BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION
AGENDA OF VIRTUAL SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION

MONDAY, AUGUST 17, 2026 - 6:00 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING

1. **Public Speaking**
2. **Approval of the Minutes: Special Meeting July 27, 2026**
3. ***Discussion of, and Possible Action Concerning, Dr. Avery's Employment, Performance, and Evaluation as Interim Superintendent, Including Possible Increase of the Annualized Salary for Dr. Avery as Interim Superintendent and Amendment of the Employment Agreement Between Dr. Avery and the Board to Reflect Such Salary Adjustment. Portions of this Matter May Occur in Executive Session Pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. Sec. 1-200 (6) Upon a 2/3 Majority Vote of the Board Members Present and Voting.**

4. **Adjourn**

Monday, July 27, 2026

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held July 27, 2028, via Microsoft Teams, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Present were Chair Jennifer Perez, Vice Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Secretary Maritza Estremera Jimenez, Albert Benejan Grajales, Robert Traber, and Andre Woodson. Willie Medina joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

Interim Supt. Royce Avery was present.

The meeting was called to order at 6:06 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved to approve the minutes of Special Meetings of June 17, June 24, July 6, and July 13, 2026. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and approved by a 5-0 vote.

Voting in favor were members Sokolovic, Perez, Traber, Woodson, and Benejan Grajales. Ms. Estremera Jimenez abstained.

The next agenda item was a presentation from Public Works on the Bridgeport Public Schools' audit recommendations sustainability plan.

JoAnn Cox said it has been pleasure working with the BPS leadership and staff. She said Public Works' contract expired on June 30th, and the intent is to update on the progress made. She added that 12 of the 34 CLA audit recommendations are completed and procedures are in place to ensure that the issue that caused the recommendation in the first place will not resurface, while 22 of the recommendations are on a continuum of progress being made.

Dr. Cox said there was an onsite visit to the district during the week of November 17th, which included a budget brainstorming session. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with leadership, staff, principals, school-level staff, and city-level staff. Virtual meetings continued later.

Dr. Cox said we provided the staff with best practices from other districts. She described other work that was done.

Dr. Cox said strong collaboration was encouraged with the city staff in the areas of internal audit, MUNIS application, and position controls. A sustainability plan was created in May.   She described a 30-day plan that was implemented during the month of June, which included timelines and methodologies, system needs, and feedback on draft procedures. A repository of sample manuals was created. She thanked the district IT staff for setting up a secure portal.

Betty Ressel spoke on budget development. She said there are three areas where further progress is needed: technology, procedures, and training. She said many financial processes were being carried out with Excel spreadsheets, and the financial people did not have good report-writing software, and action is underway to provide this.

Ms. Ressel said the budget monitoring and reporting process has the same issue because there is not access to MUNIS files or they are too complex for principals and department heads. She said the software would also address this.

Mr. Woodson joined the meeting.

Ms. Rassel said the administration would be bringing to the board some accounting issues where work is still being done.

Lesli Cathey said there were four HR audit recommendations, which relate to technology, procedures, and training. She described the status of implementation.

Ms. Ressel said an issue was discovered that benefits were not being discontinued in a systematic way, and examples of errors were found and corrected. She said now benefits are being examined on a monthly basis. She said the finance department took over many of the processes and procedures when there were vacancies in the HR department, which led to a lack of separation of duties. Training of HR staff to take back functions is ongoing. She described changes that were needed to reduce the amount of cash handling at the campus level.

Ms. Ressel said, working with the district, budget calendars and procedures were developed for the next budget cycle. Finance, HR, and grants and purchasing procedures are in place. She a lot of internal control issues have been identified, and many have been remediated. There will be better reporting, more transparency, and better collaboration.

Dr. Cox said she sees the next steps for leadership are to immediately establish some timelines and priorities for in-progress implementations. She said the contract with Public Works ended on June 30th, but the team is available to answer staff questions.

Dr. Avery thanked Public Works for their work and getting us to where we are today. He said the state technical assistance team would take over the work that we will continue to do.

Dr. Avery said having disjointed operations and procedures affects everything we do. He said it was important for the public to trust the school district to utilize the dollars that are given to it. He described the importance of procedures for student activity accounts, payroll and position controls.

Dr. Avery presented a current implementation snapshot of progress. He said reports on the audit recommendations will be presented to the board regularly.

Dr. Avery said a member of the cabinet team will own the remaining groups of items to be completed. He explained the areas to be worked on.

In response to a question, Nestor Nkwo, chief financial officer, said we're exploring with banks controls on P-cards, which will include principals approving a purchase, attaching an invoice, along with a review at the business office, before it gets paid. Principals will designate one employee who will be a program manager for an activity fund.

In response to a question, Ms. Ressel said the audit found the activity funds were being maintained at the campus level with limited documentation. She said the procurement card is a stopgap in the handling of cash.   Mr. Nkwo said every transaction will be recorded in the bank statements and will result in the elimination of the use of cash in receiving money from parents.

The next agenda item was on the qualified purchase for Blackham basketball court replacement.

Jaimie McCarville, finance manager of the facilities department, said the asphalt court is in disrepair. Additional capital funds were available, and quotes were received from contractors. The quotes came in over the $25,000 threshold, so approval was requested for a qualified purchase for the lowest, which was $35,600. She said time was of the essence for completion prior to the opening of school.

Mr. Traber noted this was the only recreational spot for the middle school side of the building.

In response to a question, Ms. McCarville said the amount requested was $40,000 to allow for unforeseen occurrences. Jorge Garcia, chief operations officer, said this was done for contingencies, and he said having a small contingency on these projects is prudent.

In response to a question, Ms. McCarville described the qualified purchase procedures, which were followed in this case.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said contingencies make sense and she uses them in her projects as well.

Mr. Medina moved "*to approve the qualified purchase for the Blackham School basketball court replacement as discussed and shown to the board*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the qualified purchase for the Claytor School resurfacing and repairs. Ms. McCarville said the vendor is Kompan, which has been used for several recent playgrounds. She said the surfacing on both playgrounds has been ripped up or damaged. The cost is $198,047, with the surfacing material being very pricey. She said it was not possible to put play fiber at this location because of the surface underneath. The purchase is being made through capital funds.

Mr. Medina moved "*to approve the cooperative purchase for the Claytor School resurfacing/repairs*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was approval of the Department of Administration Services' Office of School Construction Grants and review of final plans.

Larry Schilling said this was to go to the state to get permission to go to bid for Phase 2 of the Winthrop project, which is construction and installation of the playscape. He said the board previously approved Phase 1, the abatement and demolition, which is underway now and scheduled to be completed in November.

In response to a question, Mr. Schilling said the hired consultant recommended the size of the school based on projected enrollment. Mr. Garcia said he believed the numbers are in line with the facilities master plan.

In response to a question, Mr. Schilling said the school will have a capacity of 685 students.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez moved "*to approve the Department of Administration Services' Office of School Construction Grants, final plans, Form SCG-042*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was approval of a qualified purchase/single source for Fairchild Wheeler HVAC coil replacement.

Ms. McCarville said a similar contract was presented to the board previously. There are several hundred coils that need to be replaced, and as capital funds become available, a qualified purchase is requested. She said this is the contractor who has been doing the work over the last few years, and the work will complete over the next few years. The cost is $94,500, with capital funds to be used.

Mr. Medina moved "*for the qualified purchase of the single source of the Fairchild Wheeler HVAC coil replacement*." The motion was seconded by Ms. Estremera Jimenez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on The University School's modified proposal for the special education program and expulsion program.

Dr. Avery said he has worked with John Esteves Jr. of The University School (TUS) to reduce the costs of students placed there. He said there is a need to provide services to high-needs children. Last year, the contract was about $2 million, but working with Mr. Esteves and the state technical assistance team there will be a savings of about $800,000.

Mr. Medina moved "*approval for The University School modified proposal for the special education program and expulsion program*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said it was not the full contract; they were always separate contracts, but they were done at the same board meeting. He said the other contract was not ready when we posted the agenda, but it will be brought to the next meeting. He said the $800,000 savings is just from this contract.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez read from the contract, which indicated the core of the savings is coming from reducing students from 40 to 30. Mr. Traber said the expulsion component was being reduced by a third.

Mr. Esteves said the current costs are $2.25 million with programs combined. He said the original programs were 40 students and 30 students, and they are now 30 and 20.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said TUS has both a special education program and an expulsion program. The third program is with DRN. Mr. Esteves said DRN is legally separate.

Mr. Traber said this contract is being presented ridiculously late. He said it seems like every year we don't get to this in a timely manner.

Dr. Avery said in previous contracts the district was required to pay for a certain number of seats whether we used them or not. In recent years, the seats have not been all filled, so we approached TUS to reduce the number of seats, which led to the savings of $800,000.

Mr. Medina thanked Mr. Esteves for continuing on the work of his dad at The University School.

Mr. Nkwo said the current year's district budget has $7 million worth of assumptions in it, and this is one of the savings that make up that amount.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on Effective School Solutions (ESS).

Dr. Avery said last year there was an agreement for about $1.3 million. This contract has been reduced as well, and some services are not being utilized as part of the budget reduction options.

Margaret Hughes, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, said the current contract is $1.3 million.

Dr. Avery said we have a strong partnership with ESS, and they've worked within the district for several years now.

Dwaine Millard of Effective School Solutions said we work with the district's high acuity students, with the goal of helping them be part of the least restrictive environments in Bridgeport Learning Center. He said we are providing a $200,000 state grant in partnership with the district. The district will be contributing $105,000 for clinical support in the buildings.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez moved "*to approve the Effective School Solutions proposal*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the Teach for America (TFA)contract.

Dr. Avery said he was pleased to bring back TFA back to the district. He said TFA took last year off to revamp their program. here are currently six or seven applicants from TFA, at the cost of $8,000 each.

Sarah Diggs of Teach for America Connecticut presented. She described Teach for America. She said in 2024 there were 16 teachers in the state, and all 16 successfully completed two years of teaching. In 2025, there were 23 teachers and they are entering into their second year. She said there are currently partnerships with New Haven, Hartford, and a handful of charter organizations.

Ms. Diggs said data from Bridgeport from 2010 to 2021 indicated 179 teachers were placed, averaging between six and thirty teachers per year. She said 86 percent completed their two-year commitment. About 60 percent of those teachers continue to work in education.

Ms. Diggs said there is a focus on local recruitment this year. There are 39 incoming teachers, with 56 percent identifying as people of color. She provided other demographic statistics.

Ms. Diggs said teachers are developed by working closely with districts on coaching and professional learning. She described the certification programs that are used.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said the district is also providing mentoring to TFA teachers. He said Ms. Hughes will be presenting training to new teachers and connecting them with mentors.

Mr. Traber said he was president and vice president of the union when TFA was in the district in the past. He described a prior colleague from TFA who stayed in the district and continued her career in education.

Ms. Diggs said she did TFA in Philadelphia and continued her career in education in Connecticut. She said she would love to have a meeting with Mr. Traber and TFA teachers. Mr. Traber said he had no problem bringing Teach for America into the district while encouraging them to remain educators.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez moved "*to approve the Teach for America agreement*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the TransFinder/WayFinder proposal.

P.J. Karaffa, chief information officer, said we have been looking at this software for some time, and also looking to identify ridership on buses. He said this will give a better picture of how many buses we need. He said the software will help with safety, ridership, and Medicaid reimbursements.

Mr. Karaffa said there will be alerts when a bus deviates from its normal route, and parents will be able to access this information. He described how linking with Power School the software will allow us to take attendance of children on the bus. Students will be able to tap into the bus with ID cards.

Mr. Karaffa said the system will allow us to audit who is on the bus and when they got off the bus.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa said the amount of Medicaid reimbursement could not be estimated at this time. He said the student has to be on the bus a given number of days. This information has never been gathered previously.

Dr. Avery said the potential benefit is probably more than what we're going to pay for the software. Mr. Karaffa said the initial cost is $54,350, including training of bus drivers, and $42,000 and $44,000 in the next two years.

Mr. Medina said he applauded bringing this forward.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa described the options for providing tracking information on buses to central office, schools, or parents.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said he worried about students reporting incidents on social media.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa said the bus company currently has tablets on the buses. If the district had to provide those, it would cost about $150,000 to $200,000.

Mr. Medina said he looked forward to the technology being brought to the district.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez moved "*to approve the TransFinder/WayFinder proposal*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the Hill for Literacy contract.

Ms. Hughes said the contract is in the amount of $150,960 and represents a continuation of the ongoing partnership with the Connecticut state Department of Education and the Hill for Literacy. New teachers in grades K to 6 will receive professional learning, and all teachers in K to 6 will receive job-embedded coaching focused on the implementation of reading instruction.

Ms. Hughes said in the previous year $500,000 was invested to support this work, but due to budget constraints the district's expenditure will be reduced, and the Connecticut state department will provide additional funding. She said it will allow the district to sustain critical literacy coaching and providing leadership support for principals.

In response to a question, Ms. Hughes said this is for foundational reading skills. Dr. Avery said Effective School Solutions is for behavior work, which is separate.

In response to a question, Ms. Hughes said this is part of the Alliance Grant.

Jenna Gampel said the Hill for Literacy works closely with the state and districts in Connecticut. She said last year, $363.000 was funded by the state and will fund at the same level or more this year. Data will be used to make informed decisions.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez moved to approve the Hill for Literacy contract. The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

Mr. Medina moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod