BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION
AGENDA OF IN-PERSON REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 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**
7. **Committee Reports/Referrals**
   a. Operations Committee
   b. Instruction & Support Services Committee
   c. Policy Committee
   d. Ad Hoc Committees
   e. CABE Report
8. **Superintendent's Report**
9. **Consent Agenda**
   a. Approval of the September 14, 2026 Regular Meeting Minutes
   b. Approval of the Board Goals Created at the Special Meeting of September 21, 2026
10. **Old Business**
11. **New Business**
    a. * Approval of the Proposed Settlement Agreement Involving a Minor
    b. * Presentation of District Security, Safety and Emergency Preparedness Plan
    c. First Read of the Amended Policy Regarding the Lottery Process
12. **Adjourn**

Monday, September 14, 2026

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGPEORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held September 14, 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*, Robert Traber, Andre Woodson*, and Lamond Daniels*.

*Remote participation.

Interim Supt. Royce Avery was present.

The meeting was called to order at 6:54 p.m.

S**TUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:**

Deborah of Bridgeport Military Academy reported on the boot camp; the relocation to the Fairchild Wheeler campus; uniform distribution; a 9/11 remembrance ceremony; and after-school programs.

Isiah and Rachel at Central Magnet High reported on their school. They highlighted students' achievements on AP exams and an awards ceremony; an upcoming open house; the opening of school for over 1,700 students; an upcoming family night; attendance awareness; fall sports; HOSA activities; and the debate club.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

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Mr. Sokolovic moved "*to suspend the rules to allow them all to speak in the first portion of the meeting*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

Aaron Newcomb, a Central teacher and a BEA vice president, said his personal opinions he was giving were difficult because it carries the risk of painting an even larger target on his back. He said this was an exhausting start to the school because HR placed a special education teacher in our building who had no business being hired in any professional setting. He said he was not the only teacher in the district who feels crazy looking at the on-average-$20,0000 raise he would receive in a nearby district.

Rahmatoulie Jobe, a 7th grader at Achievement First, requested the board add the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha to the school calendar. She said Eid al-Adha is one of the two main important holidays in the Islamic faith. She said students have to choose between attending school or being with their families.

Mohammed Jobe, a 9th grader at Central Magnet, asked the board to add the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha to the school calendar. He said this festival of sacrifice is one of the two main important holidays in the Islamic faith. He said students would have to choose between attending school or observing the holiday with their families.

Dr. Khaled Elleithy, president of the Bridgeport Islamic Community Center and dean of the school of education at the University of Bridgeport, said the request for a holiday would help teach children that people of different religions, cultures and backgrounds are equally valued members of the community. He described a March 2025 incident in which two Waterbury middle school students wearing a hijab were physically assaulted by

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classmates in a hate crime and an attack on the Islamic Center in San Diego that killed three adults.

Farhan Mammon of the Connecticut chapter of the Council of American-Islamic Relations thanked the board for recognizing Eid al-Fitr as a school holiday. He asked the board to build on that success by recognizing Eid al-Adha, which is a day of communal prayer, worship, charity, and family gathering. He said no student should have to choose between religious belief and school attendance. He said responding to a significant part of the school community is inclusive and practical administration.

Amina Iawani, a Capital Prep 11th grade student, said she would like to be an attorney in the future. She said it is a reality that many Muslim students had to choose between celebrating an important holiday or going to school. She described the sacrifice aspect of the holiday. She said schools are a place where we learn how to live and work with one another.

Riham Al Hussein, a student at Dunbar School, said Eid al-Adha is a day for prayer, family, giving, and joy, and sharing the day with people we love. Muslim students face a difficult choice of missing Eid al-Adha or missing school. She said we are not asking for special treatment, we are asking for fairness.

Wesam Al Hussein, a student at Harding High, said he was asking for equality, fairness and recognition, not simply a day off from school. He said the Declaration of Independence gave the country a powerful principle that all people are equated equal, and with the right of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. He said students faced a difficult choice of missing school or to go to school and miss an important day with their family.

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Aziz Segal explained Eid al-Adha was a celebration of Prophet Ibrahim agreeing to the sacrifice of his second son, which God replaced with an animal. He said Prophet Ibrahim belongs to all the Abrahamic religions. He said Muslims all over the world sacrifice animals and give it to the poor people. He said recognizing the holiday is a symbol of minority rights in America and religious freedom.

Salem Al Hussein, a student, said Connecticut had a proud history of freedom and equality. He said Muslim students are important and we are part of Connecticut's future. He urged the board to let us make history together.

Tasnim Aljahouch, a student at Housatonic Community College, asked the board to make Eid al-Adha a school holiday, which is one of the most important holidays for Muslim students and families. She said it is a time of kindness, faith, family, generosity, and helping people in need. She said it would give all students a chance to learn about Islam and the values that Muslims, Christians, and Jews share.

Alaa Aljahouch, a student at Read School, said she deserves to celebrate her holiday just like any student who celebrates their holidays and does not have to go to school. She said we should normalize students with different religions and different holidays, and be appreciated just like others.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez read a statement by Andrea Sample. Ms. Sample, a parent of an adult autistic child who receives out-of-district services, urged the board to end the superintendent search and appoint Dr. Avery as our permanent superintendent. She praised Dr. Avery's financial management of the district and academic achievements.

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Maha Attia said it was a right, not a privilege, for our children to celebrate the holiday. She said unity for our families was important. She said she hoped other cities would follow in Bridgeport's footsteps.

Jess Resto requested the board show support for our school bus drivers as the City Council considers changing the parking ordinance where buses can park during the day. She said board support for the drivers would show the collaboration we've been building with the city extends to people who help our schools function.

Angie Van Norden urged the board to advocate for our local resident school bus drivers regarding the city's updated parking regulations. She said the steep $250 fine directly penalizes school drivers who park vehicles during midday split-shift layovers, lunch breaks or bathroom breaks. She said drivers were frontline workers who transport children safely.

CHAIR REPORT:

Ms. Perez said the superintendent's search continues through Zeal. Community engagement will continue with a Thought Exchange survey through Parent Square and the district's website.

Ms. Perez said the board will host two special meetings: September 21st on setting goals and refresher training on October 7th.

Mr. Sokolovic moved "*to moved up item D-11, Eid al-Adha holiday for immediate consideration*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales.

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The motion was approved by a 7-2 vote.

Voting in favor were members Benejan Grajales, Sokolovic, Burks-Jennings, Estremera Jimenez, Traber, Medina, and Woodson. Members Perez and Daniels were opposed.

Mr. Sokolovic moved "*to approve Eid al-Adha as a holiday and a day off beginning in the 2027-28 school year in order to promote a sense of belonging, inclusiveness, and to prevent students from having to choose between their faith and their education*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina.

Mr. Sokolovic said Eid al-Fitr was approved. He said we are not promoting any religion over another. He said the students plainly told us they feel different when their holiday is not recognized as their peers' holidays are.

Mr. Traber wished members of the Jewish religion a happy new year. He said as a teacher his class discussed faiths the children brought to the classroom. He said he made a commitment to support this motion, although he did not believe in this process because a process needed to be developed on holidays. He added we need to fight the hatred of all kinds.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said as an elected official he always answers e-mails. He spoke on the importance of God. He said he was in support of those present because they are important to our community.

Ms. Perez said the city attorney's legal team sent a memo that was distributed to the board. She said their recommendation is hold off because we have ample time because the calendar will be created towards the end of this year.

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Mr. Medina said there is nothing we can't vote on now, which could be amended later. He said he wanted to join Waterbury, and the process should not be prolonged.

Ms. Perez said the board did not have a policy on creating holidays.

Mr. Traber said because we do not have a policy we need to sit down with counsel and discuss the memo. He said we need to set precedent on holidays and the process for establishing them. He said the three primary speakers at the legislature on behalf of Bridgeport last spring were Muslim students.

Mr. Sokolovic said he made his motion based on the opinion of city attorney when Eid al-Fitr was made a holiday. He said he was promoting equity and fairness.

The motion was approved by an 8-0 vote.

Voting in favor were members Benejan Grajales, Traber, Medina, Sokolovic, Estremera Jimenez, Woodson, Daniels, and Burks-Jennings.

Ms. Perez abstained

Ms. Perez moved "*to add to the consent agenda the Dunbar 5-12 playground, the Curiale playground resurfacing, and the Barnum playground*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Ms. Perez said the Operations Committee met two weeks ago and items on playgrounds were referred to the consent agenda. The budget was also discussed.

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Mr. Sokolovic referred a review of the bus contract that we haven't seen and a report on line item transfers within Title I funds redirecting the $9,000 a year.

Mr. Benejan Grajales requested the committee hear a security update and an update on nutrition.

Mr. Traber said the Instruction and Support Services Committee met last week and reviewed the test results and the Alliance Grant. An initial discussion on AI was held. There was also discussion of special education and parent engagement. The next meeting will be on October 6th.

Mr. Benejan Grajales referred a special education update. He also mentioned the policies on PAC/PTSOs. Ms. Perez said we do not have a policy on that because the board does not oversee PAC/PTSO. She said the CABE trainers have told us this.

Mr. Sokolovic said we are fiduciaries of all taxpayers, including Title I.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said he would be presenting academic results tonight as part of the transparent presentation of data.

Mr. Woodson said a date had not been set for the Policy Committee meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic referred an item on ex officio committee members and a whistleblower policy.

Mr. Benejan Grajales referred an item on Veterans' Day.

In response to a question, Mr. Woodson said policies on board members appearing on camera were discussed and the committee moved on from it.

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Ms. Estremera Jimenz moved approval of the minutes of the meeting of the Ad Hoc Lottery Committee of August 3, 2026. The motion was seconded by Ms. Perez and approved by a 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were member Estremera Jimenez, Benejan Grajales, Medina, Daniels, Traber, Woodson, and Burks-Jennings. Members Sokolovic and Perez abstained.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez reported on the CABE convention on November 20th and 21st and said most board members were registered. There is a legal issues webinar on October 13th and a delegate assembly on November 19th. She described other online resources.

Ms. Perez requested board members confirm their attendance at the convention by the end of this week, so hotel costs and attendance fees won't be incurred unnecessarily.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Dr. Avery said the school year is off to a strong start. He said transportation issues have largely been resolved after a rocky start. Parking concerns at the old BMA campus for Winthrop have been addressed. He described a bus stop location in the North End for students, where a Winthrop administrator is present every day.

Dr. Avery said Fairchild Wheeler and Bridgeport Military Academy have had a strong opening. He thanked Mr. Garcia's division for getting classrooms ready.

Dr. Avery said final details are still forthcoming on about 2,500 free bus passes for all eligible high school students.

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Dr. Avery said district vacancies have increased from 21 to 28 positions. He said the hiring information requested by the board is in the portal and will continue to be placed in there.

Dr. Avery acknowledged the work of the facilities department on yesterday's flooding. One school, Thomas Hooker, was not able to be opened, but it is ready to go tomorrow.

Dr. Avery said the magnet school lottery will open October 12th and remain open through January 15th for high school. The elementary window is from January 4th to March 5th.

Dr. Avery said there would be a concentration on the academic progression of students this year, which he described as a collective effort. He said we did not meet the mark last year, so we have to do things differently. He challenged everyone to stand together and do things differently.

Margaret Hughes, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, presented. She said the district had slightly declining results in both ELA and math in Smarter Balance. There were eleven schools that had increases in ELA and 46 percent of schools had increases in math.

Ms. Hughes displayed historical data from 2016 to 2026. There was a growth trajectory from 2016-17 through 2018-19. After Covid, in 2022 to 2026, there were four superintendents, who introduced unique visions, communication styles and strategic goals. Instructional coaches were lost in this period.

Ms. Hughes said the district went from 17 percent of multilingual learners (MLL) to 30 percent in 2025-26. Special education and MLL students went from 34 percent to 52 percent in 2025-26. The

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underlying demographic of students have increased needs while funding continued to decline.

Ms. Hughes said the ten-year trend on SATs to 2024-25 was an increase in math scores, while ELA declined. She pointed to the importance of districtwide curriculum at high schools for math and ELA.

Ms. Hughes displayed the mission and vision statements.

Ms. Hughes said strategic priorities are, first, relentless focus on Tier I improvement; a district improvement plan; and a reevaluation of assessments. She said we listened to principals and teachers who said we were spending too much time on assessments compared to instruction. Pacing for ELA and math has been revamped, and teacher lesson-planning has been reinstituted. She said administrative data presentations by principals are being reinstituted.

Ms. Hughes said in Tier I differentiation is the number one priority.

Mr. Sokolovic said Greenwich had a similar superintendent turnover, so results in Bridgeport were the result of funding.

In response to a question, Ms. Hughes said tests for special education and MLL students are given in English with some accommodations, although reading takes place in English. Mr. Sokolovic asked for the English language learners to be pulled out of the data. Mr. Traber requested data on special education students as well.

Dr. Avery said no one wants to recognize the hardships that we have as a district based on the funding that we get. He said data was needed to drive the conversation.

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Ms. Hughes said among the opportunity districts, the lowest ten percent performers in the state, Bridgeport is the lowest performing in ELA. Historically, Bridgeport was fourth from the bottom. Bridgeport is number two from the bottom in math.

Dr. Avery said the focus in the past year was trying to survive. Mr. Traber said we have been starved of funding for thirteen years, and we have to figure out how to spread the funding thinner. He said teaching to the test makes everyone less enthusiastic about learning. He said it was frustrating to see what the superintendent is talking about in the absence of resources because the accountability is on the state, not us.

Dr. Avery said he has been asked to the state board of education in October to present on Tier I instruction, the financial audit, and special education.

Dr. Avery said he was excited that the state is providing funding to Bridgeport in the Connecticut Literacy Model. He described the focus points of the initiative. He said the next step was to get buy-in from staff to make it work.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said deeper conversations were needed in board committees for things such as cellphones in the classroom or AI. He said we don't have the funding for appropriate technology in the classroom, so kids bring their own. He said Bridgeport was unique in Connecticut, and we need to call upon and look at similar districts in the nation through the Council of Great City Schools. He said we have to do the work differently, which he described as tough. One area that will be different will be communication.

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In response to a question, Dr. Avery said the 2,500 bus passes is less than we used to get. The cost is about $36 per month for a pass.

Mr. Traber agreed with Mr. Woodson and recommended we explore cellphone usage and AI in his committee.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Mr. Traber moved "*to approve the consent agenda as amended*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales and unanimously approved.

Items approved were:

Draft Minutes, Regular Meeting 8-24-26.

BPS FY27 Alliance-Priority Grant Application.

The Dunbar 5-12 playground, the Curiale playground resurfacing, and the Barnum playground.

The next agenda item was appointment of executive director of leadership.

Mr. Traber moved "*to go into executive session with Dr. Avery*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales.

The motion was approved by an 8-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Perez, Traber, Estremera Jimenez, Medina, Daniels, Burks-Jennings, Woodson, and Benejan Grajales. Mr. Sokolovic was opposed.

The executive session began at 9:10 p.m.

The board reconvened in public session at 9:38 p.m.

Mr. Traber moved the approval of appointment of the executive director of leadership of Commander Jay Lipp. The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales.

The motion was approved by an 6-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Perez, Estremera Jimenez, Benejan Grajales, Traber, Daniels, and Burks-Jennings. Mr. Woodson was opposed. Members Medina and Sokolovic abstained.

The next agenda item was on the first read of the lottery policy revised referred by the Policy Committee.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to add to the agenda waiving the first and second read of this policy for immediate implementation. The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber.

Mr. Sokolovic said this was a more efficient process. Ms. Perez said she opposed waiving the first and second read because the policy had not gone through legal.

Mr. Sokolovic said the motion to approve could be made pending legal review.

Mr. Traber said he would remove the second to the motion.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to send revised lottery policy referred by Policy Committee for legal and bring it back. The motion was seconded by Mr. Traber.

There was a discussion of tabling the item.

Mr. Traber moved “*to table the item*.” The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

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The next agenda item was on the holiday policy revised and referred by the Policy Committee. Ms. Perez said the matter had not gone through legal.

Mr. Traber moved "*to table*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the CABE annual membership.

Ms. Perez said we have not paid this year's dues. She said the invoice was in the board's packets. She recommended renewing with CABE because of certain trainings and receiving the membership rate for conferences.

Mr. Traber moved "*to approve the CABE annual membership*." The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan Grajales.

Mr. Sokolovic noted some trainings were free from the board's law firm. Ms. Perez said we would not be paying for the policy review because it has been completed. Policy services would be provided by Shipman Goodwin.

The motion was unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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