

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

July 27, 2020

MINUTES

SPECIAL MEETING

Attendance: Richard Aroian
Julia Dennis
Mary Ellen Maloney – Arrived at 6:21 p.m.
Jaymee Miller
Timothy Oakes
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D. - Absent
Tracy Sisti
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; Director of Literacy and Social Studies Laurie Gjerpen; Director of Mathematics and Science Kara Watson; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Assistant Principal of Griswold School David Kitzman; Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza; Principal of Willard School Megan Sirois; and Athletic Director and K-12 Physical Education Health Coordinator David Francalangia.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Aroian called the virtual meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Carmela Sanseverino, 84 Valley Drive, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired if teachers, faculty, aides and volunteers will be tested prior to the opening of school and thereafter periodically. Superintendent Benigni stated, at this time, they will not be tested.

Maryanne Zadrowski, 21 Middletown Road, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired if there is another option other than live in-school instruction. Superintendent Benigni stated the district is required, by the state, to provide three learning plans for the reopening of schools: (1) in-school instruction with a traditional schedule with students attending school every day with State guidelines in place. If parents choose not to send their child to school, they will receive education through the remote learning plan. Students in grades 6-12 will participate in daily instruction with their peers and teachers using technology based access, and students in grades preK-5 will receive instruction in a grade level grouping from an educator assigned to provide distance learning; (2) Hybrid Learning would have smaller groups of students attend school each day. Students would attend school two days a week, participate in distance learning two days a week and Wednesdays would be dedicated to social, emotional and academic support with teachers available for instructional support during office hours; and (3) Distance Learning Plan with students engaged in distance learning with materials and support from the school district, similar to last year, with accountability and the amount of live instruction increased drastically from where the district left off last school year.

Erin Roche, 1190 High Road, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired if students will be allowed to participate in extracurricular activities at Berlin High School if engaged in distance learning. Superintendent Benigni stated yes, as the students are still part of the school district.

Adleen Carrion, 401 Fieldstone Crossing, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired if there are any options for parents who choose to keep their children home in the fall and then decides to send them to school in the spring. Superintendent Benigni stated parents can choose remote learning or to home school. If a parent elects to home school, the child is no longer part of the district and would not be able to participate in extracurricular activities. Students can return to school at any point.

Olivia Sakr, 11 Heritage Drive, Berlin, Connecticut, requested feedback on students' experiences attending summer school. Ms. Holian stated summer school is in the final week of the three day program, and next week will be the final week of the five day program. Students and staff are happy to be in school, and everyone is doing a wonderful job with social distancing and wearing masks or shields. The majority of students are wearing masks the whole day, with mask breaks, and accommodations are made for students with sensory issues. Board member Sisti provided insight as a parent of a child attending summer school. Ms. Sisti stated she, as well as her son, had a positive experience and felt safe and secure, and in her opinion, the district did a wonderful job with all the students.

Heather Serfass, 87 Robbins Road, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired if there will be exceptions or accommodations for students with disabilities, specifically autistic students, or will they be required to wear a face mask in order to enter the building and remain in school and why has the decision been made to require preschool students to wear a mask when they are not required in private daycare programs. Ms. Holian responded, as part of the State of Connecticut Guidelines and Expectations, anyone in the public school setting is expected to wear a mask. She stated preschool students are not having a problem with wearing masks, and if a student can not wear a mask, other programming options will need to be considered.

Julie Arcila, 192 Hudson Street, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired if the district anticipates the Governor increasing the number of people that can gather together by the beginning of school and how students at McGee and Berlin High School will pass in the hallways and enter and exit the buildings. Superintendent Benigni stated there will be one way directions in the hallways and stairwells and entering and exiting the buildings will look much different because of the social distancing that needs to take place as well as wearing masks. Superintendent Benigni stated this will be discussed later in the agenda when he reviews the draft plan for Berlin Public Schools. As far as schools reopening versus the number of people that can gather, Superintendent Benigni stated that is the Governor's decision.

Michelle Follacchio, 30 Dayl Drive, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired what the realistic plan is once flu season hits and there are symptoms overlapping with COVID. Superintendent Benigni stated if there is a confirmed diagnosis or a staff or student is suspected of being sick, the Central Connecticut Health District would be notified, and in consultation with the Central Connecticut Health District, appropriate next steps will be determined. Notifications would go out to everyone that is impacted.

Carla Durity, 601 Worthington Ridge, Berlin, Connecticut, as a parent of a kindergartner, inquired if kindergarten will be a full day; the start and end time; if children will need to wear masks; classroom sizes; how many mask breaks will children have; can children bring their own food or snacks; where will they eat; what kind of food will be provided by the district; and how many students will be on the bus. The elementary principals stated kindergarten will be a full day with the school day officially starting at 8:40 a.m. and ending at 3:20 p.m.; students will need to wear masks; it is anticipated class sizes will be 14 to 16 students; there will be mask breaks in a safe and healthy manner; students can

bring their own food and snacks and are encouraged to bring water bottles as water fountains will not be in operation; students will be having lunch in their classroom and surfaces will be cleaned before and after eating; students will have individual shields at their desks to make sure that when they remove their mask they are kept safe; and the food served for lunch is an array of choices so everyone should find something they like. Superintendent Benigni stated hot lunch will be served in an enclosed container with students bringing the hot lunch back to the classroom. With regard to the number of students on a bus, Superintendent Benigni stated he still does not know the exact number of students that will elect to come back to live instruction and those that will have remote learning. The same bus route will run as in the past, and there will be provisions as far as where students are sitting and getting on and off the bus. In order to ride the bus, students need to wear a mask prior to entering the bus and for the entire ride. If a student is unable to wear a mask, alternate transportation will need to be arranged.

III. REOPENING PLAN

Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni and Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk reviewed the draft plan for the Berlin Public Schools and, along with Building Principals, responded to the Board's questions. Board members were provided with a copy of the draft reopening plan. Dr. McGurk provided an overview of the plan development. Superintendent Benigni, along with Building Principals, walked the Board through a student's day in school, starting with the school bus stop, entering school, the cafeteria at each school, instruction in the classrooms, and exiting the building. They shared the provisions and safety protocols that have been put in place for students and staff and for band and chorus. Superintendent Benigni stated the district has spent over \$1 million preparing for the reopening of schools for additional staff, isolation rooms at all buildings for students or staff exhibiting symptoms, camera and monitoring systems for middle school and high school, desk shields, personal protective equipment, additional tables, chairs and desks to ensure the safety of both students and staff to eliminate the possibility of anyone getting sick but also to allow staff, parents and students to feel comfortable and confident. With regard to physical education, Mr. Francalanga stated he is talking with the elementary, middle school and high school teachers and working on a plan focused on individual activities such as dance, fitness, yoga and aerobics and taking away the element of team sports. Mr. Francalanga stated going forward most classes will be outside.

IV. REVISIONS TO THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL CALENDAR

Superintendent Benigni stated that, based on the State Board of Education's decision to waive the 180-day requirement to allow time for COVID-related training, the 2020-2021 calendar has been revised to allow for two additional days of professional development (August 27 & 28), which moves the first day of school to Monday, August 31. One additional professional development day has been reserved for use later in the year, if needed. Parents will receive advanced notice if the additional day will be used. The number of student days has decreased to 179.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Ms. Miller, to adopt the revisions to the 2020-2021 School Calendar as presented.

In comparing the 2020-2021 calendar to the 2021-2022 calendar, Mr. Tencza questioned why the calendars are not consistent as the first day for the 2020-2021 calendar is keyed as teacher orientation and the next calendar year is keyed as professional development. Dr. McGurk stated it is a transition to

the idea that those days, before school starts, are essentially all professional learning days and allows for more flexibility in the event an outside speaker is brought in for professional development or teacher orientation as the specific day may have to shift depending on availability. Superintendent Benigni stated, moving forward, the first day will be for professional development.

In response to Mr. Aroian's question are snow days a thing of the past as the expectation will be instruction will occur on days students are not in school because they all have devices and the district has common platforms, Dr. McGurk stated the State Department of Education has not given clearance that having distance learning in place will count as a school day when a random school cancellation occurs.

In response to Mr. Tencza's question should the district be discussing the elimination of Columbus Day as a celebrated day, Superintendent Benigni suggested that discussion should come from the Equity and Advocates Group and stated modifications can be made to the calendar.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Aroian

V. PROPOSED 2021-2022 SCHOOL CALENDAR

Board members were provided with the proposed school calendar for 2021-2022. Assistant Superintendent Erin McGurk stated, at the recommendation of the Curriculum Committee, the afternoon professional development early release day in March has been eliminated.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to adopt the 2021-2022 Berlin Public Schools Calendar as proposed.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Aroian

VI. ADJOURNMENT

At 7:40 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Aroian

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Dennis, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education