

Monday, May 22, 2023

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 22, 2023, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 Saint Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

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

Present were Chair Bobbi Brown, Secretary Albert Benejan, Michael Maccarone*, Robert Traber, and Joseph Sokolovic.

Vice Chair Christine Baptiste-Perez, David Gelin*, and Akisha Cassermere* arrived subsequently as noted.

(*remote participation)

Interim Supt. Alyshia Perrin was present.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:

Jaleel Stewart of Harding highlighted upcoming end-of-the-year activities: a law and finance fair; Capstone projects; debate team events; a medical career fair; the annual field day; and a celebration of Mr. Brown, who will be leaving as principal. He thanked Mr. Brown for his hard work and dedication to the school for the last nine years.

Julia Estrella of Bridgeport Military Academy highlighted the senior prom and the annual Fun Day. She said the NJROTC is having its change of command ceremony and cadets are getting ready for finals. She said the military ball will be on June 9th.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez arrived at the meeting.

Brenda Ronsa of Bassick highlighted senior soccer players who earned scholarships; the visit by thirty juniors to a careers exposition at Housatonic Community College; a visit by seniors to Fairfield University to see the play *Eurydice*; a visit to the Westport Country Playhouse to see *Ain't Misbehavin'*; and the PTSO's celebration of Cinco de Mayo.

Isabella Forero of the Biotech School at Fairchild Wheeler highlighted a PTSO-sponsored evening; a blood drive on May 5th; the annual prom on May 11th; and upcoming final exams and projects.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Mr. Sokolovic moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of May 4, 2023. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

Mr. Benejan requested approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of May 8, 2023, be tabled. He said he did not have a chance to check the translation of people speaking in Spanish.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to postpone approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of May 9, 2023. The motion was seconded by Mr. Maccarone.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the minutes are created from the English translation, and they are summaries, not verbatim transcriptions. Mr. Benejan said some words were not translated correctly and he wanted the message of the people to be clear. He said he notified Ms. Perrin about the translation services that were used.

Mr. Benejan said he would check the translation on the YouTube recording and provide it to Supt. Perrin for transmission to the bilingual department.

The motion was approved by 5-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Benejan, Sokolovic, Brown, Traber, and Maccarone. Ms. Baptiste-Perez was opposed.

CHAIR REPORT:

Ms. Brown reported the board has met with the superintendent search firm. She said the search firm reduced the field to nine candidates, and we ended up with five candidates; and we have moved forward with four candidates, and recently one has dropped out. Three candidates will move forward to the semifinals. She said further details will be announced.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:

Mr. Sokolovic said the Diversity Equity & Inclusion Committee might have to meet in August due to the shortage of dates in June.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Finance Committee met and spoke to city representatives about hiring a lobbyist. He said they seemed pretty much dead set against it, and they convinced us even more than we need a lobbyist of our own. He said he learned from Great City Schools most big districts use their own lobbyist. He said an RFP is on the agenda this evening.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Lighthouse Program was discussed and it was learned that it was benefitting to the tune of \$500,000 in rental fees, which will be looked at in the Governance Committee.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Governance Committee met and reviewed the school building policy and fee waivers received by Lighthouse and others. He said it was time to revisit what Lighthouse pays. He said Lighthouse representatives have been invited to the next meeting to explain why we should subsidize a city program.

Mr. Sokolovic said the student discipline and cyberbullying policies were discussed. There was also an update on the school moving policy. He said the whole school agreement with Achievement First was discussed, which is a state statute the board is supposed to be following. He said this was the first time this issue was addressed in his six years on the board.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Finance Committee would meet on June 14th and the Governance Committee on June 15th.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the Health, Safety & Facilities Committee met on May 9th. There was a presentation on grants; a discussion on how to use the remaining ARP ESSER funds; and a building report on Hall and Edison Schools. She said Edison and Hall are extremely old and have not been updated. There were strong suggestions that if budget cuts have to be made those two schools would be of interest if buildings had to be closed.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said there was a further discussion regarding a clear and consistent districtwide policy for facilities usage during sporting events. She said this was the

result of incidents at sporting events where things got out of hand or students were not allowed to enter.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said there was also a discussion on grants on physical and mental health, as well as a presentation on school resource officers.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the date of the next meeting has not been determined yet.

Ms. Brown said the Personnel & Contracts Committee will meet on May 30th.

Mr. Benejan said the Students & Families Committee will meet on May 25th at Central High.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said a date for the next Teaching & Learning Committee has not been determined yet.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Supt. Perrin said there was work group stakeholder meeting held today on Bassick and BMA. She said there was conversation about whether there would be an academy model or a school within a school. She said the Danbury Junior ROTC program will be visited. School climate, culture, and construction was also looked at.

The superintendent said there was a meeting at the adult education site at St. Michael's on May 18th to discuss relocation and the new facility. She said we will remain at Kossuth Street through October 31, 2023, and relocate in November.

Supt. Perrin said scoliosis screening is still going on in Grades 5, 7, and 8. DIBELS assessments for Grades 7 and 8 will take place through the end of this week and the students will also engage in the Reading Plus survey.

The superintendent said Grades 2 to 8 will take its HMH math assessment this week. The student school climate survey is scheduled for June 5th through June 9th for Grades 3 to 8.

Supt. Perrin said currently 93 percent of NGSS assessments have been completed and SBAC is at 96 percent completion.

The superintendent described non-funded grant agreements for 2023-24: Council of Churches mentoring and short-term support; UConn college and career advisors will begin work with Bassick and Harding; Elevate Bridgeport will provide support in four areas; University of Bridgeport will provide course offerings to high school students in dual enrollment; Western Governors University's online university to provide access to higher education for district employees; an agreement with Southern Connecticut State University for student teaching; a UConn teacher residency agreement; Read Squad mentoring for Grade 3 students; BuildOn engagement to offer 400 students in service learning programs; BPFE mentoring for academic achievement and college and career success; Today's Students, Tomorrow's Teachers programs; Child and Family Guidance Center's work with parenting and pregnant teens; and Big Brothers and Big Sisters promotion of success through mentorships.

Supt. Perrin said through April 2023 the district holds its chronic absenteeism at 30 percent, which is lower than comparable districts.

The superintendent said the technology showcase took place at Fairchild Wheeler. The citywide spelling bee will be on May 24th. The quarterly recognition will take place on May 31st. The Grade 7 and 8 math meet will be held at Sacred Heart on June 1st.

Supt. Perrin said the PAC/PTSO roundtable will take place on June 7th, at Columbus School. A job fair will be held on June 3rd. High graduation is June 12th.

The superintendent congratulated Mikeya Stovall, a Grade 3 teacher at Read School, who received the Connecticut Education Association's highest award. She also congratulated Zachary Allen of Fairchild Wheeler Aerospace who was selected as a finalist in the Math Con in Chicago with the other top one percent of students. He finished fourth in the nation for juniors.

Supt. Perrin congratulated students who excelled in the Law Day debates.

Mr. Benejan said the meeting today about Bassick and BMA was good, but he had concerns that he would send to Dr. Baldwin. He said he did not agree with having the schools together.

In response to a question, Supt. Perrin said community groups were invited to the stakeholder group on Bassick/BMA. She said no questions were asked of the mayor at the groundbreaking about the resilience project.

In response to a question, the superintendent said she is requesting the principals communicate the availability of the programs presented by community partners. Social workers

and guidance counselors market those programs with the social-emotional components.

In response to a question, Supt. Perrin said there is no cost to take the University of Bridgeport dual enrollment courses; transferring the credits may depend on the institution. She said the Western Governors University courses are provided at a discount or a sliding scale.

In response to a question, the superintendent said the church hosting the adult education program agreed to a short-term lease beyond June 30th to October 31st.

Mr. Benejan said he attended the adult education meeting. He said there was a lack of communication before, but now parents understand the situation.

In response to a question, Supt. Perrin said the costs for the lease extension will remain the same. There is a cap on repairs of \$5,000 per month. She said she will share the lease with the board.

OLD BUSINESS:

The next agenda item was on a second read of Policy 9171, remote board member participation. Ms. Brown said the document was provided in the board packet.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to waive the second read in its entirety and focus on the one change made before we move on to the next motion to approve.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic read bullet 11, which was added at the last meeting: The chairperson of the board or the chair of the

committee may participate remotely in an in-person meeting, but when doing so may not function as the chair for the in-person meeting. In order for the chairperson of the board or the chair of the committee to participate, he/she must designate another board member who will be physically present in the meeting room to act as chair of the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve 9171, remote board meeting participation and in-person and committee meetings, as presented in the second read.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez asked if non-committee members could be chosen to chair a committee under this provision.

Mr. Sokolovic said the word “board” could be replaced by “committee.”

Mr. Sokolovic moved to amend by striking the word “board” in the fourth line and insert “committee.” The amendment was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez.

Mr. Traber recommended to leave “board” and make it “member.” Mr. Sokolovic said only committee members had the power to vote.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez withdrew her second. Mr. Sokolovic withdrew his motion.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez moved to amend Policy 9321.2c(11) of full sentence number two to state: *“In order for the chair of a committee to participate remotely, he or she must designate another committee member who will be physically present in the meeting room to act as chair of the committee meeting. In order for the chairperson for the board to participate*

remotely, first, designation will fall in the line of order of vice chair, and if vice chair is not available, then secretary. If vice chair and secretary are not available, then the chair shall appoint a board member who will be physically present in the meeting room to act as chair of the regular meeting.”

Mr. Sokolovic seconded the amendment, which was unanimously approved.

The motion as amended was approved unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS:

The next agenda item was review and discussion of scoresheets for the superintendent evaluation of Interim Supt. Alyshia N. Perrin.

Ms. Brown said board members were asked to send in evaluations. She said she had not received all of them. She suggested discussing them and when all are received, she will tally the scores up. She added that three members chose not to participate due to not having prior work experience with Ms. Perrin.

In response to a question, Supt. Perrin said she would prefer to wait until all the scoresheets were completed but would defer to the board.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “to postpone this item until all scoresheets are in and completed and tabulated. “The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she didn’t realistically think everyone was going to complete their scoresheets since everybody doesn’t show up to meetings. Ms. Brown said it

was the three new members who had deferred participating. Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the board had several weeks to work on the scoresheets. Ms. Sokolovic said Ms. Brown has been waiting for the submissions to tally and then formulate it into a report for the whole board to look at. He urged Ms. Brown be given time to compile the submissions. Ms. Baptiste-Perez said that made sense, but she was not okay with postponing for absent board members.

Mr. Benejan withdrew his motion; Mr. Sokolovic withdrew his motion.

Mr. Gelin* joined the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to postpone pending the compilation of the scores currently in possession of Chairperson Brown.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez.

Ms. Brown said, in addition to the three new board members, one board member has said he does not want to participate; also missing are Ms. Allen’s and Mr. Benejan’s submissions.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on a solicitation for the food service bids for the 2023-24 school year. Ms. Brown noted the information has just been submitted to our portals, but she noted members had asked for enough time to read items submitted before the board.

In response to a question, Keoma Steele, director of food and nutrition, said approval was needed by July 1st. He said there are no changes to the standard language in the RFP and just the food options were updated.

Ms. Brown said she would support postponing this because of new board members.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez moved *“to postpone discussion and possible approval to issue a solicitation of the annual food service bids for the 2023-24 school year until the next regular board meeting.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the vision RFP going from VSP to EyeMed for active staff members' benefits.

Ulysses Rogers, director of payroll and benefits, said the city and the board have gone through the RFP process for vision coverage. He said we are required to go out to bid every three years. He said the bids were assessed upon plan design and cost. He said the board has about 860 total subscribers, but the plan does not cover teachers and administrators.

Mr. Rogers displayed the current three-year costs for the board and the bidders that participated in the RFP process. He said EyeMed was deemed the successful bidder. He said the choice will realize savings of about \$77,000 over a three-year period, with the board's savings between \$27,000 and \$30,000. He said if utilization changes, the figures will possibly fluctuate up or down.

Mr. Sokolovic said he did not recall the RFP coming to the Contracts Committee, but the city is once again going ahead and signing a contract without our input. Mr. Rogers said the city is waiting on the board's approval before proceeding. He said the savings were determined by the utilization and the overall head count of board and city employees. There are

1900 noncertified staff members using the plan, 860 of which are board employees.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was reluctant to approve because we should have been in the initial RFP process. He said this has happened over and over again where we have a joint contract with the city. He said this should be before a committee to have a thorough discussion.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez noted the city had not executed this contract unlike the last time with the retirees. She said it would have been good to have notice of the RFP. Mr. Rogers said the RFP was issued around January. He said the three-year contract would have the option of two one-year extensions.

In response to a question, Mr. Rogers said he and the benefits team goes over the RFP with the city and a consultant, and subsequently a scoresheet is compiled. He said it was clear to him that the board wished to be advised of these types of things on a timely basis. He said there are about five bargaining units impacted. He said it could be pushed back, but we're looking to move forward as of July 1st.

Mr. Gelin said it seemed like it should have been brought to the board earlier. Mr. Maccarone said he agreed.

Ms. Brown said she agreed. She said it was unfair to the board. She said future RFPs and contracts need to come to board committees.

In response to a question, Mr. Rogers said the overall projected three-year cost for VSP would be \$377,000, while the cost with EyeMed would be \$300,000. He said the

proposals were scored by himself and the city benefits manager.

Mr. Sokolovic said since we were not under the gun in regard to employees' benefits, it should be handled at the committee.

Mr. Sokolovic moved "*to commit this to the next Contracts Committee for a thorough vetting by the board,*" since we are partners with the city. The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan.

Ms. Brown said a Contracts Committee meeting was scheduled for May 30th. Mr. Rogers said he could be present.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on an RFP to engage in lobbying service on behalf of the board. Ms. Brown said this item came out of the Finance Committee.

Tony Pires of the business office said the RFP calls for proposals from qualified lobbying consultants experienced in serving public school districts. He described the services requested in the RFP.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she saw the need for this to a certain extent. She said it was the obligation of board members to sit down and have communications with the Bridgeport delegation in Hartford. She said asked how much we had done to have those communications. She noted Supt. Perrin met with the delegation. She said reps on the education committee should reach out to the board and she believes the board has been ignored.

Mr. Sokolovic said the committee discussed the need for better communication with Constance Vickers. He said he reached out to Great City Schools, and they indicated almost every city district has their own lobbyist due to conflicts of interest with cities, just as the board has its own lawyer. He said the lobbying firm and the legislative affairs person for the city indicated they take their direction from the mayor. Mr. Maccarone said he agreed.

Mr. Gelin said this was a tricky one. He said we should look at and fortifying relationships with the delegation and build bridges first.

Ms. Cassermere* joined the meeting.

Ms. Brown said she understood both sides. She said as chair she had experienced items brought forward in Hartford before the board has knowledge of them. She said this made her feel out of the loop and unable to tell the board members what the delegation is allocating or supporting. She said she learned at the committee meeting there could be situations where the board's vision does not align with the delegation, including their representation of other cities.

Ms. Brown said she has been with Supt. Perrin in two meetings with the delegation, and there was one where a plan was not presented for keeping us in the loop. She said she hoped we could continue with or without the board's own lobbyist.

Supt. Perrin said it was important to have a voice when engaging with the delegation because of conflicts. She said a meeting with the delegation did not result in open communications and conversations, but it was basically

indicated that you all are wrong. She said a voice was important, despite the cost, and for the delegation to hear from us.

Mr. Traber said he has met with both state senators, his state rep, and Rep. Felipe. He said we should continue to try to meet with them. He said we should take up Ms. Vickers's offer to meet with her this summer or fall regardless of the RFP. He said the RFP would strengthen our hand with regard to keeping their attention. He noted there was no cost to putting out the RFP.

Mr. Traber said we are elected to support the interests of the students of the Bridgeport Public Schools, while they have other interests. He said the proposed bill 503 would give three times more money to a charter school student than a public school student, and there has been no explanation why that's the case. He said, like with the RFP on vision, the city talks to us when they feel like it.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said it might be a good idea to have a lobbyist because for prior sessions no communication came from us. She said she had never learned of potential legislation from the city. She said she did not want it to become a crutch, but we should still have communication on what the needs are for the board. She said she learned of legislation from outside organizations that had their own lobbying.

Mr. Sokolovic said this definitely needed to be done. He said charter schools had their own strong lobbyists. He said the attendance by the delegation at legislative breakfasts with the board has been intermittent.

Mr. Benejan said he talked with City Council members today and they said they would like to meet with the board and state reps for better communication. He asked that Supt. Perrin and Ms. Brown arrange a meeting.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said they may be interested in the conversation because there is an election this year for City Council. he said they only gave us an extra \$500,000. She said, let's work on communications, but not let's not be used as political propaganda.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *"to approve putting out an RFP to engage lobbying services on behalf of the Bridgeport Board of Education."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

Mr. Benejan to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the board on June 12, 2023