

BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION
AGENDA OF REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION

MONDAY, APRIL 27, 2026 - 6:30 PM
BRIDGEPORT REGIONAL AQUACULTURE SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION
CENTER
60 ST. STEPHENS ROAD
BRIDGEPORT, CT 06605

1. **Call to Order**
2. **Pledge of Allegiance**
3. **Roll Call**
4. **Student Representative Reports**
5. **Public Comment**
6. **Chairperson's Report**
 - a. Update on the Board of Education's Progress to State Intervention.
7. **Committee Reports/Referrals**
 - a. Operations Committee
 - b. Instruction & Support Services
 - c. Policy Committee
 - d. Ad Hoc Committees
 - e. CABA Report
8. **Superintendent's Report**
 - a. Student Recognition
 - b. Budget Update
9. **Consent Agenda**
 - a. Approval of the April 13, 2026 Regular Meeting Minutes
10. **Old Business**
11. **New Business**
12. **Additional Public Comment as Needed**
13. **Adjourn**

Monday, April 13, 2026

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April 13, 2026, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science and Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

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

*Remote participation.

Interim Supt. Royce Avery was present.

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:

Christian Bica of Central High School reported on his school. He highlighted spring sports, upcoming AP exams, course scheduling for next year, and class events like the ring dance and senior prom.

Mr. Woodson* joined the meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to suspend the rules to allow all public commenters to speak.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

Travis Perricone, director of operations at Bridgeport Caribe Youth Leaders, said he was here on behalf of John Torres with a letter of support for Dr. Avery. Mr. Torres’s letter said he had strong support for appointing Dr. Avery as superintendent.

Marge Hiller, former director of the Bridgeport Public Education Fund, said Dr. Avery was respected by teachers, administrators, parents, students, and the public. She said she did not understand why Dr. Avery was not being offered a two-year contract instead of conducting a search for a superintendent.

Edith Boyle, president and CEO of Life Bridge Community Services, said she was strongly in support of Dr. Avery’s appointment as superintendent. She said Life Bridge partners with the district every day supporting students. She described Dr. Avery as a true partner.

Mr. Daniels* joined the meeting.

Khaled Elleit, president of the Bridgeport Islamic Community Center, which he said serves more than two thousand families across Greater Bridgeport, said Muslims observe two major holidays: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. He urged the board to also recognize Eid al-Adha as a school

holiday. He said the impact on academic calendar would be minimal because the holidays often fall on weekends.

James Meszoros, retired security officer for the district, said he was in support of Dr. Avery. He urged the board to move forward with Dr. Avery's appointment.

Stephen Nelson, retired school police officer and an elected city sheriff, said he was upset with adult education program, where eight teachers were fired. He said we need to have people that look like our kids that understand what they're going through and want to help them.

Omar Resto, father of two children in the district and a district employee for 24 years, said Dr. Avery has brought a sense of stability that we desperately needed. He described the tenure of prior superintendents and the events that occurred.

Jess Resto, a parent, said the board should stop repeating the cycle because there is now progress and stability in the district. She said trust is being rebuilt in a way people can feel. She said it would have been easy for Dr. Avery to leave, but he chose to stay. She said Dr. Avery should be supported in the board's actions.

Marwan Majeed said he was speaking on behalf of many families in the Bridgeport Muslim community. He said he supported Dr. Avery's appointment as superintendent. He requested Eid al-Adha be added to the official school

holiday calendar. He described how the holiday is celebrated.

John Ramos II, principal of Discovery Magnet School, said he was in support of Dr. Avery as superintendent. He described the struggles that occur when superintendents change. He said morale of students and staff greatly improved when Dr. Avery took over.

Jeffrey Schwartz, a leader with Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut, spoke in favor of adding Eid al-Adha to the school calendar. He said it was important for children to learn about different religious traditions, and honoring diverse religions sends the message that everyone is welcome here.

Faith Villegas, executive director of the Bridgeport Public Education Fund, said she would like to echo the support of prior speakers for Dr. Avery and with respect to religious equity and inclusion. She said students' needs should be put first

Mostafa Hassam, teacher residency program coordinator at the University of Bridgeport, said he was in support of including Eid al-Adha as an official school holiday. He said he was an educator and his wife is a certified elementary school teacher. He said negative stereotypes and misunderstandings about Islam can negatively impact

students and educators. He described an incident at the school where his wife was teaching.

Emma Alamo, a nurse practitioner, said Dr. Avery was a leader in action and was committed to students' education and families. She said Dr. Avery's visits to classrooms send the message that our children matter. She said it was time for the board to do the right thing for our kids.

Amani Lawani, a 10th grade student at Capital Prep Harbor School, said recognizing Eid al-Adha as a holiday will let students like her not have to choose between school or celebrating with family. She said the holiday was a celebration of Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son to obey Allah.

CHAIR REPORT:

Ms. Perez said the board received a letter back from the state on March 31st, which asked that we begin the superintendent search by selecting a search firm by June 1st. She said discussions within the board are underway on this.

Mr. Sokolovic said the state was upset that we were going to move to offer Dr. Avery a one-year contract. He said the state can appoint a superintendent if they don't like who we pick and the state was a hindrance to the process.

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND REFERRALS:

Ms. Perez said the Operations Committee met and brought two items to the consent agenda tonight. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for May 6th.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested a special meeting sooner than May 6th because of budget issues. He referred an item regarding a resolution on the finances of the district.

Mr. Traber said the Instruction and Support Services Committee will meet on April 22nd.

Mr. Woodson said the Policy Committee will meet on April 15th.

Mr. Medina said that we have to stop acting with fear. He said suggested an ad hoc calendar committee be formed.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez referred Policy 9321 regarding cameras to the Policy Committee and policy on non-committee members speaking during committee meetings.

Mr. Traber reported on the Ad Hoc Advocacy Committee. He said there has been tremendous progress in the last few weeks in the pursuit of funding in Hartford. He said we have been told the amount of funding may exceed the amount needed to balance the budget. He said he appreciated Dr. Avery's support in the effort.

Mr. Traber said there would be a meeting this Saturday with members of the Bridgeport delegation. Next week,

the City Council hearing and Bridgeport Day in Hartford will occur.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said he would like to meet on April 23rd with the Ad Hoc committee on the facilities master plan.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said CABA will hold an event on May 12th for board members. The CABA/CAPSS convention will be held on November 20/21. A CABA webinar will be available on May 20th.

Mr. Traber said CABA is content with the \$150 million package and is not seeking increases, which is not satisfactory to us.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Dr. Avery said he hoped everyone had a restful and enjoyable spring break. He thanked community members for their continued support. He said he is committed to going deeper on the academic side and ensuring every student receives the support they need.

Dr. Avery said a grant is going to be received for free Wi-Fi for public housing. He said several playgrounds in the district will be upgraded during the summer.

Dr. Avery commended the board for working diligently to get policies updated.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said the technology department is assessing the status of computers in the district and there will be an update soon.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Mr. Traber moved *“to approve the consent agenda.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales.

Mr. Sokolovic requested the removal of item D for discussion. It was placed under New Business.

Consent agenda items A, B, C, and E were unanimously approved.

Approval of the March 23, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes.

Approval of the Multicultural Magnet School overnight field trip May 6-8, 2026, to Outdoor Classroom, Lakeside, CT.

Approval of the High Horizons Magnet School overnight field trip June 3-5, 2026, to Philadelphia, PA.

Approval of the Request for Proposals for Absence Management and Staffing Services for the Period July 1, 2026-June 30, 2029

NEW BUSINESS:

The next agenda item was on the proposed permit policy for 2026-2031.

Mr. Sokolovic said that we asked at the committee for information on how much Lighthouse costs the district.

Jorge Garcia, chief operating officer, said currently Lighthouse pays \$75,000. An analysis with the upgraded fees will be provided to the board by the end of the week. He said it was substantially more \$75,000.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “to approve the permit policy as presented by Mr. Garcia.” The motion was seconded by Ms. Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on approval of the contract for construction services for Columbus School, front entrance masonry work.

Jamie McCarvill of the facilities department said the project will replace the steps and ramp of the entrance. The contract for \$39,995, obtained through a public bid, will be funded with capital funds.

In response to a question, Ms. McCarvill said it was the lowest bid.

Mr. Traber moved “to approve the contract for construction services for Columbus School front entrance masonry work.” The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was approval of the contract for Bryant School paving and site work.

Ms. McCarvill said this replaces the paving of the existing area and the area where the playground is. Sidewalks will

be replaced, along with curbing. The retaining wall will also be replaced. There was a public bid, the lowest bidder was chosen, and it is being funded with capital funds and a grant. Mr. Garcia said the cost is \$301,505.29.

Mr. Traber moved *“to approve the contract for Bryant School paving and site work.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on Bryant School playground. Ms. McCarvill said the contractor is Kompan, which has been used on many district playgrounds. The contract is a cooperative contract funded with capital funds and a grant. The total is \$154,469.

Mr. Traber moved *“to approve the contract for the Bryant School playground.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was to amend the 2026-27 capital plan to add a pool complex at Central High School.

Mr. Garcia said we're looking for an additional \$2,381,000 for an exciting project. He said the Brant Foundation approached him about providing a pool to the district. He said the green space at Central High was chosen. The foundation would provide a donation of about \$8 million; the rest would be financed at 20 percent city match. He said we would look for approval from the City Council for the match.

Mr. Garcia said it would be an outdoor pool with a pool house.

Mr. Sokolovic said the documentation did not include a mention of Bridgeport Public Schools, and it seemed to be a partnership between Wakeman and the city. He said it appeared the district would be giving up a softball field. He said it appeared on its face that we are relinquishing authority to hold that property.

Mr. Garcia said there was not sufficient time to bring the proposal to the board prior to approval of the capital plan. He said Brant Foundation wants to do a long-term endowment for ten years to pay the operating costs. He said we don't have the wherewithal to maintain a building or a pool, so Wakeman will provide those services. He said it was still a work in progress.

Mr. Garcia described the possibility of bringing in additional funding from another donor for work at Central High. He said work on the Blackham pool would be part of the renovation of Blackham.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said Wakeman would potentially run the programs at the site, but the district would have first rights via MOUs. He said it doesn't make sense for the district to manage it in evenings and on weekends.

Mr. Sokolovic said the primary use had to be for schools, and it should be presented to committee. Mr. Garcia said the presentation to the City Council is scheduled on April 25th.

Mark Anastasi of the city attorney's office said unless the board determines it doesn't need the property, the city doesn't have unilateral authority to act with respect to the property.

Mr. Garcia said the request was to add it to the capital budget and to bring it to the City Council to see if they have the appetite for this.

Nestor Nkwo, chief financial officer, said the board approved a five-year capital plan. He between city bonding and the donor, it would not cost the district one penny. Mr. Garcia said usage of the pool could be governed by MOU. Mr. Nkwo said moving forward now was not binding on the board.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said the diagram showed two other baseball diamonds on the site near the football field.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said the concept is no child should have to pay to utilize the facility. He said contracts and approvals would have to be brought back to the board.

Mr. Medina said there are two softball fields on the property that he believed are being utilized. Mr. Garcia said he has not had discussions with the school on this.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said no parking spots will be lost. He said the two lower ballfields on the site needed to be turfed.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said the donor prefers outdoor pools. He noted indoor pools are far more costly due to HVAC expenses. He said this would help make Central a great sports complex. He said the pool would be something special for Bridgeport kids.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said the Bridgeport delegation has sought to bring a fieldhouse to the city, so it was added to the sketch as a hypothetical.

Mr. Sokolovic said the pool would only be useful for part of the year due to New England weather. He said liabilities would also have to be considered.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved *“to table the item to get more information.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

Ms. Perez said if the item is tabled, it would not be part of the capital plan presented to the city. Mr. Garcia said if we don't meet this calendar, he didn't know if the donor would extend out to next year.

The motion was approved by a 5-4 vote. Voting in favor were members Benejan Grajales, Sokolovic, Burks-Jennings, Medina, and Daniels.

Voting in opposition were members Woodson, Perez, Estremera Jimenez, and Traber.

The next agenda item was on the receipt of legal advice from the city attorney's office and/or Shipman & Goodwin relative to the appointment of Supt. Dr. Royce Avery in response to the correspondence on March 31st, 2026, from the State of Connecticut Department of Education.

Ms. Perez said Dr. Avery was notified of his right to have the matter discussed in public session.

Ms. Perez said Atty. Mark Anastasi and Atty. Rebecca Santiago of Shipman & Goodwin would participate. Dr. Avery said he consented to the matter being discussed in executive session. Ms. Perez said Dr. Avery may be part of the executive session if requested by the board.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *"to go into executive session to discuss legal advice from legal."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina and unanimously approved.

The executive session began at 8:27.

The board reconvened in public session at 9:31 p.m.

The next agenda item was approval of the first read of the 2000 administration series policy.

Mr. Sokolovic said it had to be looked at in conjunction with the 3000 series. Ms. Perez said the regulations have been eliminated from the model policy.

Dr. Avery said CAGE has reviewed the 2000 series and has said all the policies are correct and accurate. He said he would like Policies 2113 (assignment and transfer of building administrators), 2131 (job description of the superintendent), and 2151 (hiring of administrative staff) readopted. He said these are the only changes in the entire series and they bring clarity to these items.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was a glaring issue, the use of the phrase, "chief executive officer of the board." He said the superintendent is the chief executive officer of the public schools and answerable to the board. Mr. Traber said this was in 2131-A.

Dr. Avery said he believed the language said the same thing as Mr. Sokolovic was indicating.

Ms. Perez said we were advised that we should not be meeting as a full board in a committee meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to amend the first read to replace it with "the chief executive officer of Bridgeport Public Schools accountable to the board." The amendment was seconded by Mr. Medina.

Mr. Traber said he believed the language was an unclear redundancy. Ms. Perez said it says that throughout the policies.

The amendment was defeated by a 6-2 vote. Voting in opposition were members Woodson, Perez, Daniels, Estremera Jimenez, Traber, and Benejan Grajales. Voting in favor were members Sokolovic and Medina. Ms. Burks-Jennings was not present.

Mr. Traber moved to amend the section to say, "*the superintendent of schools as chief executive officer of the Bridgeport Public Schools will have the following specific powers and duties.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved,

Mr. Sokolovic moved "*to send the 2000 series to committee for further review.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber 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 9:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod