

Thursday, February 23, 2023

MINUTES OF THE TEACHING & LEARNING COMMITTEE  
OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held  
February 23, 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 Christine Baptiste-Perez and Joseph  
Lombard.\*

(\*remote participation)

DRAFT

Mr. Lombard moved to approve the committee's minutes of  
October 26, 2022. The motion was seconded by Ms.  
Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on Bridgeport Military Academy's  
field trip to Passaic High School in New Jersey on Marcy  
25th.

Lt. Commander Travis Brewster described the trip. He said  
the Navy JROTC will participate in a drill competition. He  
said the students return the same day, but approval is  
required because the trip is out of state. He said the event is  
linked to teaching the students drill.

Mr. Lombard moved "*to approve Bridgeport Military  
Academy's field trip to Passaic High School in New Jersey  
on March 25th, 2023.*" The motion was seconded by Ms.  
Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the item will be presented at the next Regular Meeting of the board.

The next agenda items were on Winthrop School and Marin School field trips to Nature's Classroom in April 2023.

Pamela Musante of Winthrop said it will provide students with real-world connections to STEM and science, including learning properties and movements of water. The Winthrop students have gone on a nature walk and observed life and animals out in nature, which will connect to the trip.

Michele D'Auria said the Marin TAG students have gone on a trip to the Maritime Aquarium to learn about animals that are native and invasive to our region. She said the students will be involved in a pollinator garden that is being built at the school.

Ms. D'Auria said the trip includes an overnight stay, leaving on April 3rd and returning on April 5th. She said staying overnight provides an opportunity to visit different areas on different days.

In response to a question, Ms. Musante said the students from each school will share the same bus on the trip.

Mr. Lombard moved *"to approve Winthrop School's field trip to Nature Classroom, April 3rd through April 5th, 2023."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

Mr. Lombard moved *"to approve to Marin School's field trip to Nature Classroom on April 3rd through April 5th, 2023."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on Multicultural Magnet's field trip to Boston, Massachusetts, from May 31st to June 2nd.

The school's representative said the trip is from May 31st to June 2nd, including two nights. She said the trip will include academic and social-emotional components. History will be covered by visiting the Boston Tea Party Museum and the Freedom Trail. Science aspects include visits to the New England Aquarium, with a theater presentation, and the Science Museum. A performance by the Blue Man Group and a Boston Red Sox game will add to the social-emotional aspects. She said students will be able to see visually some of what they are studying in African-American history and literature. She described how a young man overcame shyness on a similar trip and is going to Boston University to study anthropology.

Mr. Lombard said it was a fantastic presentation. Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the story of the young man was very powerful.

Mr. Lombard moved *"to approve Multicultural Magnet School's field trip to Boston, Massachusetts, on May 31st to June 2nd, 2023."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on High Horizon Magnet's trip to Washington, D.C., from May 30th to June 2nd.

Francine Carbone, principal, said this was an annual trip prior to Covid. She said every day is jam-packed with activities, with the focus being American government in 8th grade. Monuments to Washington, Lincoln, Martin Luther King, and the Korean War will be visited. The White House,

Congress, Arlington Cemetery, the African-American Museum, and the Smithsonian Air-Space Museum will also be visited.

Ms. Carbone said a tour group was hired, which also provides security during the day and at the hotel.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she had checked the insurance and the student-to-chaperone ratio.

Mr. Lombard moved “*to approve High Horizons Magnet School’s field trip to Washington, D.C., May 30th, 2023, to June 2nd, 2023.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the trip would be presented to the board in March.

The next agenda item was a special education update. Shamain Johnson, director of specialized instruction presented.

Ms. Johnson said a report was prepared in advance for the meeting. She said a contract was entered into in the fall of 2022 with the Urban Collaborative for an in-depth review of special education services in the districts. She said the consultants interviewed 20 families of students with special needs and over 125 employees and collected observational data through classroom visits at seven schools. The consultants have prepared a draft report covering strengths, challenges, vulnerabilities, and recommendations for improvement. She said the draft will be shared with the interim superintendent and cabinet on Monday.

Ms. Johnson said the initial recommendations center on student experience, family engagement, teaching and learning and leadership, special education student level decision-making, special education systems, and cabinet vision and leadership.

Ms. Johnson said special education in the district continues to focus on professional learning and capacity building of staff. She said the department continues to respond to a compliance complaint from the 2021-22 year and is working with the state to resolve those issues.

Ms. Johnson said all administrators participated in a workshop conducted by Berchem & Moses on special education procedures and student discipline. She said the department continues to work on the transition to the new state-level platform for IEP data management.

In response to a question, Ms. Johnson said one of the results from the consultants was the way in which we provide services. She said there will be in-depth conversations on best practices for students with special needs.

Mr. Lombard said the consultants met with board members briefly. He said he believed the consultants were impressed with the professionalism and enthusiasm from the district staff.

In response to a question, Ms. Johnson said a positive from the draft report is that families felt supported and felt their children were in settings where staff members were working hard and providing successful experiences for the students. She said we want to reinforce that parents are part of the process.

The next agenda item was on a memorandum of agreement for math endorsement to increase the district's certified teaching pool.

Denise Altro-Dixon, executive director of human resources, said last year cross-endorsement incentives were created in the district for ESL, world languages, bilingual, and special education. She said this year we are seeking create incentives for math and science, which are major teacher shortage areas.

Ms. Altro-Dixon said about ten experienced teachers were interested in science and ten interested in math. The MOU creates an agreement that the district will offset certain costs and increase salaries as long the teachers maintain their position in this area for three years. If they cease to teach in Bridgeport for the period, they will have to repay Bridgeport a prorated amount.

In response to a question, Ms. Altro-Dixon said the state has relaxed some certification requirements and teachers can get cross-certified in certain areas if they pass a Praxis exam. She said a crash course will be offered to help the teachers take the exam. She said the salary increase is a two-step increase. If they are at the highest step, she said she believed it was an additional \$7,500, with subsequent raises determined by the teachers' contract.

Ms. Altro-Dixon said because of teacher shortages, the state does not require all the coursework previously necessary for certification.

In response to a question, Ms. Altro-Dixon said the math and science certification applies to Grades 7 to 12.

In response to a question, Ms. Altro-Dixon said she believed step 16 is the highest level in the district. She said there is no clear-cut timeframe for the crash course. She said Mr. Planas and Ms. Scott have been working on it, and they will work with the teachers as much as they need.

In response to a question, Ms. Altro-Dixon said she believed the candidates would take the exam sooner than later in case they have to retake it. She said the district pays for the costs of the first exam.

In response to a question about professional development for this cadre, Ms. Altro-Dixon said Mr. Henry, Mr. Planas and Ms. Scott are ready to help these teachers and will provide support within their departments.

Ms. Altro-Dixon said she received an e-mail from Mr. Henry, the science director, that indicated the program will be well-thought-out and not a crash-course. She said this was the case with math also.

Mr. Lombard moved *“to approve the memorandum of agreement for math endorsement to increase Bridgeport Public Schools’ certified teaching pool.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she believed it would not be a crash course. She suggested Mr. Henry be available when the item is brought before the full board.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on an MOU for a science endorsement to increase the certified teaching pool.

Ms. Altro-Dixon said Mr. Henry and Ms. Scott have scheduled six, two-hour sessions between February and June to meet with all candidates interested in the cross endorsement in science.

In response to a question, Ms. Altro-Dixon said the possibility of a teacher taking the exam without being part of the ten candidates was not considered. She said she would not be opposed to allowing a teacher like that into the program.

In response to a question, Ms. Altro-Dixon said if the twenty teachers became certified the district would be pretty close to being fully staffed in math and science, if the current numbers remained the same. She said retirements or resignations are not known at this time.

Mr. Lombard moved *“to approve and present to the full board a memorandum of agreement for science endorsement to increase the certified teaching pool.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the library media renewal project. Dr. Melissa Jenkins, chief academic officer, said she would present an overview in order that the item would be on the agenda next month for possible action.

Dr. Jenkins said the library/media centers support a love of literacy, research, critical thinking, social consciousness, and to help our students become critical consumers of information. She said \$1 million has been allocated under the ESSER grant for 2022-23 to renew resources. She called this Phase One.



Dr. Jenkins said the federal government awarded a \$2 million grant to be utilized during 2023-24 to continue Phase Two of the library media renewal project.

Dr. Jenkins said the district does not have a director of library/media specialist, Lissette Valle, the library/media specialist at Park City Magnet, has been leading the work. There are about 19 library/media specialists in the district. Eleven schools do not have library/media specialists, but they do have certified teachers to support access to media centers.

Dr. Jenkins said a survey will be administered to students in Grades K to 8 to support the process of looking at books and magazines for libraries. She said non-fiction books come prepared within the Dewey decimal system. Various digital projects are being previewed, with the primary one from Capstone Publishing called PebbleGo and PebbleGo Next, a premier product. She said the product is the number one product currently that the media specialists would like to purchase. She said the product would be used by classroom teachers as well.

Dr. Jenkins said she hoped to present the results of the survey and contracts to the committee next month to complete Phase One, along with a blueprint for Phase Two.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said she needs to reach out to content area coordinators in the high schools to make sure their needs are addressed in Phase Two.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said several teachers teach early college experience courses and she will assess their access to university libraries. She said previously

Fairchild Wheeler had an explicit partnership with the Bridgeport Public Library.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said a free access code is available for look at PebbleGo. She said it is very colorful and interactive. The text is often read to children at the lower grade levels. She said she is exploring the purchase of classroom libraries for schools that may not have a certified media specialist, which would be part of the Phase Two.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said students would have access to the digital resources at home through their individual devices. She said the IT Department has begun to vet PebbleGo to make sure the interface works with Power School and Class Link.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said Phase One is part of the 2022-23 ESSER and the funds have to be encumbered by the beginning of April.

Dr. Jenkins said she will develop the necessary quotes and prepare a PowerPoint, lay out Phase Two, and answer questions that have come up for the next meeting.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the committee on April 26, 2023*