

Monday, August 26, 2013

**MINUTES OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION
REGULAR MEETING, held August-26, 2013, at Bridgeport Regional
Aquaculture Science and Technology Education, 60 St. Stephens
Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.**

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m. Present were Jacqueline Kelleher, Sauda Baraka, Maria Pereira, Leticia Colon, Hernan Illingworth, Thomas Mulligan, John Bagley, and Chair Kenneth Moales Jr.

Mr. Mulligan moved approval of the minutes of the August 7 special meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Colon. Ms. Baraka noted a correction to add p.m. to the time the meeting opened. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Illingworth moved to add to the agenda a discussion of pending litigation in the matter of James Moran vs. the Bridgeport Board of Education be added to the agenda. The motion was seconded by Ms. Colon. The vote on the motion was 7-0 in favor. Voting in favor were members Baraka, Kelleher, Pereira, Colon, Illingworth, Bagley and Moales. Mr. Mulligan abstained.

Mr. Illingworth moved the board go into executive session to discuss the pending litigation matter of Moran vs. Board of Education. The motion was seconded by Dr. Kelleher. Invited to participate in the executive session were the board, Supt. Vallas and Attorney Michel Bayonne. Mr. Mulligan noted he would not be participating in the executive session or voting. The vote on the motion was 7-0 in favor. Voting in favor were members Baraka, Kelleher, Pereira, Colon, Illingworth, Bagley and Moales. Mr. Mulligan abstained. The board went into executive session at 6:40 p.m.

The board reconvened in public session at 6:53 p.m.

CHAIR REPORT:

in his Chair report, Rev. Moales thanked and congratulated the staff and executive team, particularly Mr. Vallas, for an exceptional year last year. He commended an exceptional job by teachers in rolling out an entirely new curriculum. Rev. Moales noted that the facilities department was doing a great job with beautification and remediating problems at facilities. He commended the efforts of George Garcia in facilities and the work of Mr. Shively Willingham in the area of security. He also commended McKissick & McKissick construction management for completing the Fairchild Wheeler high school on time. Rev. Moales said his visit to the Bridgeport Military Academy's camp held at Camp Niantic revealed a very positive atmosphere and excellent parental participation, despite the great distance from Bridgeport.

Rev. Moales thanked the team at Curiale School and noted the success achieved by the school in its first year in the Commissioner's Network. He also described the hiring of 17 new principals and assistant principals, including 10 of which that are minority. He said for the first time in the history of the district Bridgeport has four African-American male principals.

PAC REPORT:

Tammy Boyle, District PAC corresponding secretary, delivered the PAC report. She said new bylaws are being finalized and the executive PAC will vote on them on September 4th. She added that The first executive board meeting will be on August 28th. Ms. Boyle said the PAC was striving to improve parental involvement in the district.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Crystal Mack, among other things, said that special education children were not being properly tested. She cited an example of some children known to her that had been improperly promoted without being able to read.

Carmella Parrish, recently moved to Bridgeport from Brooklyn, said she was recently voted to be on a turnaround committee with Dr. Kase at Dunbar. She further described some of the reasons for

choosing FUSE as the management organization at Dunbar.

Nick Banks said Mr. Vallas was not qualified to be superintendent in Bridgeport as well as Chicago, Philadelphia, New Orleans or Haiti.

Virginia Hudson Johnson, an educator in Bridgeport for fourteen years, said she has urged parents to enroll their children in Dunbar School. She said the model in place for Dunbar, now known as the Jumoke Academy Honors at Dunbar, will lead to more successful students.

Albert Benejan, District PAC bilingual secretary, said he was offended at statements at the last meeting calling for background checks. He said his background check was nine years of helping the community and schools.

John Evans thanked Bobby Simmons for taking a stand against the culture of rubberstamping approvals that benefit Paul Vallas. He said Mr. Vallas had ignored the law due to his arrogance. He spoke in opposition to funding Mr. Vallas's appeal of the recent court decision.

David Gordon said the administration's alternative programs to the Leadership Group to combat drugs and gangs were ineffective. Mr. Gordon said the board not received an annual report from RYASAP on drug programs in the schools.

Mack Allen, a parent of three children in Bridgeport public schools, said he was behind what was being done at Dunbar School, adding that he had seen a lot of positive changes in the schools.

Reverend William McCullough, a pastor from the East End of Bridgeport, said he was glad that Mr. Vallas was superintendent, that Rev. Moales was the chair of the board, and that Dunbar School was in the Commissioner's Network.

Bishop Richardo Griffith said he had been in Bridgeport for 21 years and none of his children had ever attended the public schools, however, his son would now be attending the Fairchild Wheeler high school. He said he was excited about the changes in Dunbar and

added his support for Mr. Vallas.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Dr. Kelleher announced that the Student Achievement Committee was shooting for September 16th as the first meeting of the school year. She added that the state-mandated SRBI, which involves assessment and using data to make decisions, would be a focus this year.

Ms. Baraka said the Student Engagement Committee meetings will commence on September 17th.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Supt. Vallas said a presentation would be made in September on drug interventions and peer mediation. He said that RYASAP would report on their 1100 referrals and interventions.

Mr. Vallas said school was beginning with a structurally balanced budget. He added that Chrome Book computers were in the schools and training for the computers was taking place. About 85 percent of the new Smart Boards have been installed.

The superintendent said benchmark assessments would soon be available online. Mr. Vallas said schools were fully staffed and there was no frantic scrambling to hire teachers because teachers were recruited and prequalified. He said that the new group of teachers hired was diversified and extraordinarily talented.

Mr. Vallas said the Fairchild Wheeler school was ready and noted the successful summer boot camp held for the Military Academy.

The superintendent said the Pride Academy, the transition school in the former St. Ambrose's School, is ready to open. The school will target students that need second chances and special services.

Supt. Vallas said over the summer the Jewish Community Center had given the district \$500,000 of exercise equipment.

Mr. Vallas said the district would be choosing the state option of taking the Common Core exam next year, not the CMTs. The Common Core exam will be mandated by 2015, which will allow the district to get a two-year jump on the exam, which he described as containing higher standards and expectations and more rigorous curriculum instruction.

He said the team of Dr. Kase, Amy Marshall and Mary Beth Stickley would drive instruction into the future.

Ms. Pereira asked that the following items be removed from the consent agenda: I, numbers 2 and 3; all 34 Teach for America teachers under probationary appointments under II, specifically items 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 31, 33, 36, 40, 42, 44, 45, 51, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, 63, 65, 68 and 69, and two teachers designated as TTT, 10 and 34.

Mr. Mulligan moved approval of all other personnel items in items I through VIII.

Rev. Moales noted he would abstain from voting on V, number 2, concerning his wife, and that item was removed from the consent agenda.

Ms. Baraka seconded the motion.

Dr. Kelleher said she was sorry to so many people resign under item III. She commended the work of Jacqueline Knee-Orsino in the area of special education at Bassick. Ms. Baraka added her concurrence and added praise to Helenann McMahon. She commended personnel on the retirement list who gave more than 25 years to the district.

The vote on the motion was unanimous.

Mr. Mulligan moved approval of V, item 2. The motion was seconded by Ms. Colon. The vote was 6 to 0 to approve. Voting in favor were members Baraka, Bagley, Kelleher, Illingworth, Mulligan and Colon. Members Moales and Pereira abstained.

Mr. Mulligan moved approvals of item 1, items 2 and 3. The motion was seconded by Dr. Kelleher.

Ms. Pereira asked if the two employees had retired and were being retained while collecting a pension. Supt. Vallas said they had not retired; had applied for the positions and been selected by the school governance councils as the principals of the schools. In response to a question, Mr. Vallas said a team would be doing the prior work of Deborah Santacapita in the central office.

The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Mulligan moved approval of the appointment of those in Item II who were excepted from the original motion, consisting of Teach for America (TFA) candidates. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth.

Ms. Pereira expressed deep concern about the 34 new teachers; she said 31 of them had no teaching experience. She added that seven TFA teachers were going to Dunbar, a bottom-ranked school in the state. She said it was disappointing that the superintendent signed a \$750,000 contract with Teach for America, a for-profit entity, several months ago without bringing it to the board for approval. She said 80 percent of Teach for America teachers turn after three years, which created stability concerns. Ms. Pereira said Nate Snow is the director of Teach for America, the president of Excel Bridgeport and involved in the illegal takeover of the school board.

Supt. Vallas said every year the district has hired between 20-25 Teach for America teachers. This year there are about 33, but the district is hiring more teachers(over 100) so the percentage is similar.

He said he would let Teach for America defend its record and let Dunbar, where the model was selected by the community, justify their hiring practices.

He said the message should not be sent by telling teachers two days before school opens that they will not be hired.

Rev. Moales said the Teach for America program was created in

1993 by President Clinton to bring educational reform using college students with specialized knowledge. He added that Dr. Sharp of FUSE uses Teach for America teachers in all his schools.

Ms. Baraka said the Teach for America program is designed for young people who are finding themselves, and that category of teachers should not be used in the district.

Rev. Moales said there were 1500 teachers in the district, of which 63 were Teach for America. Since almost 60 percent of the students in the district were below proficiency, the credentials of the teachers and other administrators have led to a failing district. He added that 93 percent of teachers in the district were non-minority.

Ms. Pereira said hiring the other teachers did not involve paying a \$6,000 placement fee to a for-profit company. She said Steve Mendel, a Greenwich billionaire involved in the illegal takeover of the board, sits on the national board of Teach for America.

Ms. Baraka said parents of Bridgeport schools see the dedication by the teachers, but what is lacking are resources to support needs in the schools.

Mr. Mulligan said board members who objected to hiring Teach for America teachers should have brought up the issue a long time ago, not on the eve of school opening.

Dr. Kelleher said she had been involved in preparing teachers with certifications since 1998. She said Teach for America has different regional branches and she has little knowledge of Teach for America Connecticut. She said she does have issues with TFA. She requested a districtwide study, a return on investment investigation, about the use of TFA students in the district. She noted the benefits of hiring TFA teachers in areas of shortage, but some hires seem to be in areas where there is likely well-qualified Connecticut teachers available. Dr. Kelleher said the research in this area was mixed and said she was torn by this decision.

Ms. Baraka said the question of Teach for America teachers had been raised by Ms. Pereira before the end of the school year.

In response to a question from Ms. Pereira, Kathy Jaeger, director of human resources, said ,approximately ten of the Teach for American hires were residents of Connecticut and approximately ten were minorities.

Supt. Vallas said last year he indicated the district would probably hire the same amount of TFA teachers, but the exact numbers were unknowable because the principals select the teachers to be hired. He said the percentage of minority teachers hired was higher because recruiting went on in the beginning of the hiring phase.

Ms. Pereira said the information should have been provided earlier so that a timely vote could have taken place.

Ms. Jaeger described the process by which teachers apply to the district, are screened and then selected by principals to interview. She added that the majority of the candidates from Teach for America were in shortage areas such as math, science, foreign language and English. Ms. Jaeger said besides Dunbar all but six of the TFA teachers were in shortage areas. Ms. Pereira said library media specialists were not a shortage; Ms. Jaeger and Supt. Vallas said it was deemed a shortage area in Connecticut.

Dr. Kelleher said shortage areas were posted on the state Department of Education's website. She said elementary education was not a shortage area, but English and library and media specialists has been a shortage area for the past three years.

The vote was 5 to 3 in favor. Voting in favor were members Moales, Illingworth, Colon, Mulligan and Kelleher. Voting against were members Bagley, Pereira and Baraka.

Mr. Mulligan moved to approve personnel appointments in Section II, items 10 and 34. The motion was seconded by Dr. Kelleher.

In response to a question from Ms. Pereira, Catherine McGrath, director of grant development and management, said TTT is acronym for the transition to Teaching Grant, a federal grant to bring math majors into district as interns. The interns will then owe the district a

three-year commitment.

The vote was 7 to 0 in favor. Voting in favor were members Colon, Bagley, Moales, Illingworth, Mulligan, Baraka and Pereira. Abstaining was member Kelleher.

Dr. Kelleher said she abstained because she taught the candidates.

Dr. Kase then introduced the new principal of Dunbar School, Marilyn Taylor. Ms. Taylor thanked everyone for their warm welcome and said she truly believed in the FUSE model for schools.

Rev. Moales said the Jumoke model was being used by FUSE in Hartford, New Britain, Norwalk, Norwich, New Haven and Waterbury. He added that Supt. Vallas had far exceeded his expectations for Dunbar School by saving the school. Rev. Moales said staff at Dunbar had been recruited nationwide and life was being breathed back into Dunbar.

Mr. Mulligan moved acceptance of the memorandum of understanding between Bridgeport Public Schools and Jumoke Academy, Incorporated. The motion was seconded by Ms. Colon.

Ms. Pereira said on page five of the memorandum of understanding it states that in January 2013 the board declared an interest to the Commissioner of Education in having Dunbar participate in the network and that the local board of education has been consulted and supports the participation. Ms. Pereira said the board never the item has an agenda item. Rev. Moales said the letter of interest began with Curiale and the notice was left open for more Bridgeport schools in the network.

Ms. Pereira said the board never appointed two members to the turnaround committee per state statute. Dr. Kelleher approved two appointees that were not brought to the board, which violated state law.

Ms. Pereira said the board did not vote on a memorandum of understanding within thirty days of the model being selected. Dr. Kase said the Commissioner of Education extended the deadline to

August 30. Ms. Pereira requested a copy of the document.

Ms. Pereira said Jumoke had zero experience with bilingual students. She said that 34 percent of Dunbar students are Hispanic, and asked what percentage of the staff will be bilingual. Leanne Masterjoseph, chief academic officer of FUSE, said the staff has been assembled to meet student needs, but she did not have the figures, which she said she would provide.

Ms. Pereira said charter school organizations have a history of pushing out students who are challenged and noted that at the Milner School in Hartford enrollment had reduced by 20 percent. She noted some declines in test scores at the school, which she described as troubling. She said the FUSE organization was new in managing public schools and said she was not in support of it taking over a Bridgeport public school.

Rev. Moales said it was unfair to take the results after one year of Milner School. He said Dr. Sharp told him that the first year was focused on changing on the culture of the school.

Ms. Masterjoseph said a failing school cannot be turned into a stellar school in one year. She said year one was about culture and climate. She cited Milner test scores which showed substantial increases. She said Jumoke has 15 years of experience in working in schools in urban settings.

Ms. Masterjoseph said the suggestion that the Jumoke Academy schools pushes away students is false - not one student has been asked to leave the school. Additionally, the number of students enrolled is determined by the Hartford Public Schools.

In response to a question from Ms. Baraka, Supt. Vallas said there are no transportation costs for the school because it is a neighborhood school.

Ms. Baraka suggested that references in the memorandum of understanding be changed to indicate the superintendent through the board be responsible for certain actions, including budgetary adjustments.

In response to a question from Ms. Baraka, Supt. Vallas said the funding formula for the school has been worked out with the state, which ensures the district saves money, for example, because Jumoke has its own instructional support personnel. There will be no diversion of funds to this school, which has the same funding allocation that every other school gets – plus the state money. He added that any additional funding to Jumoke would require a renegotiation of the agreement that was made by the state – no diversion of funds. He estimated net savings to the district of \$100,000.

Ms. Masterjoseph said the turnaround plan has three comprehensive goals: literacy, enrollment development and disciplinary measurement. Each goal has a timeline and specific metrics.

In response to a question from Ms. Baraka, Ms Warren said the district is providing IEP services.

Mr. Mulligan said no alternative to the plan proposed was available, and he said the FUSE organization had a good plan and had done good work.

Dr. Kelleher said the performance standards in the memorandum of understanding indicated student enrollment and attendance will increase by 30 percent, but the turnaround plan doesn't say anything about attendance. She added that in the past she had some issues with education management organizations, but said she was in favor of approval because the community has been loud and clear in support.

Ms. Pereira noted \$400,000 in administrative fees would be paid in the first year. Marlene Siegel said the school would be getting \$1,289,899 in the Commissioner's Network. Dr. Kase said the model would bring a rich staffing model to help students who are far behind.

Ms. Pereira said she was glad Dunbar School was staying open, but she was not in support of an outside organization. She said the current staff could have been successful with adequate resources. Dr. Kase said it was often not a matter of money, but knowing what to

do with the money. She said Dunbar was still a district school with a partnership with FUSE, an organization that knows how to use increased funding well.

Mr. Illingworth thanked everyone who played a part in bringing Jumoke to the district to give Dunbar something it really deserves. He said the community cookout indicated that parents and children of the school were excited.

Ms. Baraka said she opposed changing the name of the school. Paul Lawrence Dunbar was a great African-American writer and poet who stood for knowledge and learning. She said the school was renamed Dunbar from Lincoln School. Ms. Masterjoseph said "Jumoke Honors" was added to the school name to represent what they stand for, the child is loved. Ms. Baraka said the board did not approve the name change per board bylaws.

Rev. Moales said he was completely in support of the Jumoke model and FUSE, and said we have to adjust our mindset to real educational reform. He said the community was one hundred percent behind the model and FUSE. He said once the Jumoke model is seen it can be replicated elsewhere in the district. He added that he was honored to have Dr. Sharp and FUSE in Bridgeport.

Mr. Mulligan moved the question. The motion was seconded by Ms. Colon. The vote on the motion was 6 to 2 in favor. Voting in favor were members Bagley, Moales, Illingworth, Mulligan, Colon and Kelleher. Opposed were members Baraka and Pereira.

The vote on the motion to approve the memorandum of understanding was 6 to 2 in favor. Voting in favor were members Bagley, Moales, Illingworth, Mulligan, Colon and Kelleher. Opposed were members Baraka and Pereira.

Ms. Baraka said she had old business, although old and new business did not appear on the agenda.

Mr. Mulligan moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Colon. The vote on the motion was 5 to 3 in favor.

Voting in favor were members Moales, Illingworth, Mulligan, Colon and Kelleher. Opposed were members Bagley, Baraka and Pereira.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



John McLeod