

**BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION
AGENDA OF SPECIAL MEETING OF THE AD HOC LOTTERY PROCESS COMMITTEE**

**MONDAY, AUGUST 3, 2026 - 2:30 PM
CITY HALL ROOM 305
45 LYON TERRACE
BRIDGEPORT, CT 06604**

- 1. Public Speaking**
- 2. Approval of the Minutes: July 9, 2026 & July 23, 2026**
- 3. Review and Discuss of Lottery Policies.**
- 4. Ad Hoc Lottery Proposal to the Full Board**
Approval of the Proposal to the Full Board
- 5. Next Steps**
- 6. Adjourn**

Thursday, July 9, 2026

MINUTES OF THE LOTTERY PROCESS AD HOC COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held July 9, 2026, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Present were members chair Maritza Estremera Jimenez, Robert Traber, and Albert Benejan Grajales.*

*Remote participation. ** began the meeting remote and subsequently arrived in person as noted.

The meeting was called to order at 3:05 p.m.

Interim Supt. Royce Avery was present.

The first agenda item was a summary of magnet program schools and their requirements.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said the committee was formed to review lottery policies in the district and to help increase transparency and equity.

P.J. Karaffa, chief information officer, said the magnet schools were in two buckets: intradistrict and interdistrict schools. There are six pre-K- to-8 magnet programs and five 9-to -2 magnet programs that have lotteries.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa said the district conducts the lottery for other districts who send students to interdistrict magnet schools.

Mr. Karaffa said Discovery Magnet is the only school with a pre-K lottery, where students who enter in pre-K can remain until 8th grade. All other schools do not have a pre-K lottery, so students

in a pre-K program in one of the other schools have not made it into the magnet school for subsequent grades. Seven other districts send students to Discovery Magnet and there is an allocation per town. He said there is no difficulty filling the suburban seats at Discovery and there is a huge waitlist.

Mr. Karaffa said Bridgeport students may enter the lottery process at several different schools.

Mr. Karaffa said 75 percent of students at Fairchild Wheeler are from Bridgeport, with 25 percent being suburban students. If the ratio is not meant, the state requires an action plan to get to the ratio. He said on one occasion a waiver was granted during Covid to allow more Bridgeport students. He said there are about twenty different towns and cities that send students to Fairchild Wheeler. He said the number of suburban students has gone down this year at Fairchild Wheeler.

Mr. Karaffa noted the graduation rate is very high at Fairchild Wheeler and Bridgeport Military Academy.

Dr. Avery said the Fairchild Wheeler program has not been changed since 2013, while suburban schools have rebuilt schools around different career pathways, which reduces the amount of students going to Fairchild Wheeler. He said that we're trying to reinvent high school programs districtwide.

Mr. Traber said we can't compete with districts in Fairfield County who are spending five to ten thousand more per student. He said we need to make sure the magnet school process is fair. He said since 1993, when his daughter started, it's been unfair and it remains unfair. He said we continue to hear stories about the

process being unfair, and we want to make sure none of that is happening.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said she wanted to start with the background because not many people are familiar with the situation.

Mr. Traber said there were three magnet schools in 1994, which were clearly superior to the neighborhood schools in the city. He said the use of the word “magnet” has been extended to Claytor School and Classical Studies. Mr. Traber said Central Magnet was a program inside of Central High. He said we could do similar things inside the other comprehensive high schools.

In response to a question, Mr. Traber said extra state funding is provided to Discovery Magnet, but not the intradistrict magnet schools.

Mr. Karaffa described the process of measuring the square footage of classrooms, some of which cannot hold the contractual maximum of 29 students.

The next agenda item was on the lottery selection process.

Mr. Karaffa described the process that takes place in his office. High school lotteries are opened in the middle of October and run to the middle of January.

Mr. Karaffa said the pre-K/kindergarten lottery is done from January to close to the end of March. The only pre-K lottery is at Discovery.

Mr. Karaffa said parents register their children on the district’s website for the lottery. The parents also select schools they are seeking admission to. He noted the impact of the sibling policy,

where children who enter into the lottery may have siblings already in the school. He said parents who choose to enter the lottery while their children are in second or third grade have only minimal chance because the slots were filled by those entering in kindergarten. He said parents must apply each year even if denied in a prior year.

Mr. Karaffa said every year the old waiting list is disbanded, and the new waiting list starts. He said students from suburban districts are not eligible to attend intradistrict magnet schools.

Mr. Karaffa said verification software is used to determine if the students actually reside in Bridgeport, which he said is a huge issue in the district. He said access to the software is limited to himself and one other person.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said her kids got into Discovery Pre-K to 3, however, it was evident that a lot of the parents were city employees and city officials, so she questioned the equity. She said it was said certain principals are hosting interviews for spots in the school, which should not be the case if it's a lottery.

Mr. Karaffa said years ago the lottery used to be live, but it is now done with software called School Mint that contains student information. He said there have been discussions with the company to hide the student information if it were to be made public. He said once the lottery is run, principals are given about a week to make sure everything is verified with things like siblings. He said after that, the schools pull kids in and out and use the waiting list. He said the process resides in the hands of the schools for the rest of the year.

Mr. Karaffa said about 42 to 50 people have access to the lottery program. He said his office does not know whether if a school really called a parent or declined a parent. He said he has heard the rumors that board members are hearing, and he has made Dr. Avery aware of what people are saying.

Mr. Traber described an incident with his daughter's application to a magnet school about thirty years ago, where she gained admission only because someone told him about an opening in a school despite being on a waiting list. He said we're hearing stories about similar things going on right now. He said somebody has to be monitoring this and preventing abuses. He said it was clear to everybody a few years ago that a student who wasn't even a finalist was put into a magnet school.

Mr. Traber described his daughter and granddaughter meeting with the principal of Classical Studies recently.

Dr. Avery said he used to run a magnet school, but nobody but central office had access to the lottery results. The program reached out parents who were selected in the lottery, and no humans touched the process. Mr. Karaffa said our program can do that, but schools gained the access to pull students in. He said he would be glad to run it out of central office, but it requires personnel for eleven magnet schools.

Mr. Benejan Grajales left the meeting.

Tim Grasty noted there are academic requirements for students to gain admission to magnet schools. Mr. Traber said those situations should be documented. Mr. Grasty said the problems seem to be at the handling of the waiting list.

Mr. Karaffa said deselection occurs in the magnet schools. He added that Fairchild Wheeler's lottery is non-criterion and anyone is allowed in. He said the deselection of children should be documented.

There was a discussion of the impact of enrollment from the suburbs on Fairchild Wheeler.

Mr. Karaffa said Discovery students can bypass the lottery and gain admission to Fairfield Wheeler. Other magnet schools' students gain admission to Central Magnet. There is also going to be a partnership between Geraldine Claytor and Aquaculture.

Mr. Traber said we need an ombudsperson to oversee the progress and monitor numbers because of the outrageous stories we continue to hear.

Dr. Avery said there should be limitations on the number of people who have their hands in the process. Mr. Traber said we want people in Bridgeport to think everyone has the same chance in the public schools.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said the application process is very confusing and there needs to be a layer of transparency after the parent submits their application. She urged there be information on the district's website to walk parents through the process.

Dr. Avery said he had leave to participate in a phone call.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said a major goal is to increase transparency about the lottery and the waiting list. Mr. Karaffa said that could be done by designating students by number. He said complications arise when a student pulled from the waiting list has a sibling who is also eligible.

The next agenda item was a review of the lottery policies.

Mr. Traber requested an opportunity to read them before the next meeting because he was unable to print them at home. He said he also tried to print out the sibling policy.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez moved *"to table the lottery policy review."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber and unanimously approved.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said the next meeting will review the policies, however, policy changes need to go through the Policy Committee.

Mr. Karaffa said he could provide the Central Magnet policies.

There was a discussion of the production of a video on magnet schools and the lottery process. Mr. Grasty said it could be prepared before the next lottery in the fall.

Mr. Traber said he was impressed when he saw a parent's papers that showed the lottery results at several different schools where she entered the lottery.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said that the next meeting would likely be on July 23rd.

Mr. Traber moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Estremera Jimenez and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Thursday, July 23, 2026

MINUTES OF THE LOTTERY PROCESS AD HOC COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held July 23, 2026, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Present were members chair Maritza Estremera Jimenez, Robert Traber, and Albert Benejan Grajales.*

*Remote participation. ** began the meeting remote and subsequently arrived in person as noted.

The meeting was called to order at 3:05 p.m.

Interim Supt. Royce Avery* was present.

The first agenda item was on Policy 5116(b), the elementary magnet school sibling policy.

P.J. Karaffa, chief information officer, said Discovery Magnet is not currently included in the sibling policy.

Mr. Traber said he did not believe a reinvention of the wheel on sibling policy was needed. Ms. Estremera Jimenez suggested eliminating school names and reference magnet schools in the policy to cover any new schools.

There was a discussion of the sibling policy. Mr. Karaffa said the sibling of current students are given priority and pretty much guaranteed entry. Some edits were suggested.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said we would present a formal proposal during the first Regular Meeting of the year with our findings and propose it for implementation. The policies would be referred to

the Policy Committee. Mr. Karaffa noted applications for the high schools are opened in October.

It was noted there are criterion for entering magnet schools regarding grades and behavior.

The next discussion was on elementary magnet entrance and performance expectations policy.

Mr. Traber noted the reference to a public lottery should be removed. Claudia Osorio said board members were invited to observe the high school lottery.

Some edits to language were suggested. Mr. Karaffa and Mr. Traber said wording should be added requiring the filling of open slots from the waiting list immediately.

Mr. Karaffa said one of the problems is with the extended waitlist. He said with the state magnets if there are no suburban students on the waitlist, the slot cannot be filled with a Bridgeport student due to the state mandates, which is an issue at Fairchild Wheeler. He said slots for suburban students are broken down by town.

In response to a question, Ms. Osorio said at Discovery two students per town suburban town are admitted, along with about 25 Bridgeport students. Mr. Karaffa said in the early grades there are fifteen students per classroom. Pre-K has three classrooms of fifteen students each. Mike Ferraiolo said currently there are 31 Bridgeport students. Mr. Traber said this ratio being reported was more like 2 to 1 instead of 3 to 1, so Bridgeport children are being denied access to the pre-K that guarantees access to the best elementary school in the city. Mr. Karaffa said the ratio should be 70/30. Tim Grasty said the ratio at Fairchild Wheeler is 75/25. Mr.

Ferraiolo said 31 students is 68 percent; 32 students would be 71 percent.

Mr. Traber said he questioned why each suburban town should have two students due to differences in population.

Mr. Karaffa said a problem occurs when a magnet student moves out of the district, their seat will be forfeited, and they are sometimes let back into the school, which should be addressed in policy. However, when they leave, the next person on the waiting list should get in.

Mr. Karaffa said the waitlist does not continue into the next year, which is a common misconception.

There was a discussion of issues with fraud involving residency.

Ms. Osorio said occasionally parents forget to designate a sibling on their applications. Mr. Traber pointed out the impact of this on families who do not gain admission to the magnet school. Mr. Karaffa said the creation of a video by Mr. Grasty will help with this.

Mr. Karaffa said nearby towns have incentives for teachers such as school choice. He said we need to think about incentive policies for teachers due to low pay compared to neighboring districts.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez suggested edits to wording in the policies.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa said the kindergarten is non-criterion based. For students in 1st to 8th grade, there are academic requirements of a final grade of C or better, attendance,

discipline, and parent commitment. He said students are typically interviewed by the principal to check on the requirements.

Mr. Traber said there have been administrators who have been less than fair in this process. There was a discussion of an appeal process.

There was a discussion of Central Magnet.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa said the lottery for Bridgeport Military Academy is run by CES, and there are about twenty non-Bridgeport students. He described the weeklong boot camp requirement, which is only held at the beginning of the year and in January, for admission.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa said it would be difficult to remove students who gained entry to a magnet school as a result of their parents cheating. He said tightening up the process may eliminate such activity.

Mr. Traber said he was surprised to learn that Fairchild Wheeler did not have entrance requirements.

Mr. Traber said the board could not create preferential access to magnet schools to attract and retain teachers because it is something that should be bargained with the union. He said it was bordering on bad-faith bargaining. He said if deals are being cut to do this now, it is illegal. He said exceptions have been made to policies for years, so things should be done fairly for every parent in a transparent process.

There was a discussion of TAG referrals.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said he would e-mail questions to Mr. Karaffa. He said he hoped everyone can follow the policies and there should not be favoritism in the system.

There was a discussion of the lottery section of the district's website. Ms. Estremera Jimenez suggested some possible alterations to provide more information on siblings, the waiting list and other things.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said ideally the proposed changes by the committee would be available to the board at its first Regular Meeting on August 24th.

Mr. Grasty noted that the waiting list is not currently a policy.

Ms. Osorio said she could provide a draft to the committee by Monday.

Mr. Traber moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Estremera Jimenez and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod