

RECEIVED

MAY 21 2013

Gary Peluchette
Complainant

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
CT STATE DEPT OF EDUCATION

State Board of Education

And

C.G.S. 10-4b Complaint

Bridgeport Public Schools
Respondent

May 15, 2013

C.G.S. Section 10-4b Complaint of Gary Peluchette against Bridgeport Public Schools

1. I am both a resident of Bridgeport and the President of the Bridgeport Education Association. The address of the Bridgeport Education Association is: 3543 Main Street, Bridgeport, CT 06606. The telephone number of this Association is (203) 576-7769.
2. The school district against which my complaint is filed is the Bridgeport Public Schools.
3. As stated in paragraph 1, supra, I am a resident of the City of Bridgeport. I am also a teacher in Bridgeport Public Schools and am the President of the Bridgeport Education Association.
4. C.G.S. Section 10-4 (4) is involved, in particular Bridgeport Public Schools' violation of the mandates pertaining to education and a failure or inability to implement the educational interests of the state delineated in C.G.S. Section 223j captioned "School Governance Councils," as more fully set forth below.
5. School Governance Councils were created by the Connecticut Legislature for the laudatory purpose of involving the community and school employees in the educational process. As stated by the Connecticut State Department of Education, "School Governance Councils provide a remarkable opportunity for Connecticut schools to engage with families and community members in a partnership to make our school centers of excellence that prepare all students for success. Councils are intended to represent the diverse interests of the families, teachers, students and community members that make up the school population." (Connecticut State Department of Education, School Governance Councils Guide on Election Procedures) Further, "School Governance Councils provide an unprecedented opportunity for stakeholders in Connecticut schools to craft a productive collaboration to support student success. The intent of councils is to enable parents, school staff, students (where appropriate) and community leaders to work together to improve student achievement in the state's lowest performing schools." (From Mark McQuillan, Commissioner of Education, to

Superintendents of Schools, Series 010-11, Circular Letter C-3, "Overview of New School Governance Council Requirements," October 4, 2010)

- 6. In many respects the aforementioned beneficial purpose of School Governance Councils and the statutory mandates of C.G.S. Section 10-233j has been largely ignored by Bridgeport Public Schools.**

- 7. Upon information and belief, in 2012, Deborah Reyes, a lifelong resident of Bridgeport was elected to be on the School Governance Council for the Bridgeport Multicultural Magnet School. During her tenure on this School Governance Council, Ms. Reyes experienced the following:**
 - a. She was not given an opportunity to review the fiscal objectives of the draft budget for the school and provide advice to the principal of the school before the budget was submitted to the superintendent pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-223j (d) (2).**
 - b. She did not participate in the hiring process of administrators of the school by conducting interviews of candidates and reporting on such interviews to the superintendent and the board of education as required by C.G.S. Section 10-233j (d) (3).**
 - c. She did not work with the school administration to develop and approve a school compact for parents, legal guardians and students that included an outline of the criteria and responsibilities for enrollment and school membership pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-223j (d) (5).**
 - d. She was not involved in developing and approving a written parent involvement policy that outlined the role of parents and legal guardians in the school pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-233j (d) (6).**


- 8. Upon information and belief, Faith Zillega, a resident of Bridgeport since 1984, was elected in 2011 to be on the School Governance Council for the Blackham School. During her tenure on this School Governance Council, Ms. Zillega experienced the following:**
 - a. She had no involvement in analyzing school achievement data and school needs relative to the improvement plan for the school pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-233j (d) (1).**
 - b. She was not given the opportunity to review the fiscal objectives of the draft budget for the school and provide advice to the principal of the school before**

the budget was submitted to the superintendent pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-233j (d) (2).

- c. She did not participate in the hiring process of the school principal or other administrators of the school by conducting interviews of candidates and reporting on such interviews to the superintendent and the board of education pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-233j (d) (3).
 - d. She did not assist the principal in making programmatic and operational changes for improving the school's achievement pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-233j (d) (4).
 - e. She was not involved in developing and approving a written parent involvement policy that outlined the role of parents and legal guardians in the school pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-233j (d) (6).
 - f. She believes that Blackham School Governance Council members have not been made aware of their authority nor are they given opportunities to exercise this authority.
 - g. She believes that while Blackham School Governance Council meetings inform members, they do not encourage input.
9. Upon information and belief, Kimberly Bruce, a resident of Bridgeport since 2004, and was appointed in 2011 to the School Governance Council for the Wilbur Cross School. During her tenure on this School Governance Council, Ms. Bruce experienced the following:
- a. She was not given the opportunity to review the fiscal objectives of the draft budget for the school and provide advice to the principal of the school before the budget was submitted to the superintendent pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-233j (d) (2).
 - b. While she initially participated in the hiring process of the school administrators, she has not recently been involved in conducting interviews of candidates and reporting on such interviews to the superintendent and the board of education as required by C.G.S. Section 10-233j (d) (3).
 - c. She did not assist the principal in making programmatic and operational changes for improving the school's achievement pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-233j (d) (4).
 - d. She was appointed to the School Governance Council by the Principal of the school rather than elected by other parents pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-233j (b).

- e. She is aware that the School Governance Council meets only quarterly.
 - f. The School Governance Council meetings are called by and run by the Principal; furthermore, it is unclear as to who the Chairperson is.
10. As a further example of the disregard Bridgeport Public Schools has for School Governance Councils, upon information and belief, Delores Mason, a school employee who was openly critical of how the school district disregarded these councils, was informed that her position was being eliminated.
11. That the Board of Education for Bridgeport Public Schools, through its superintendent, Paul Vallas, is not interested in following the statutory mandates of the School Governance Councils, is clearly demonstrated in his recent comments before that Board. In March of this year, the following colloquy between Superintendent Vallas and the Board illustrates his antipathy: "Dr. Kelleher said school governance councils are mandated by state laws and they are struggling to find a level of respect and identity at the schools. Mr. Vallas responded they were a response to a parent trigger law involving closing schools, but that typically the school governance councils dominate the parents. The superintendent said where school (sic) have governance councils we work with them, but he did not view the expenditure of time and energy as a priority over spending more time with parents hand holding school forums. Mr. Vallas said he hears very clearly what principals, unions and teachers want, but he wants to hear from groups that are parent-led, parent-dominated and have a single parent voice... Ms. Pereira expressed disagreement, (noting) school governance councils are mandated by law and there are supposed to be seven parents on the council. She added that the district's priorities could not alter the law. Mr. Vallas said that the state does not object to making things other than a school governance council a priority, no is the district in violation of the law. Ms. Pereira said school governance councils are part of the parent engagement policy and should be part of the principal's job." (see pages 8-9 of Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Bridgeport Board of Education held on March 27, 2013, attached hereto as Exhibit 1)

Submitted by:



Gary Peluchette, President
Bridgeport Education Association

Monday, March 27, 2013

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION , held March 27, 2013, at Sacred Heart University, 101 Oakview Drive, Trumbull, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 12:25 p.m.

Present were Chair Kenneth Moales Jr., Leticia Colon, John Bagley, Maria Pereira, Jacqueline Kelleher, Thomas Mulligan, and Hernan Illingworth.

The first item on the agenda was the presentation of the administration's 2013-2014 priorities. Supt. Vallas said his presentation would be an incorporation of a series of presentations made at board meetings. He noted next year's budget would soon be forthcoming.

Supt. Vallas described his morning and afternoon meetings with faculty, separate from principals, and his plans to visit every school. In many cases he has visited schools more than once.

Mayor Finch arrived at the meeting and thanked the board for its service and longed for a day when we can all be unanimous.

Mr. Vallas said his approach is to deal with the public directly, which is why he stays here through weekends, visits churches and has evening forums.

The superintendent said the common themes he hears from teachers are the need more for instructional time and that the benchmark assessment system and teacher evaluation systems are too time-consuming. Mr. Vallas said the goal is simplify the systems.

EXHIBIT 1

Mr. Vallas said administrators say they need more support for at-risk students as well as simplification of the benchmark test and evaluation system.

Turning to parents and the community, the superintendent said parents want choices and options, and they want all their kids to go to superior schools. Community and community leaders want transparency and extracircular programs.

Mr. Vallas said the district is in crisis academically. Only 48 percent of students are proficient in both reading and mathematics and only 55 percent of students from high schools graduate. Although data is unclear, Mr. Vallas said he suspected the percentage of graduates who complete college is probably in the single digits. The benchmark test data indicates students are actually doing worse than reflected on the state exams.

The superintendent said when he came to district there was a very limited choice of quality school options compared to Hartford and New Haven. He also described a total lack of a comprehensive human capital strategy, including the absence of an aggressive effort to recruit teachers and build the next generation of leaders.

Mr. Vallas said data that less than ten percent of the district's teachers are African-American and less than ten percent Latino indicated the lack of an aggressive recruitment policy. The number of teachers retiring with less than ten years of service suggests Bridgeport is the last stop for many teachers.

Supt. Vallas said when he arrived in the district there was a culture of limited accountability and transparency. He said he has had more fights trying to get things on the district's website than off the website.

Mr. Vallas said he found financial mismanagement when he took over in the district, including overspending in transportation, printing, and special education. Ten percent of the total budget was going to

about 300 special education students, which impacted the financial allocation to other students.

In response to a questions from Ms. Colon, Mr. Vallas described potential teacher recruiting efforts in Puerto Rico. Rev. Moales requested agenda items in future board meetings on homework and minority recruitment.

Mr. Vallas said special education traditionally misdiagnoses students,. For example, 80 percent of African-American boys in special education have no cognitive disabilities. He described SRBI and early invention as the silver bullet in this area.

Ms. Pereira expressed concern about potential closure of schools. Supt. Vallas said he was not proposing to close any schools, but state accountability requirements can cause school closure if schools are persistently failing. Mr. Vallas said we have to design interventions for failing schools or the state will take them away. He described new models being implemented at Longfellow School and Curiale School. Among potential models Mr. Vallas listed the Commissioner's Network, Jumoke, Classical Studies and CREC (Hartford).

Supt. Vallas then described the district's priorities: expand school choices, stabilize and build long-term a comprehensive curriculum instructional strategy, provide strategic academic interventions and supports, create a permanent structure for community engagement and involvement, a human capital development strategy, a comprehensive strategy on school safety and climate, a strategy to modernize schools and classrooms, and to create an accountability system characterized by transparency and oversight.

Following Mr. Vallas's description of the administration's accomplishments, Mr. Illingworth noted that the Classical Studies school was not a perfect model because the enrichment program is not being used effectively. At Central High School, he added, there is no Safe Corridors program.

Mr. Vallas said there will be three home-school coordinators on a trial basis in the high schools and the job description is changing pending union approval. Ms. Pereira said the absence of a home-school coordinator is resulting in a lack of parental participation in the school's' PTSOs.

Rev. Moales conducted a quick survey and all board member agreed home-school coordinators were needed.

Supt. Vallas said there are expansions at Black Rock and Classical Studies, early childhood slots are increasing, and there is a revamped Twilight Program at high schools. Four new high schools are opening. The interdistrict magnet high schools are currently sixty or seventy students shy of the necessary suburban numbers, but Mr. Vallas expressed confidence those slots will be filled if transportation issues are worked out.

Mr. Vallas said the district was considering models for gifted students such as Montessori and Renzulli. Ms. Pereira expressed about concern segregating student populations with gifted programs. Dr. Sandra Kase, chief administrative officer, said the Renzulli model would not be used to create Renzulli academies but to look at developing gifts and talented models. Supt. Vallas said the Renzulli model is designed to grow the number of gifted and talented students, not skim off the best students.

Dr. Kelleher requested the Renzulli model be presented to the Student Achievement Committee or the full board.

Mr. Vallas said he was looking to double the size of adult education. The district is currently looking for a second site to house the program. He noted there was currently a waiting list of 150 to get into adult education and that expansion is funded by the state. Mr. Illingworth spoke in favor of the expansion because many of the adult graduates he spoke to were dropouts and students that we've failed. Ms. Pereira said the program was not cost-free because the district spends a dollar out of our operating budget for every \$1.53 the state contributes.

Mr. Vallas then said pilot money is being sought for an afternoon program at Bullard Havens for vocational tech programs for high school students and he described a partnership with BAYM, designed to introduced students to computers and technology.

Turning to the budget, the superintendent said he was optimistic we are going to finish year with a balanced budget, and finish with a small surplus, despite heath-care cost increases. He added that Bridgeport is the most underfunded district in the state and an aggressive agenda is being pursued in the state legislature.

In response to a question from Ms. Pereira, Mr. Vallas clarified that his reference to surplus meant there would be pre-buy and no money would revert to the city.

Dr. Kase said the level of instruction had to be raised for all students. Evaluation procedures for teachers and new curriculum and instructional programs have been instituted. She said this year has been a formative year because teachers in Bridgeport have not heretofore had the quantity and quality of instructional choices. In response to a question, Dr. Kase said the Accu-Placer tests, a national college entrance examination, is being administered to students.

Dr. Kase described the online feedback that teachers can provide regarding the curriculum.

Ms. Pereira said the number one concern she receives from parents is the amount of testing. She noted the national debate on the subject and the belief that tests typically do not measure critical thinking. Dr. Kase responded that the testing next year is going to be streamlined with formative assessments that are benchmarked to the curriculum. Rev. Moales said many students, particularly minorities, lack test-taking skills not aptitude. Mr. Vallas said, however, the universities, technical training schools and military training schools all put great emphasis on tests. He described the state tests as too limited, given too early, results provided too late

and consisting of too much preparation and high stakes. In response to a question, Mr. Vallas said SAT prep programs will be incorporated into district electives for high school students.

The superintendent said teachers will be evaluated on what they're doing to implement the interventions, not the results of benchmark testing.

Dr. Kelleher opined that there is research that shows SRBI (scientific research-based intervention) works, but it must be implemented with fidelity. She added that statewide high schools lag behind in implementing SRBI. Dr. Kase said high schools are not used to differentiated instruction, but there will be more and more at the high school level.

Mr. Vallas said interventions are focused on students, staff and schools. Teacher supports needs to be differentiated. A Gates Foundation grant has been applied for that provides differentiated professional development. He described the use of SRBI for differentiation in the district as totally unique. Mr. Vallas said the tiering of schools, students or teachers is to support, not to punish. Parents will be evaluated through online data how their children are doing relative to their class and school.

Behavioral SRBI models are also being looked at.

Mr. Vallas said the state has categorized schools and there is a state requirement for interventions for schools that are failing. Supt. Vallas said the district is going to tier its schools based on the state criteria, but adjustments may be made after onsite quality reviews for designing the interventions.

For Tier III, failing schools, the community will be presented with potential models such as Jumoke, Classical Studies and Blueprint, and be able to select the model.

Supt. Vallas said by doing this we are able to stay in compliance with state requirements, we keep schools open, we empower the

community, and there is an end date if schools are chronically under performing.

He said Tier III schools in the district included Bassick, Harding, Curiale, Dunbar, Roosevelt and Longfellow. In response to a question, he said Columbus and Bryant could be candidates for Tier III.

Dr. Kase said the school improvement plans are in existence and still used.

Ms. Pereira said a recent teacher of year in Connecticut made a valuable point about problems with teacher evaluations based on test scores because it fails to account for truancy and student mobility which the teacher doesn't have control over. The superintendent said teachers are not responsible for truancy. He said data had to be disaggregated to account for mobility. He added that accommodations should be made for mobility and account for measuring how the kids who have been in the classroom all year have done. He said evaluation should be based on whether the prescribed interventions are implemented by the teacher.

Rev. Moales said teachers who say they don't want to be evaluated send a flag immediately about those teachers. Dr. Kase said the new evaluation system is evidence-based and not as subjective as prior evaluation methods.

In response to a question from Dr. Kelleher as to whether quality review teams for teachers will be comprised of peers within the district or outside of the district, Dr. Kase said she thinks it will be a combination, including some of the best principals in the district. Mr. Vallas described the process as designed to be practical and teacher-friendly, and that the best evaluations are self-empowerment guides, not gotcha guides.

Ms. Pereira said when going to the community it was important not to use educ-speak and acronyms. Dr. Kase then announced that the

community forum about the Commissioner's Network at Dunbar will be held on April 2nd, from 6:00 to 8:00.

On the subject of community engagement, Mr. Vallas said progress has been made this year with the creation of parent hotline and the parent engagement policy, which he called the parent Magna Carta.

He said he would continue community forums in the schools due to their success and the track of record of establishing good relationships with the community.

Supt. Vallas said the parent engagement policy has to be implemented and principals know that part of their evaluation is parent engagement. Input from PAC members will be sought during principal evaluations. The superintendent said that he wants to continue to meet with parents directly. He cited the example of seven meetings at Longfellow, which led to the emergence of a cadre of parents leaders in the school community.

Mr. Illingworth suggested training opportunities for the PAC, which is not being done by the Parent Center, be added to the priorities.

Dr. Kelleher said school governance councils are mandated by state laws and they are struggling to find a level of respect and identity at the schools. Mr. Vallas responded they were a response to a parent trigger law involving closing schools, but that typically the school governance councils dominate the parents. The superintendent said where school have governance councils we work with them, but he did not view the expenditure of time and energy as a priority over spending more time with parents and holding school forums. Mr. Vallas said he hears very clearly what principals, unions and teachers want, but he wants to hear from groups that are parent-led, parent-dominated and have a single parent voice.

Ms. Pereira expressed disagreement, nothing school governance councils are mandated by law and there are supposed to be seven parents on the council. She added that the district's priorities could not alter the law. Mr. Vallas said the state does not object to making

things other than a school governance council a priority, nor is the district in violation of the law. Ms. Pereira said school governance councils are part of the parent engagement policy and should be part of the principal's job.

Mr. Illingworth urged the administration to take the lead in making sure school governance councils are accessible to parents, including when meetings are scheduled.

Ms. Pereira said she had not received metrics on the use of the parent hotline. Mr. Illingworth responded that the Community Engagement Committee would look at this issue.

In response to Ms. Pereira's concerns about outdated school websites, Dr. Kase said principals have been spoken to to make sure parent engagement policy is on the websites. Mr. Vallas said Ms. Pereira's point was well taken and there will be a response because it is a transparency issue. He said the goal is to clean up the district's website and push the schools to do the same.

Turning to human capital, Mr. Vallas said there was a surprisingly good talent pool in the district and there has been great success in identifying principal candidates for the new schools; in fact, there may be too many good candidates

The superintendent said his strategy is to recruit top teachers early in the process and to have new teachers spend time in the district's classrooms before being hired. He described the current pool of teacher candidates as the best we've ever had.

Mr. Illingworth said more direct supervision of principals is needed due to lack of policy implementation at the school level. Mr. Vallas disagreed because the principals are being supervised like never before by Dr. Kase, Amy Marshall and Terri Carroll, and by Marlene Siegel on the financial side.

A discussion developed around teacher certifications. Dr. Kase said alternate routes to certification are now available for second career

teachers or teachers with knowledge of subject matter. For the traditional pathway, state certifications have been strengthened. Mr. Vallas said discussions have taken place with state to create Teach for American-type programs for recruiting African-American students with STEM backgrounds. The superintendent said there must be an increase in minority teachers above the current ten percent level. He added that the district made early commitments to 40 new teachers in February. Pilot programs with historic black colleges are being explored.

In the area of school climate and safety, Mr. Vallas said training for the Safe Corridors is starting up and he is optimistic it will grow. He added that parents who work in the program should be entitled to a stipend, particularly those may participate up to twenty hours a week.

Supt. Vallas described the oversight of the administration in place . Among the items he mentioned were the board, regular visits by the state to the district, the visits by the Gates Foundation(which is guiding the district in writing a professional development grant), and the financial advisory group of business people looking at finances.

In response to a question from Ms. Pereira, Supt. Vallas said the financial condition report of the district was updated every two months. Ms. Pereira said there was a board policy that the board be provided with a financial report every month, which is useful in monitoring expenses throughout the year. Mr. Vallas and Ms. Siegel, chief financial officer, explained that there was an additional time-consuming work involved to update forecasts and detailed analysis when presenting the financial condition reports. Mr. Vallas said he would be willing to provide MUNIS reports on a monthly basis, and noted that the district publishes financial reports, contracts and his own schedule on the web. Rev. Moales said no other school districts updates its finances and posts them online the way Bridgeport does. He indicated support for Mr. Vallas's position.

Dr. Kelleher requested data be provided regarding program impact on new initiatives in special education, SRBI, the Twilight Program,

student success plans, as well as a textbook update. Rev. Moales said he would submit questions from the board to the superintendent by Thursday and requested information be provided to board members by Wednesday of next week.

Motion to adjourn was made Mr. Illingworth. The motion was seconded by Dr. Kelleher and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


John McLeod