

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

July 13, 2020

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Richard Aroian
Julia Dennis
Mary Ellen Maloney
Jaymee Miller (left at 7:51 p.m.)
Timothy Oakes
Adam Salina - Absent
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti - Absent
Matthew Tencza

Also in attendance: Superintendent of Schools Brian J. Benigni; Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk; Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; Athletic Director and K-12 Physical Education Health Coordinator David Francalanga; and Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Aroian called the virtual meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Mr. Aroian welcomed the district's new staff and stated he was very impressed with the article appearing in *The Berlin Citizen*, highlighting the level of accomplishments and qualifications of the new staff entering the district.

II. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Committee Reports

Ms. Dennis reported the Community Engagement Committee met on June 16, 23 and July 7, and with all the changes, the Committee is finding ways to engage the community. Ms. Dennis thanked Mr. Aroian for mentioning the article, which appeared in *The Berlin Citizen*, and stated, later in the agenda, the Board will have a discussion concerning utilization of social media.

B. Correspondence to the Board

There was no correspondence to the Board tonight.

III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Mr. David Bosso, teacher at Berlin High School, asked in what ways teachers and students can be assured that the air flow and air quality in the building will be monitored and conducive to a healthy environment, especially since windows do not open and there have been concerns with the ductwork at the high school. Superintendent Benigni stated right now, in all buildings, at least one window is opened in classrooms that have windows, and Doug Solek is working with the town to change all filters in the air handling units and program the air handling units to meet state guidelines, prior to the start of school. With regard to the ductwork, Superintendent Benigni stated there have been a few issues at the high school with odors, smells and the ventilation system. The air has been tested in numerous locations to ensure that it meets the criteria of safe for students and staff.

Jeff Pajor, 153 Dayl Drive, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired what the district's plan is for children unable to wear a mask for any length of time to attend school. Superintendent Benigni responded the district is still formulating a plan and working through other interventions that can be put in place to protect the student and others.

Joshua Travinski, 60 Hall Lane, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired, with cases spiking up drastically in nearby places, why isn't the district prepping now for a more organized and thought out remote learning solution and curriculum so teachers, students and families are not placed in high risk scenarios. Superintendent Benigni explained it is important for parents and the community to recognize the state is requiring three plans. The first being live, in-school instruction; the second a hybrid with half the population attending daily or weekly; and the third, a totally virtual environment. The district is required to submit to the state how it will address each of the three plans by July 24.

Adleen Carrion, 401 Fieldstone Crossing, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired, with the reopening of school, will there be an option for online schooling for parents not comfortable sending their children to school or for children with pre-existing health conditions that would place them at a higher risk for COVID-19 and is it possible for staff to be tested. Superintendent Benigni stated, at this time, the district will provide a distance learning education for those students who cannot attend school due to medical reasons or parents electing not to send children to school because they feel it is a health risk.

Adam Lozis, 44 York Road, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired if electronic devices will be available for students whose parents opt to keep their child home for distance learning. Superintendent Benigni responded absolutely.

Julie Arcila, 192 Hudson Street, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired if there will be a community back-to-school forum to address COVID-19 concerns and will the district provide masks for students. Superintendent Benigni responded at this time, the district will be providing all staff and students with two washable masks. With regard to the back-to-school forum, Superintendent Benigni stated he has met with and will continue to meet with the administrators across the district. Next week, Superintendent Benigni will first meet with staff, administrators as well as Dr. McGurk and cabinet members at each building separately followed by a parent meeting at each building separately because, although there is district-wide consistency, there is also specificity at each building. Superintendent Benigni stated he will share the district's draft re-opening plan with staff and parents and make the necessary adjustments based on their feedback prior to submitting to the state.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes – Special Meetings of June 29, 2020
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period Ending June 30, 2020

Moved by Ms. Dennis, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to approve the consent agenda as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Aroian

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Graduation Update

Superintendent Benigni thanked Principal Eustis who worked tirelessly to put together the graduation activities. Superintendent Benigni stated there will be no senior prom or all-night graduation party, regardless if the state moves into Phase 3, because of the social distancing that is required. Principal Eustis has prepared a letter, which will go out to parents regarding these events. Superintendent Benigni stated graduation will be held on August 7, 2020 at 8:00 p.m. in the Berlin High School parking lot. If social distancing guidelines improve and there can be groups of 250 people, students will sit six feet apart and parents will have an assigned parking spot for one car to view the ceremony. If social distancing guidelines are not lifted, students will attend in a car with their parents and each student will be able walk across the stage to receive their diploma. Principal Eustis will send out information tomorrow concerning the general plans for graduation.

In response to Mr. Aroian's question concerning the all-night graduation party, Principal Eustis stated she has been in communication with the parents that oversee the all-night graduation party, and they have had conversations with their own committee in terms of formulating alternative plans to support the students.

B. Setting of the 2020-2021 Budget

The Town Council has approved the level of funding for the Board of Education's Operating Budget for 2020-2021 in the amount of \$46,416,504.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Tencza, that Board of Education adopt an Operating Budget for 2020-2021, in the amount of \$46,416,504, as set by the Town Council.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Aroian

C. Deposit into the Non-Lapsing Account

The administration and the Finance and Operations Committee recommended that an amount not to exceed \$375,000 in uncommitted funds be deposited into the Board's Non-Lapsing Fund to be used for the fire suppression capital expenditure for Hubbard School and the roof top unit at McGee Middle School.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Tencza, that the Board of Finance deposit an amount not to exceed \$375,000 from account 001-35-3560-0-51000-00000 Board of Education Program 60 into account 500-35-3561-0-54000-01733 Unexpended Education Funds for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Aroian

D. Motion to Return Balance of 2019-2020 FY Budget to the Town's General Fund

Director of Business Operations Jeff Cugno indicated the unaudited balance of the 2019-2020 fiscal year budget is \$400,000. A motion is in order to return this amount to the Town of Berlin General Fund.

Moved by Mr. Tencza, seconded by Ms. Dennis, that the unaudited balance of the 2019-2020 fiscal year budget, in the amount of \$400,000, be returned to the Town of Berlin General Fund.

Mr. Tencza stated the Board of Education requested the unaudited balance of \$400,000 also be deposited into the non-lapsing account for expenses due to COVID-19 and the opening of school. Mr. Tencza echoed Mr. Aroian's appreciation of the Board of Finance and Town Council with the entire budget process and the allowance of \$375,000 for capital upgrades. Mr. Tencza stated his concern is, while the Board is returning these funds to the town, these funds will, most likely, be needed in the future because of COVID-19 and unknown expenses. Mr. Tencza stated that returning the unaudited balance to the town is the right thing to do, and he was assured by a Board of Finance member that if these funds are needed later on, the Board of Finance will work with the Board of Education.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Aroian

E. Discussion of Re-Opening Plan Draft

Superintendent Benigni and Assistant Superintendent McGurk shared the latest district re-opening draft plan based on CSDE Requirements and Guidance as outlined in *Adapt, Advance, Achieve* document, which was available to Board members in Schoology.

Superintendent Benigni stated a survey was sent out last week to all staff concerning their availability to come back to teach. Once the district's re-opening plan is complete, a survey will be sent to parents. Superintendent Benigni stated he has had individual meetings with each building principal and is now having daily meetings with building administrators and central office cabinet. Some decisions have been made to ensure the education for students that are in school and students unable to attend school. There have been discussions concerning staff that will be unable to come back to teach and how they will be utilized outside the school; the structures that will be used within the buildings; the typical cleaning pattern that will take place; directional ways in the hallway; and students' utilization of space as far as when students will be eating and how the meals will be prepared and delivered. Superintendent Benigni stated some of the larger areas that still need work include protocols in place if a student or teacher is diagnosed with COVID-19, the safest environment possible for students and then providing the best education possible.

Superintendent Benigni stated last week students returned to school for summer school, and it has been positive for students, as well as staff, to be back in the building.

In response to Mr. Aroian's question, has there been an any unexpected issues having students in person for summer school, Superintendent Benigni stated today there was an issue dealing with a bus driver not wearing a mask, and at this time, the bus company is addressing the issue. Superintendent Benigni stated the three times he has been in the school no issues or concerns have been raised. Ms. Holian

stated students and staff have been doing an amazing job, and she has heard only positive feedback from parents.

In response to Mr. Aroian's question if there have been any guidelines received from the CIAC, Mr. Francalanga stated everything is on as schedule for the fall season; however, that does not mean things cannot change. Mr. Francalanga stated that he, along with other athletic directors and members of the CIAC, are very hopeful that the season will go on as planned. There have been conversations concerning perhaps limiting the number of games but nothing has been determined as of yet.

F. Discuss Community Engagement Topics and Social Media

Ms. Dennis, Chair of the Community Engagement Committee led a discussion with the full Board on community engagement topics and utilization of social media, specifically a Berlin Board of Education Facebook Page, to communicate and engage with the community at a higher level. Board members shared their thoughts and suggestions, and it was the consensus of the Board of Education to set up a Facebook Page.

VI. SUPERINTENDENT'S EVALUATION AND CONTRACT

At 7:05 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to enter into executive session to discuss a personnel matter, inviting the Superintendent.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Aroian

In attendance for Executive Session, virtually, were Board members Aroian, Dennis, Maloney, Miller, Oakes, Sassu, and Tencza.

At 7:51 p.m., Board Member Miller departed.

At 7:54 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

At 7:54 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Ms. Dennis, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Aroian

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Dennis, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education