

Monday, July 21, 2025

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

Present were chair Jennifer Perez, Vice Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Secretary Albert Benejan Grajales, Andre Woodson*, and Akisha Cassermere* \. Willie Medina* and Robert Traber joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

*remote participation

Interim Supt. Royce Avery was present.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of June 18, 2025. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic. The motion was approved by a 4-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Perez, Benejan Grajales, Woodson and Cassermere. Mr. Sokolovic abstained.

Margaret Hughes, executive director of school turnaround, said there were two Catalyst contracts being presented for work performed in the 2024-25 school year. She said they should have been brought up to the board when the other Catalyst contracts were presented but they were not.

Ms. Hughes said the first one, for \$35,000, was for a comprehensive schoolwide assessment to develop recommendations for schoolwide interventions and school climate at Bassick. The second contract was for \$58,000, for Catalyst coordinating and carrying out SEL (social-emotional learning) programming at Bassick from March 1st to June 30th.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “*to approve for the fiscal year 2025 the agreement Catalyst CT assessment at Bassick High.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

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

The next agenda item was on the position of assistant chief of special education. Michele McKinley, chief of special education, said she requesting the position to address the department’s needs related to IEP compliance, overseeing charter schools, out-of-district placements, and to address chronic absenteeism. She said the need was created due to needing to maximize our focus on specific areas related to the compliance. She said, working with the state assistance team, we’ve identified specific areas of compliance that require more focus. Two positions, which have been vacant, will be

eliminated to create the new position. She said there would likely be a reduction of legal costs and compensatory services.

Mr. Medina* joined the meeting.

In response to a question, Ms. McKinley described how the district got so far behind in compensatory services, which she said has been accumulated due to the vacancies. She said a plan has recently been developed to address the compensatory services. She said a position would add oversight in dealing with the campuses and administrators. She said there is a lot of effort to fill vacancies with certified teachers.

Dr. Avery said this person would be boots on the ground and inside the schools and charter schools making sure things are being done properly. He said supervisors will also be out in the field doing the same thing. He described the importance of oversight. He said the state technical team has helped us understand where we are. He said special education was huge in the district.

Mr. Sokolovic said this does cost money and impacts the budget. He said about \$450,000 was spent to put positions back at the last meeting. He said the money could be put in the Internal Service Fund or used to bring back other positions. He said the board should be in

control of the budget, but only the superintendent's desires are being brought to the table.

Ms. Cassermere said for many decades our test scores have been challenged and special education is a huge problem in the district. She said this is a first step towards showing the state we are serious about changing the status quo. She said Ms. McKinley can't do it all by herself. She added that it was a way to provide support to teachers.

Mr. Traber arrived at the meeting.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved "*to approve the position of the assistant chief of special education.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber. The motion was approved by a 6-1 vote.

Voting in favor were members Woodson, Cassermere, Benejan Grajales, Traber, Perez, and Medina. Mr. Sokolovic was opposed.

Mr. Sokolovic said he voted no because it was unaffordable, not that it's not necessary.

The next agenda item was on the approval of compensation and agreement terms of various executive level positions. The positions were assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction; assistant superintendent of human capital; chief financial officer; chief of special education; chief operating officer, chief

information officer; assistant chief of special education; executive director of school turnaround; and executive director of school leadership.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to go into executive to discuss the aforementioned compensation agreements.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

Dr. Avery was invited to join the board members.

The executive session began at 6:47 p.m.

The meeting resumed in public session at 8:00 p.m.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to authorize Dr. Avery to enter into the compensation and agreement terms for various executive level positions as discussed in executive session.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod