for goals.

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

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

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod