

Monday, May 8, 2023

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE  
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 8, 2023,  
at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology  
Education Center, 60 Saint Stephens Road, Bridgeport,  
Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m.

Present were Chair Bobbi Brown, Secretary Albert Benejan,  
David Gelin\*\*, Michael Maccarone\*, Robert Traber, Akisha  
Cassermere\*\*, and Joseph Sokolovic. Vice Chair Christine  
Baptiste-Perez arrived subsequently as noted.

Christine Baptiste-Perez

(\*remote participation) \*\* (began the meeting remote, arrived  
in person subsequently as noted)

Interim Supt. Alyshia Perrin was present.

### **STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:**

Caswin Hanson representing the Aquaculture High School  
as a Central High School student, highlighted the upcoming  
FFA competition in Storrs, Connecticut; Teacher  
Appreciation Week; and the year-end Aqua Cup on June 6,  
including a ceremony for the new research vessel.

Mr. Gelin arrived at the meeting in person.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

John Weldon thanked the board for the thoughtful acknowledgement of his service that was delivered to his home. He said he was appointed in 2016 and he reflected back on winning two elections and serving for five years as chairman. He said he had memories of board members who sat and argued for what they believed in, as well as many parents and voters that he encountered along the way. He said he has met countless dedicated teachers and administrators who always did their best to move the district forward. He said he was inspired to obtain an 085 school business administrator certification.

Gabriel Sobreira, a college student, spoke on behalf of his mother about the closing of the adult learning center at 418 Kossuth Street after this semester. He said his mother attends ESL morning classes. He said many of the 200 adult students are low income and immigrants on the East Side and East End. He said adult education is mostly funded by a state grant of almost \$4 million.

Ms. Cassermere arrived at the meeting in person.

Cesar Ortiz thanked the board because it creates better things for our community and a better situation for the population to learn.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez arrived at the meeting.

Chontal Santana, a student, said they would like to get a petition to prevent the closing of the adult education building. She said they are trying everything to stay in that building and asked the board to help.

Nogales Brown, a student, asked for the adult education building to stay open. She said the parents that do attend

have children that go to neighborhood schools, and everything is around this neighborhood. She asked the building to remain open.

Albert Benejan said he was in support keeping the adult education building open. He said the total grant for the department was \$3.9 million. He said despite being a board member he was one of the last persons to know about closing the building. He said he supported renovation of the building, but communication with the community was needed. He said the building was important to the East Side and helps parents with students.

Gladys Walker-Jones said the district is saddled with operating deficits, amidst increasing enrollment, and the city's budget director said the only hope is grow the city's tax base. She said presentations to the city need to focus on great schools as a major catalyst to build the tax base. She said the board should take its time to fully vet and hire a new superintendent who had demonstrated astute and savvy political skills at the city and state level. She said a novice just won't do.

Dorca Hernandez, a student, asked for support to keep the adult education school open. Her son and daughter attend in that same building.

Nellie Jada, executive director of Connecticut Workers Center, said she appeared with other leaders of the nonprofit organization which assists immigrant families. She said members of the center are worried about the loss of ESL classes. She said we would like to know where the program for English classes will be moved to. She asked the board to consider keeping the program open.

**APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:**

Mr. Benejan moved approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of April 24, 2023. The motion was seconded by Ms. Cassermere and unanimously approved.

**CHAIR REPORT:**

Ms. Brown reported there was a Special Meeting last week on the superintendent search. There are currently about 19 candidates. She said we will continue to update the public on the process.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:**

Mr. Sokolovic said the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee would meet on May 20th. There is one agenda item tonight under new business.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez asked for research on equity opportunities amongst our schools. She said the same group of schools go out of state and on field trips.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Finance Committee would meet on May 10th.

Mr. Traber referred an item to develop a standard of financial support that we need to do the job correctly for our students, not just to survive. He said it has been done in other districts with a master plan.

Mr. Sokolovic said the next Governance Committee meeting will be on May 17th. He said there is an agenda item that came out of the committee.

Supt. Perrin referred an item for a whole-school management agreement between Bridgeport Achievement First and Achievement First Bridgeport Academy. She said this is a yearly request that comes to the board for our charter school partners.

Ms. Brown referred an item about items salvaged from the former Harding High School. Mr. Sokolovic said there are no policies in place, and they are being developed to prevent the Harding situation from happening again. He said from the walk-through there is really nothing that's not contaminated other than memorabilia that was saved. He said it was worthy of discussion.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the <sup>DRAFT</sup>Health, Safety & Facilities Committee will meet tomorrow. She said agenda items include HVAC grant awards; the ESSER plans; building reports on Hall and Edison Schools; districtwide policies on facilities for sporting events; a presentation on health-related grants; and school resource officers.

Ms. Brown said the Personnel & Contracts Committee will meet on May 30th. The committee is in the process of reviewing the different departments in the district.

Mr. Sokolovic referred the RFP on a lobbyist developed through the Finance Committee to the committee.

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

Ms. Brown said she would like to hear an update on the parent handbook being developed.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the Teaching & Learning Committee met on April 26th. She said it was found that the ARP/ESSER funds went towards additional teachers, coaches, and support for students, which led to incremental growth in ELA and math. There was a special education update and a presentation on students transitioning from high school to adulthood and on civics education.

## **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:**

Supt. Perrin said invitations will be sent for a planning meeting for Bassick/BMA stakeholders. The tentative date is May 22nd.

The superintendent said this week is <sup>DRAFT</sup> Teacher Appreciation Week.

Supt. Perrin said there are conversations about relocating the adult education site at St. Michael's, effective July of this year. There are conversations about a short-term lease.

The superintendent said scoliosis screening has begun by the nursing department in Grades 5, 7 and 8. Assessments for Smarter Balance in Grades 3 and 8 will take place this week, as well as Reading Plus for Grades 9 to 12.

Supt. Perrin said the student climate survey for the high schools are scheduled for the week of May 15th.

The superintendent said the Newtown Savings Bank has funded five scholarships for Bridgeport students. Experience Connecticut, consisting of Saturday field trips, is underway. She described the Connecticut Right to Read Act and School Mental Health Specialist Grant. She also described applications for a school security grant.

Supt. Perrin said the district is working on the second round of the school violence prevention program. Capt. Grech has identified schools and projects in need to updates and renovation. The maximum of the grant is \$500,000 over three years.

The superintendent said the district decreased chronic absenteeism by three percent from last month for students identified with disabilities. She said chronic absenteeism decreased by ten percent from last month for students experiencing homeless, and by two percent by students identified as multilingual.

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Supt. Perrin said there will be upcoming parent training on independent educational evaluations in special education. The annual EL summit will take place on May 17th at Harding. The technology showcase will take place on May 22nd at Fairchild Wheeler. The last recognition ceremony for the year will take place on May 31st at Harding. The math meet will be on June 1st at Sacred Heart University. The PAC/PTSO roundtable will be at Columbus School on June 7th. There is a job fair on June 3rd at Central High. High school graduation is June 12th.

The superintendent gave kudos to at Aerospace School at Fairchild Wheeler, which has been recognized by Project Lead the Way with its highest award.

James Denton, director of adult education, recognized all the amazing students and staff. He said many ESL students had gone all the way through into the credit program, received a high school diploma, and then on to college.

Mr. Denton said we've been at the adult learning center for the day program for thirteen years. He said the night program is held at Central High. He said the lease at the center is up; and there have been discussions with the church about a renewal, but there were several topics that we did not come to an agreement on. The lease expires in July.

Mr. Denton said the old lease called for the district to make all the repairs to the very old building. He said the furnace broke this winter resulting in thousands of dollars of work. He said the negotiations revolved around who would be responsible for repairs. He said the building was very large and has large electricity and heating expenditures. There is also an issue around paving the parking lot and ADA compliance issues.

Mr. Denton said there have been discussions with the superintendent and Ms. Siegel about alternative sites. The thought would be to get a modern, updated facility for the staff and students. He said talks continue with the church, but there is no agreement in place. He said it was hoped to get an extension to make a transition out of the site.

In response to a question from the audience, Mr. Denton said a few alternative locations are being considered. Ms. Brown said members of the public could ask Mr. Denton questions privately.

In response to a question, Mr. Denton said the program serves about 100 students.

In response to a question, Supt. Perrin said there has been no response from the resilience state project or Mayor Ganim on the new Bassick, despite inquiries. Ms. Baptiste-



Perez said correspondence has been sent to the mayor's office and the state office. The superintendent said she e-mailed DEEP; then met with city officials with Ms. Brown; and then followed up in writing. No responses were received.

In response to a question, Mr. Denton said the adult education center has been leased for ten years. He said the original lease started in 2013. He said those attending the program live districtwide; he did not know how many live in the area near the building. He said a small amount of people living in Fairfield attend in exchange for \$25,000. He said he believed there were 17 Fairfield students last year. Ms. Baptiste-Perez said he seemed like Fairfield is getting a heck of a deal.

In response to a question, Mr. Denton said lease negotiations began in January 2022 when he e-mailed the church. He described the building as an old Catholic school. He said the program was not closing but would potentially be relocated. The ESL program, the biggest program, runs from Monday to Thursday, 9:00 a.m. to noon. There is also a GED program and an online credit diploma program.

In response to a question, Mr. Denton said if the district is not out of the building by July 1st, it is liable for the payment of \$1,000 a day.

In response to a question about communication, Mr. Denton said the process was not finished and was fluid. He said we're still figuring it out.

Mr. Benejan requested there be a meeting in the center to explain the situation to the parents. He said there should be good communication. Supt. Perrin said she had no issue

with having a meeting. She added we're still trying to figure out the best option.

In response to a question, Mr. Denton said he met with Jorge Garcia, and Mr. Garcia was also involved in meetings with the church's attorney and the city attorney. He said for the last three years the lease was renewed without an increase in rent.

Mr. Benejan said the lack of communication here was not good.

Mr. Benejan said people have to understand Ms. Perrin is the superintendent in Bridgeport. If anything is happening in a building, they have to respect her and let her know. He said these comments were in relation to a groundbreaking ceremony for the new Bassick on May 22nd. He said the mayor decided to do this without letting us know details. He noted there was a prior groundbreaking that board members were at. He said with good communication we can do things better.

Mr. Sokolovic said as the longest serving board member he had been through three superintendents. He said the lack of communication from the mayor's office is no reflection on Supt. Perrin. He said Supt. Johnson also had trouble with communication with the mayor. He said Supt. Testani did not have this problem, and you can infer the differences in the treatment. He said there are disparities in treatment and funding. He said the second groundbreaking at Bassick was a disrespectful political ploy for the election.

In response to a question, Mr. Denton said the lease costs \$130,000 per year; utilities costs are over \$100,000; along

with another few hundred thousand for security and custodial.

Mr. Sokolovic said Fairfield was not paying its fair share of the costs, which should be looked at. Ms. Baptiste-Perez suggested that matter be handled at the Finance Committee.

Mr. Sokolovic said if we're not properly funded, we're basically getting ready to decimate the education system in the next few years.

In response to a question, Supt. Perrin said adult education is all grant-funded, so it does not come out of the operating budget. This year about \$4.1 million was received for the whole program. Mr. Sokolovic said if the city agreed to fund the center, it would allow the district to maintain or improve services in adult education.

Ms. Cassermere said holding a meeting with the parents was a good idea. She said the reason for the decisions should be made clear. Mr. Denton said the repairs are an unknown at this point.

Mr. Maccarone left the meeting.

In response to a question, Mr. Denton said there is a plan in place in the event the district has to leave the building. He said there is a contingency plan for satellite sites, but the real hope is to find a modern, updated facility. He said the adult education graduation is June 1st at Central High School, which would leave the month of June to depart the building. The summer program begins on July 5th.

In response to a question, Mr. Denton said the proposed \$10,000 amount in the proposed new lease would be per repair and work like an insurance deductible.

Mr. Traber suggested there be a meeting with the students before the June 1st graduation.

Ms. Brown said it can be hard to relocate the building because some attending might be discouraged from moving to the new location. She said it was beyond mind-blowing how much we're paying to repair the building.

In response to a question, Mr. Denton said there is a YMCA child care across from the current location. He said he could not guarantee a site would be found with child care nearby could be found. He said bus passes were provided to any student who needs one.

Ms. Cassermere asked that Mr. Denton return to update the board. Mr. Traber said due to the high costs of operating the building as described it would be a good time to move.

In response to a question, Mr. Denton said he has seen potential modern locations that fit the bill.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

The next agenda item was on the healthy food certification for school year 2023-24.

Keoma Steele, director of food and nutrition services, said this was a required annual vote by state statute to meet Connecticut nutrition standards for a 'la carte items in high schools and the exemptions for sale of food at sporting and fundraising events.

Ms. Brown moved for the approval of the health and food certification for school year 2023-2024. The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved as follows:

*“Pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the Board of Education, City of Bridgeport, certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempt from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024. This certification shall include all foods offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups.”*

Mr. Traber moved to approve combined food and beverage exemptions. The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved as follows:

*“The Board of Education of the City of Bridgeport will allow the sale to students of beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; the sale is at the location of the event; and (3) the food and beverage items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An ‘event’ is an occurrence that involves more than just a regular school practice, meeting or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer*

*games, school plays, interscholastic debates are events, but soccer practices, play rehearsals, debate team meetings are not. The regular school day is the period from midnight before 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. Location means where the event is being held and must be at the same place as the food and beverage sales.”*

The next agenda item was on an RFP for DEI training. Tony Pires of the business office was present.

Mr. Pires said the item came out of the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee. He said the RFP would solicit for a consultant to provide capacity-building services, and various professional development and reporting services.

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In response to a question, Mr. Sokolovic said the current provider never went out to bid, so it is time to go out to bid. He said the provider must give an update which is subject to recording, which was one of the sticking points under the last contract. He said it is mostly the same services as performed by the prior provider with a few additions for Title IX.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve the issuance of an RFP for DEI training.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the first read and replacing in its entirety Policy 9171, remote board member participation in person and in committee meetings. Ms. Brown noted this came out of the Governance Committee.

Karen Baldwin, deputy superintendent, described the background to the proposed policy. She said a public act allows public agencies to continue to hold remote and hybrid meetings. She said the current policy puts restrictions on

committee meeting attendance and limits on remote participation, which are no longer legal because Public ACT 22-3 allows remote meetings. She said the document is based on policy guidance from CABE.

Mr. Sokolovic said the new statute requires us to give any board member remote access upon their request.

In response to a question, Mr. Sokolovic said he did not believe there was a provision in the policies that says anything that is not in compliance with the law is subject to being in compliance with the law. He said we could ignore the current policy because we cannot do anything in violation of the law.

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Mr. Sokolovic asked for board members to read the entire policy, which then took place.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to amend proposed Policy 9321-2c by replacing 9321.2d and moving it backwards to E to read “the chairman of the board or the chair of a committee may participate remotely in an in-person meeting, but when doing so may not function as the chair for an in-person meeting he or she is participating in remotely. For the chairman of the board or the chair of a committee to participate remotely he/she must designate another member who will be physically present in the meeting room to act as the chair of the meeting.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested this be added as number 11 in the policy. Mr. Traber moved *“to introduce this language as a new subsection 11 to the policy statement.”* Mr. Sokolovic seconded the amendment, which was unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic said it would be cleaner to have the chair of the board or the committee being physically present at meetings.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she was split on the committee level because of complications when there is poor attendance from committee members. She said she has been lone committee member present as a chair, which leads her to wonder why she showed up in person. Mr. Sokolovic said the chair of a committee still has the option of calling an entirely remote meeting. Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she heard comments from students and adults that students have to attend school in person, so why shouldn't board members. She said as a working individual, sometimes you will be late in traffic and have to log in remotely. She said it was valid on both sides.

Mr. Traber said the amendment seemed to pretty much codify what the board has been doing. He said the ability to do things remotely is a new horizon, especially with the board members acting as volunteers.

Mr. Sokolovic said he agreed with Ms. Baptiste-Perez, and we should be in person facing our constituents, particularly if we had to make budget cuts. He said if it wasn't for the statute, he would have never suggested a change.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *"to accept the first read of Policy 9321 and all its subsections as amended."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.



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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the board on June 12, 2023*

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