

ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

BOARD OF EDUCATION

AT GERALDINE JOHNSON SCHOOL

475 LEXINGTON AVENUE

BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT

HELD DECEMBER 11, 2023

PRESENT:

JOSEPH GANIM, Mayor  
CHRISTINE BAPTISTE-PEREZ, Chair  
AKISHA CASSERMERE, Vice Chair  
JENNIFER PEREZ, Secretary  
ROBERT TRABER  
ALBERT BENEJAN GRAJALES  
JOSEPH SOKOLOVIC  
WILLIE MEDINA  
TIHEBA BAIN  
ANDRE WOODSON

CARMELA LEVY-DAVID, Superintendent of Schools

Transcribed by: John McLeod

1 (The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m.)

2 MAYOR GANIM: If you don't know me, I'm Mayor  
3 Joseph Ganim, and by charter of the City of Bridgeport,  
4 it's my pleasure and honor at the beginning of the  
5 year, at the beginning of the term, to chair the  
6 Organizational Meeting, this Organizational Meeting, of  
7 the Bridgeport Board of Education. And it's my pleasure  
8 to do so.

9 And my role is somewhat limited and procedural,  
10 but I like to claim it's important, nonetheless. It's  
11 the - it's really the one time at the beginning of the  
12 year that I get to join the Board of Ed, to say  
13 congratulations, I guess formally now, that they've  
14 been sworn in, new and existing members of the Board of  
15 Education, citywide elected officials, who are charged  
16 with the high duty, privilege, and honor of guiding our  
17 new superintendent as - as we welcome her. She's beyond  
18 the welcoming point; she's here and she's moving. But  
19 to recommit ourselves, I think collectively, I know as  
20 members of the board, as members of the school  
21 administration, as members of the city administration -  
22 and I see councilman - Councilwoman Maria Valle here  
23 representing the City Council as well - to ensure that  
24 we do everything that we can to make Bridgeport schools  
25 the place of learning the best that we can for all of

1       our students.

2               So, I'm happy to join tonight. So, the public  
3 knows - and we kind of were just going over it  
4 informally - what - how this will go. If you have the  
5 agenda in front of you, it's noticed as the Annual  
6 Organization Meeting - and I'm reading from the - from  
7 the notice. Meeting of the Board of Education, which  
8 will be held Monday, December 11th, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.,  
9 here at - here at Geraldine Johnson School, 475  
10 Lexington Avenue, Bridgeport. Public viewing access to  
11 the meeting will be made available through - and it  
12 gives the public access, which I could read to you, but  
13 you can see it as well. It's [www-dot-bridgeportedu-at](http://www-dot-bridgeportedu-at-net/slash/stream)  
14 [net, slash, stream](http://www-dot-bridgeportedu-at-net/slash/stream).

15              And so, from there the agenda is fairly simple.  
16 It's - it begins with a call to order. So, accept this  
17 as the call to order. And it's my assumption, I think  
18 accurately, this meeting is being recorded at this  
19 time, and so we are on the record, and the meeting has  
20 begun. It's a little after 6:00 p.m.

21              And the call to order is - with the first order of  
22 business - or number two on the agenda - is the  
23 election of officers.

24              And so that will proceed in the following way. I  
25 will - the first position, which is chair or president

1 of the board, which I will call for an opening of the  
2 nominations, and any member of the board can nominate  
3 any member of the board. And we've in the past have  
4 held that you need a second to the nomination, and if  
5 that becomes a point of contention, we'll discuss it at  
6 that time. But at this point, accept that it seems to  
7 be the practice that I don't think will be problematic  
8 tonight, there will be a second for a nomination, even  
9 if there's only one nomination. And the nomination will  
10 remain open to see if there's a second or a third, or  
11 as many nominations, and then at some point I'll  
12 entertain a motion, with a second - entertain a motion  
13 to close nominations.

14 Either way, if there's only one nomination and it  
15 basically appears to be uncontested - if there's more  
16 than one, there will be paper ballots, which has been  
17 the practice for voting for the officers in the Board  
18 of Education in the City of Bridgeport, at least  
19 through my tenure. And they'll be handed out by the  
20 secretary - and if we need to officially nominate our  
21 secretary - say it again - Rita Valle. And my apologies  
22 for not knowing your name before that. Unless there's  
23 objection - is our - our secretary, or the secretary  
24 pro tem or whatever the appropriate term is, so that  
25 she can handle the ballots and take us through the

1 process.

2 The members of the board will fill out their  
3 ballots; they'll pass them back in. She will then  
4 proceed to open them and count them out loud here in  
5 everyone's presence, and the results will be what the  
6 results are, and we'll announce the election of the  
7 chair or the president.

8 And at that point, I will, along with others,  
9 welcome the chair to take over, and will cede my seat  
10 and allow that chair to run the rest of the meeting,  
11 and of course continue on with the second item, which  
12 will be the vice chair and secretary, and then other  
13 matters, including the approval of organizational  
14 minutes, that are on the agenda for tonight.

15 So, with that, unless there's any questions or  
16 points of order anyone wants to add anything, correct.  
17 I make mistakes; if I did something that doesn't seem  
18 comfortable or familiar to you, let me know.

19 Hearing none, let the record reflect that we're  
20 going to begin now with the election of officers, and I  
21 will open nominations for the position of chair or  
22 sometimes referred to as president of the Board of  
23 Education. I'll look to my left.

24 MR. WOODSON: I'd like to nomination Christine  
25 Baptiste-Perez.

1 MR. BENEJAN GRAJALES: Madam Chair [*sic*] -

2 MAYOR GANIM: Okay Albert.

3 MR. BENEJAN GRAJALES: Madam Chair, I'd like to  
4 nominate Joe Sokolovic

5 MAYOR GANIM: Okay. Let me do this first. And the  
6 nominations are open. I just want the record to reflect  
7 that all the members of the board are present by name  
8 but let me just call their names.

9 Tiheba Bain. Christine Baptiste-Perez. Christine,  
10 right?

11 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: Yes.

12 MAYOR GANIM: Albert Benejan.

13 MAYOR GANIM: Akisha Cassermere. How do I pronounce  
14 it?

15 MS. CASSERMERE: Cassermere.

16 MAYOR GANIM: Cassermere. My apologies, too.  
17 Willie Medina.

18 MR. MEDINA: Present.

19 MAYOR GANIM: Jennifer Perez.

20 MS. PEREZ: Present.

21 MAYOR GANIM: Joe Sokolovic.

22 MR. SOKOLOVIC: Present.

23 MAYOR GANIM: Robert Traber.

24 MR. TRABER: Here.

25 MAYOR GANIM: And of course, he just made the

1 nomination, Andre Woodson. So, we not only have a  
2 quorum, but we have a full complement of the board. I  
3 just thought it was important to put that on the  
4 record.

5 And so, where we left off was Andre Woodson made a  
6 nomination. Andre, would you repeat the nomination.

7 MR. WOODSON: Christine Baptiste-Perez.

8 MAYOR GANIM: For Christine Baptiste-Perez. Okay.  
9 And since we're not saying - I would like to see if  
10 there's a second for that. Is there a second for that  
11 nom -

12 MS. PEREZ: I'll second that.

13 MAYOR GANIM: There's a second with that  
14 nomination. And then, Albert, did you have a  
15 nomination?

16 MR. BENEJAN GRAJALES: Yes, I nominate Mr. Joe  
17 Sokolovic to be the board chair.

18 MAYOR GANIM: So, Albert nominates Joe Sokolovic.  
19 Is there a second to that nomination?

20 MR. TRABER: I second that.

21 MAYOR GANIM: Okay, So, we have two nominations  
22 and two seconds.

23 Is there any other names that would like to be  
24 placed or put into nomination at this time? Hearing  
25 none, I will close nominations.

1           We have two candidates; they've been nominated and  
2           seconded. And as our protocol and practice has been  
3           describe, Madam Secretary, would you at this time  
4           distribute the ballots.

5           MS. VALLE-SHASTRI: Joseph Sokolovic for Joseph  
6           Sokolovic. Christine Baptiste-Perez for Christine  
7           Baptiste-Perez. Akisha Cassermere for Christine  
8           Baptiste-Perez. Thiheba Bain for Christine Baptiste-  
9           Perez. Jennifer Perez for Christine Baptiste-Perez.  
10          Willie Medina for Joe Sokolovic. Andre Woodson for  
11          Christine Baptiste-Perez. Robert Traber for Joe  
12          Sokolovic. And Albert Benejan Grajales for Joe  
13          Sokolovic.

14          MAYOR GANIM: Thank you. It appears - and I think  
15          I'm accurate - that there are four votes for Joe  
16          Sokolovic and five votes Christine Baptiste-Perez. And  
17          with five votes, Christine Baptiste has been elected  
18          the chair or the president of the Board of Education.  
19          Congratulations.

20          I'll turn it over - I told you, I don't get to the  
21          hammer, but I'll just tap it lightly, and say thank you  
22          for all members of the board for your willingness and  
23          commitment to serve, and to work in partnership,  
24          certainly with the superintendent, with the City  
25          Council, and myself and members of the administration,



1 to do just what I know all of you ran for office or  
2 elected for office to do. We look forward to doing it  
3 in partnership, and with our new superintendent's  
4 vision and leadership, to make sure that we meet and  
5 exceed the goals for the children and the students of  
6 the City of Bridgeport schools.

7 Thank you so much, and I'll pass the agenda over  
8 to you. Come on over; you take the hammer from here, if  
9 you need. Would you rather move over that way?

10 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: Yeah. We will now proceed  
11 with nominations for vice chair of the Bridgeport Board  
12 of Education.

13 Mr. Woodson.

14 MR. WOODSON: I want to nominate Akisha  
15 Cassermere.

16 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: We have a nomination for  
17 Akisha Cassermere. Do I have a second?

18 MS. PEREZ: Second.

19 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: Second by Jennifer Perez.

20 MR. SOKOLOVIC: Nominate Willie Medina.

21 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: Nomination for Willie Medina.  
22 Do I have a second?

23 MR. BENEJAN GRAJALES: I second. Mr. Benejan.

24 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: Second by Albert Benejan. And  
25 now we'll proceed with the votes for vice chair.

1 MS. VALLE-SHASTRI: So, our first voting ballot by  
2 Willie Medina for Willie Medina. Tiheba Bain for Akisha  
3 Cassermere. Akisha Cassermere for Akisha Cassermere.  
4 Christine Baptiste-Perez for Akisha Cassermere.  
5 Jennifer Perez for Akisha Cassermere. Robert Traber for  
6 Willie Medina. Andre Woodson for Akisha Cassermere.  
7 Joseph Sokolovic for Willie Medina. Albert Benejan  
8 Grajales for Willie Medina.

9 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: Congratulations to vice chair  
10 of the Bridgeport Board of Education, Ms. Akisha  
11 Cassermere.

12 The next officer for election is secretary of the  
13 Bridgeport Board of Education. I will now open the  
14 floor for nominations.

15 MR. SOKOLOVIC: I'd like to nominate Albert  
16 Benejan Grajales.

17 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: We have a nomination for  
18 Albert Benejan Grajales.

19 Mr. Woodson.

20 MR. WOODSON: I have a nomination for Ms. Jennifer  
21 Perez.

22 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: And we have a nomination for  
23 Ms. Jennifer Perez.

24 Is there a second for either candidate's name I've  
25 heard so far?

1 MS. CASSERMERE: I'll second Jennifer Perez.

2 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: I have a second for Jennifer  
3 Perez.

4 MR. MEDINA: I'll second Albert Benejan.

5 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: There is a second for Albert  
6 Benejan. Are there any other nominations.

7 Seeing none, we'll proceed with the ballots.

8 MS. VALLE-SHASTRI: For the position of secretary.  
9 Albert Benejan Grajales votes for Albert Benejan  
10 Grajales. Joseph Sokolovic votes for Albert Benejan  
11 Grajales. Andre Woodson votes for Jennifer Perez.  
12 Jennifer Perez for Jennifer Perez. Christine Baptiste-  
13 Perez for Jennifer Perez. Akisha Cassermere for  
14 Jennifer Perez. Tiheba Bain for Jennifer Perez. Robert  
15 Traber for Albert Benejan. Willie Medina for Jennifer  
16 Perez.

17 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: Congratulations, Ms. Jennifer  
18 Perez on being secretary of the Board of Education.

19 The next item on the agenda is approval of the  
20 2022 Organizational minutes - meeting minutes.

21 Is there any questions or comments?

22 MR. SOKOLOVIC: Madam Chair.

23 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: Yes.

24 MR. SOKOLOVIC: I'd like to make a motion to  
25 approve the organizational minutes from 2022.

1 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: Okay. There's been a motion  
2 to approve the organizational minutes from 2022. Is  
3 there a second?

4 MS. PEREZ: Second.

5 MR. BENEJAN GRAJALES: Second, Mr. Benejan.

6 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: It's been seconded by Ms.  
7 Perez. All right. Is there any discussion, comments, or  
8 edits?

9 MS. CASSERMERE: I abstain.

10 MS. BAIN: I abstain.

11 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: We're not voting yet. Okay.  
12 So, all in favor for the approval of the 2022 minutes,  
13 say aye.

14 ("Ayes" were sounded.)

15 MR. SOKOLOVIC: Point - I'm sorry. Point of order.  
16 The majority of new members were not here for the last  
17 organizational meeting, and unless they watched, they  
18 really should be abstaining.

19 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: It's their decision to vote.  
20 And I'll take their word that if they said they've  
21 watched and they're voting on it, that they are doing  
22 so correctly.

23 Okay. So, all in favor?

24 ("Ayes" were sounded.)

25 (Voting in favor were members Baptiste-Perez, Benejan

1 Grajales, Sokolovic, and Woodson.)

2 Any abstentions?

3 MR. TRABER: Abstain

4 MS. BAIN: Abstain.

5 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: There's Mr. Traber, Ms.

6 Cassermere, and Ms. Bain, and Ms. Perez.

7 MS. PEREZ: Abstain

8 BAPTISTE-PEREZ: Mr. Medina abstains. The ayes have  
9 it. Approved for the organizational minute meeting -  
10 Organizational Meeting minutes have been approved.

11 The next item on the agenda is adjournment for the  
12 organizational meeting. There will be a Regular Meeting  
13 following this around 6:52.

14 So, all in favor for adjournment?

15 ("Ayes" were sounded.)

16 MS. BAPTISTE-PEREZ: Any nays? Hearing none, this  
17 meeting has adjourned.

18 (The meeting was adjourned at 6:28 p.m.)

## C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE FOREGOING IS A TRUE  
AND ACCURATE TRANSCRIPT OF THE RECORDING OF THE  
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF  
EDUCATION, HELD AT GERALDINE JOHNSON SCHOOL, 475  
LEXINGTON AVENUE, BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT, ON  
DECEMBER 11, 2023.

DATED THIS 15TH DAY OF DECEMBER 2023.

\_\_\_\_\_  
JOHN McLEOD