

# **BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**June 12, 2023**

## **MINUTES**

### **REGULAR MEETING**

Attendance: Julia Dennis  
Melissa Gibbons  
Jaymee Miller  
Gina Nappi  
Adam Salina  
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.  
Tracy Sisti  
Matthew Tencza  
Peter Zarabozo  
Student Representatives: Samantha Negrao  
Ian Saunders

Also in attendance: Superintendent of Schools Brian J. Benigni; Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno; Finance Director Ashley Dorsey; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; Supervisor of Special Education – Elementary Michelle Zeuschner; Supervisor of Special Education – Secondary Cindy Martin; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Co-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson; Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis; Assistant Principals of Berlin High School Katie Amenta and Brian Testroet; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Assistant Principal of McGee Middle School Tim Chiaverini; Principal of Griswold School Jonathan Campbell; Principal of Willard School Megan Sirois; and Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza.

#### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

##### **A. Pledge of Allegiance**

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, CT. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

##### **B. SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS**

###### **1. Presentation of Berlin High School Diploma to World War II Veteran John Sampl**

A local Board of Education may award a diploma to a veteran of World War II who withdrew from high school, prior to graduation, in order to serve in the armed forces of the United States and did not receive a diploma as a consequence of such service. The Board of Education (Board) presented World War II Veteran John Sampl with his Berlin High School diploma and thanked him for his service. Mr. Sampl will be celebrating his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in October.

###### **2. Announcement – Teacher and Paraprofessional of the Year 2024**

Superintendent Benigni announced Berlin School District's 2024 Teacher and Paraprofessional of the Year, Alexandra Ivimey and Nicole Sapko, respectively.

3. Berlin High School Recognition

Principals Eustis and Urso recognized the following Berlin High School and McGee Middle School students:

Valedictorian – Michael J. Lanteri

Salutatorian – Laura Allison Munch

CABE Student Leadership Awards:

BHS – Tamarah Al Mozani and Julia Greenwood

McGee – Grace Alger and Yahir Gonzalez Ramos

4. Thank You to BOE Student Representatives –Samantha Negrao and Ian Saunders

The Board recognized and thanked Samantha Negrao and Ian Saunders for their enthusiasm, insightful reports and intuitiveness provided to the Board of Education this school year.

**II. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD**

A. Report of Student Representatives

Miss Negrao reported on the Berlin High School graduation ceremony held on Friday, June 9, 2023, and recognized the band, chorus, broadcasting team and the janitorial staff at Berlin High School for a successful graduation ceremony, and on behalf of the Class of 2023, she thanked all Board members and staff at the Berlin Public Schools for all their hard work, ensuring all students graduate. Miss Negrao also thanked Principal Eustis and stated she is appreciative and beyond grateful that she was Berlin High School's principal. Miss Negrao thanked the Board of Education for the opportunity to serve as a student representative.

Mr. Saunders reported, last week, the Upbeat Program hosted an elementary walkthrough for the Class of 2023 graduates, and on Thursday, June 8, 2023, students across the district left school for the final time this school year.

B. Committee Reports

Mr. Tencza reported the Finance & Operations Committee met on June 1, 2023 and discussed school lunch pricing for the coming year, which appears later in the agenda; end-of-year funds; and the outdoor classroom and Biscoglio Field projects.

C. CREC Report

There was no CREC report this evening.

D. Correspondence to the Board

There was no correspondence to the Board this evening.

Ms. Dennis and Ms. Sisti reported on the collective bargaining workshop they attended on Tuesday, May 9, 2023, sponsored by Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE).

**III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

Al Souza, 67 Raspberry Hill, Berlin, Connecticut, as a community member and on behalf of the teachers and administrators, thanked the Board, the Upbeat Program, Berlin High School staff and Superintendent Benigni for having the senior students return back to the elementary schools as the elementary walkthrough was one of the most impactful and special events of the year and suggested the elementary walkthrough remain in place.

Aurora Corteville, 19 Timberwood Road, Berlin, Connecticut, thanked the Board for a great job this year as well as their work on the Budget.

**IV. PERSONNEL**

A. Resignation – Berlin High School Principal

Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis submitted her letter of resignation to be effective at the close of June 30, 2023. Principal Eustis has accepted a central office position as Director of Secondary Education with the West Hartford Public Schools.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to accept the resignation of Eileen Eustis, effective at the close of June 30, 2023, and to thank her for the five years of service she has provided to the district and to wish her well in her new position as the Director of Secondary Education with the West Hartford Public Schools.**

Board members Dennis, Miller, Salina, Sassu, Nappi, Tencza and Sisti thanked Principal Eustis and expressed their appreciation for her service to the district and also wished her the best in her new position.

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis**

B. Anticipated Appointment of Berlin High School Principal

Superintendent Benigni recommended that the Board of Education appoint Katie Amenta as Principal of Berlin High School, effective July 1, 2023.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Tencza, that the Board of Education appoint Katie Amenta to the position of Principal of Berlin High School, effective July 1, 2023.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis**

**V. CONSENT AGENDA**

A. Approval of Minutes – Regular Meeting of May 8, 2023

B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending May 31, 2023

C. Facilities Update

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno provided a Facilities Update that has been posted in Schoology.

D. Request for Leave of Absence – Emma Hart Willard School – Speech Language Pathologist

Jacquelyn DeBarge-Rosman, speech language pathologist at Emma Hart Willard School, requested an unpaid leave of absence, for childrearing purposes, to begin immediately following her maternity leave through November 26, 2023.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to accept the consent agenda as presented.**

**FAVOR: ALL  
MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis**

**VI. NEW BUSINESS**

A. Berlin Visiting Nurse Association Service Agreement with the Board of Education for July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024

Board members were provided with the annual agreement between the Berlin Board of Education and the Berlin Visiting Nurse Association, which has been posted in Schoology.

**Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Ms. Nappi, to approve the agreement between the Berlin Board of Education and the Berlin Visiting Nurse Association for 2023-2024.**

In response to Mr. Salina's question has anything changed in this agreement compared to other years, Superintendent Benigni stated the only difference is their budget.

**FAVOR: ALL  
MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis**

B. Report on FAFSA Completion Rate for Berlin High School

In accordance with Board Policy 5129, policy to improve completion rates of the free application for federal student aid (FAFSA), each year, the Superintendent or designee will report to the Board the FAFSA completion rate for Berlin High School. Tonight, Co-Director of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen provided the FAFSA Completion Rate Report for 2022-2023, which has been posted in Schoology. Ms. Gjerpen stated this year, at the high school, the counseling department's goal was to increase last year's completion rate of 46%. The completion rate for 2022-2023 increased to 78.8%. Ms. Gjerpen stated the application process opens October 1 and beginning December 15, the counseling department called all families who did not complete the application. Through those phone calls, 62 families applied. Ms. Gjerpen stated the counseling department also held a FAFSA night where 11 families were in attendance and were able to complete the application. Ms. Gjerpen stated Adult Education information did not need to be reported to the State.

In response to Mr. Salina's question what is the reasoning behind this, Ms. Gjerpen stated last year the state initiated the FAFSA Challenge to encourage school districts to reach out to all families to increase its FAFSA completion rates.

C. School Lunch Pricing

Board members were provided with a memo requesting an increase to breakfast and lunch prices for the 2023-2024 school year. Finance Director Ashley Dorsey presented the historical pricing for school years 2017-2018 through 2022-2023; cafeteria operations (income and expenses) for school years 2018-2019 through projected 2022-2023; cafeteria expenses by components; and the proposed pricing for 2023-2024.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to increase breakfast and lunch prices for the 2023-2024 school year as follows: Breakfast – BHS from \$2.00 to \$2.15; McGee from \$2.00 to \$2.15; elementary schools from \$1.55 to \$1.65; adult breakfast from \$3.00 to \$3.50; Lunch – BHS from \$3.40 to \$3.70; McGee from \$3.10 to \$3.40; elementary schools from \$2.80 to \$3.05 and adult lunches from \$4.50 to \$5.00.**

In response to Ms. Miller's question did the funds, received from the government for the free meals provided the last two years, meet the actual expenses for food and supplies, Ms. Dorsey stated there is a surplus from the federal reimbursement; however, as the district continues to move to a paid program for the new school year, that surplus is going to dwindle, and in order to cover anticipated operating expenses for the next school year, these price increases are needed.

In response to Ms. Sisti's question, will lunches change with the price increases, Ms. Dorsey stated she, along with Mr. Cugno, have been working with Food Service Director Wendy Rawlings to provide more creative offerings on the menu.

**FAVOR: ALL  
MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis**

D. Setting of the 2023-2024 Board of Education Budget

Finance Director Ashley Dorsey stated, after the second referendum on May 23, 2023, the Town Council approved the level of funding for the Board of Education's 2023-2024 Operating Budget in the amount of \$50,855,071, an increase of approximately 3.61%. Board members were provided with a chart representing the Board's Operating Budget for 2023-2024 and a document reflecting the tiered cuts for fiscal year 2024. Ms. Dorsey stated in order to get to this number there was a reallocation of grant funding by not offering summer programming; the Food Service Director's salary will move into the Food Service Fund; a rate adjustment for insurance from a 10% increase to an 8.5% increase; athletics and Berlin High School graduation will move to the Enterprise Fund; and end-of-year funds will cover some projects originally funded in the Operating Budget. Ms. Dorsey stated the Berlin High School science retirement, the Berlin High School math resignation and custodial resignation will not be filled.

Superintendent Benigni stated, based on the 3.61% increase, as well as the additional resources that have become available, the district will retain the secondary in-school suspension supervisors, Berlin High

School student management paraprofessional, Special Education paraprofessional, building substitutes, kindergarten paraprofessionals, elementary reading paraprofessionals, elementary and secondary math paraprofessionals and secondary reading interventionist.

Superintendent Benigni stated all ARP ESSER funds have been reallocated to the ESS Program at McGee Middle School; Family Communication Specialist; Reading Specialist; Academic Resource Tutor; and Elementary Math Interventionist. Superintendent Benigni stated these funds expire at the end of the 2023-2024 school year, which will put the district at a deficit, starting the following school year's budget, as these funds will not be available to fund those positions.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Tencza, that the Board of Education adopt an operating budget for 2023-2024, in the amount of \$50,855,071, as set by the Town Council.**

**FAVOR: ALL**  
**MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis**

E. Pre-K Transportation Discussion

The Board discussed the feasibility of providing pre-K transportation for all students for the 2023-2024 school year as a follow up to a parent's request at the last Board meeting. Superintendent Benigni stated the district is legally mandated to provide transportation for students eligible for the pre-K program and is not required to provide transportation for community model representatives enrolled in the pre-K program. Superintendent Benigni stated there would be considerable costs to transport community role models and will provide Board members with this information at the next Board meeting.

Ms. Dennis stated the Board will consider the information presented and, based on that information, can take action. She stated if the Board moves forward with providing transportation for all pre-K students that would not go into effect until the 2024-2025 school year.

F. Board of Education Retreat in August - Discussion

Ms. Dennis stated the areas of focus for the Board's retreat are (1) the Board's handbook; (2) the self-evaluation process the Board engages in and the participation process; and (3) the utilization of C.A.B.E.

Debbie Batista will coordinate with Board members a date for the retreat.

**At 8:15 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, to go into Executive Session, inviting Superintendent, to discuss unaffiliated administrators', personnel not covered under collective bargaining and evaluation of Superintendent of Schools.**

**FAVOR: ALL**  
**MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis**

In attendance for Executive Session were Board members Dennis, Gibbons, Miller, Nappi, Salina, Sassu, Sisti, Tencza and Zarabozo. In addition Superintendent Benigni was present.

- G. Unaffiliated Administrators' Contract
  - 1. Director of Finance
  - 2. Director of Human Resources
  - 3. Director of Operations
  - 4. Director of Pupil Personnel Services
- H. Personnel Not Covered by Collective Bargaining
- I. Evaluation of Superintendent of Schools

At 9:50 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

**VII. ADJOURNMENT**

**At 9:50 p.m., a motion was made by Ms. Miller, seconded by Mr. Salina, to adjourn.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis**

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education