

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

September 14, 2020

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Richard Aroian
Julia Dennis
Mary Ellen Maloney – Arrived at 6:05 p.m.
Jaymee Miller
Timothy Oakes – Arrived at 6:02 p.m.
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti
Matthew Tencza – Departed at 7:20 p.m.
Student Representatives: Ryan McGowan
Lindsey Leary

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 Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; and Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Aroian called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. Mr. Aroian welcomed new student representative Lindsey Leary and returning student representative Ryan McGowan. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Miss Leary reported on the Freshman Orientation, which was held on August 21, 2020. Miss Leary reported there is no contact in any sport and masks are required inside for volleyball.

Mr. McGowan reported all seniors will take the SAT test on September 23, 2020, which will be a remote half day for all other students; UpBeat held a successful registration last week with its first meeting tonight; and soccer has been going very well with the team wearing masks, separated into cohorts and practicing social distancing.

In response to Mr. Aroian's question how the first week of school was, student representatives provided Board members with their impressions for the first week of school.

B. Committee Reports

Mr. Tencza reported the Finance and Operations Committee met on September 9, 2020, and most of the discussion revolved around opening school expenditures, the affect on the CHOICE grant money and anticipated expenditures. Mr. Tencza stated the CHOICE grant balance for the 2019 – 2020 school year was \$1,093,477, and the anticipated CHOICE grant for 2020-2021 is \$987,000; therefore, the total amount of CHOICE funding the district had was \$2,080,477. Mr. Tencza stated the district spent approximately \$1.6 million, leaving a balance of \$465,334 of which \$20,000 is already encumbered for custodial work. The district will be receiving \$130,000 from the CARES Act, and there are some State funds, approximately \$487,000, the district has been told it will receive, but there are questions surrounding those funds. Mr. Tencza stated there also have been discussions concerning the possibility

the town may receive some reimbursement money from the State, and the Committee believes some of those funds should come back to the Board of Education. Mr. Tencza stated the Committee received a draft of the Facilities Study for each of the five schools.

Ms. Sisti reported the Berlin Board of Education Facebook Page is set up, the opening letter from Superintendent Benigni and tonight's meeting are posted, comments have been turned off and any questions are to go directly to Superintendent Benigni or the Board.

C. CREC Report

Ms. Sisti reported the Capital Region Education Council has not met all summer, and the next meeting is this Wednesday.

D. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared a thank you note from Angela Campagna.

III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Olivia Sakr, 11 Heritage Drive, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired what ingredients are in the wipes students use for their desk and hands and if she is allowed to supply her child with a cleaning wipe of her choice. Superintendent Benigni stated, if a student decides to bring in a wipe of their choice to wipe their own personal desk and space that is fine, and on the Berlin public school website, there is a link to those documents listing the cleaning supplies and the ingredients in those supplies.

Stacy Forsyth, 116 Scarborough, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired if it is the intent to transition students back into school full-time and what will it take for students to be back full-time.

Wesley Wade, 129 Hudson Street, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired when the district would consider bringing students back full-time.

Superintendent Benigni stated the district initially thought the right period of time to reassess would be at six weeks. The district would look to the State Department of Public Health to have that conversation to see if it would be in the best interest to have students back full-time. Mr. Benigni stated in-person learning is definitely where the district would like to be; however, live instruction occurs five days a week and is a benefit to students even if part of it is virtually.

IV. PERSONNEL

Retirement – Assistive Technology Coordinator (District)/Occupational Therapist (BTA)

Rozalind Stachon, assistive technology coordinator for the district and occupational therapist for the Berlin Transition Academy, submitted her letter of intent to retire at the end of the 2020-2021 school year.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to accept the retirement of Rozalind Stachon, assistive technology coordinator for the district and occupational therapist for the Berlin Transition Academy, effective June 30, 2021. Also to thank her for

the 40 years of service she has provided to the youth of Berlin and wish her good health and happiness in her retirement years.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Aroian

V. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes
 - 1. Special Meeting of July 27, 2020
 - 2. Regular Meeting of August 10, 2020
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending August 31, 2020

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to approve the consent agenda as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Aroian

VI. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Opening of School Report

Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni reported on the opening of school. Superintendent Benigni stated this year was a much different opening with fewer students actually live in school, but the start of school went very smooth. Superintendent Benigni stated he believes the extra week the district had to plan was helpful, along with the patience of parents, students and staff members, made for a positive opening of school. Superintendent Benigni stated with so many parents driving their children to school, he has asked the police to stay on and direct traffic for the next two weeks while determining traffic patterns and ways to improve the drop off and pick up at the schools. Superintendent Benigni stated Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson are the acting administrators for the remote learning, and presently there are between 13 and 15 percent of elementary students receiving remote learning in its entirety. There is a teacher at every grade level with two teachers at the second grade level and two teachers at the third grade level, working exclusively with remote learning.

Superintendent Benigni stated important notices will go home to parents weekly on Fridays. This Friday information will go home concerning (1) bus transportation; (2) the federal government, in conjunction with state, is providing free lunch, not ala carte lunch, to all students until December 31, 2020 as long as funds are available; and (3) an update of the Connecticut State Department of Education Addendum 5, which provides guidance for responding to COVID-19 scenarios in Connecticut school districts.

Board members Miller, Salina and Sisti shared their children’s experiences during the first week of school.

Mr. Tencza congratulated the administration, administrators, teachers, staff and students for working together cooperatively towards a successful opening of schools.

B. New Staff Orientation 2020

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk reported on the New Staff Orientation Program that took place on August 19, 2020. Included in the discussion was a summary of the topics addressed and feedback from the teachers regarding the orientation and their introduction to the Berlin Public Schools.

C. Facilities Related Updates – Summer Maintenance/Project Updates – District

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported in all of the five schools painting, plumbing and electrical work occurred over the summer. Along with getting ready for the opening of schools, there were mandates that came down from the State regarding the cleaning and disinfecting that is being cared for by the custodians and maintenance staff for the town. Mr. Cugno stated custodians have been asked to clean the buses. There were guidelines for ventilation, which required having those systems cleaned, new filters installed and the ability to gauge the appropriate level of ventilation, which also meant the ability to open windows and receive fresh air. Mr. Cugno stated the buildings are now running much different because of COVID-19. Currently, the Board is having the maintenance department for the town engage a commissioning agent to go through the elementary schools to make sure the systems meet the state's guidelines and qualifications.

Mr. Cugno stated renovations to the softball field at Sage Park have started; at McGee, the gym is complete and looks tremendous, renovations are being done to the Wellness room and the library media center has been refurnished with a new rug and it is anticipated lightening will be done this year; and renovations were done to the courtyards at McGee and the elementary schools to improve the outside learning environment and spaces for students.

Mr. Cugno stated he received the draft Facilities Study report for all five facilities, which provides short-term and long-term planning.

In response to Mr. Aroian's question if the part-time custodians were hired specifically to clean the buses, Mr. Cugno stated no, they were hired because of the additional cleaning within the schools.

D. Summer Program Update

Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian reported on the ESY program offered to students qualifying for these services. Ms. Holian reported there were 151 students recommended for ESY, the district planned on 99 students, based on feedback from parents, and 94 students actually attended. The expenses increased greatly as an additional class was need for preschool and two additional classes were needed for the BLAST program as only eight people were allowed in a classroom, including adults and staff. The total expense for the ESY program was \$183,000, \$58,000 over budget. There was an increase of \$41,000 for salaries as extra paraprofessionals, teachers, bus monitors, floaters and substitutes were needed. Also, the staff was brought in, prior to the start of summer school, to go over all safety guidelines. In addition, \$17,000 was spent for safety materials. Ms. Holian stated the ESY program ran for five weeks with absolutely no issues or problems.

In response to Mr. Salina's question if some of the personal protective equipment purchased for the ESY Program was able to be utilized now for the full school year, Ms. Holian stated absolutely. In response to Mr. Salina's question concerning the number of buses or vans used, Ms. Holian stated 18 vans were used as opposed to 16 in the past as, in addition to the driver, there had to be another person on every van to and from school that was in charge of taking the student's temperature before they got on the van.

E. Revised 2020-21 School Calendar and Graduation Discussion

Superintendent Benigni stated that, in order to allow additional time for personal protective equipment to be received and installed, the school calendar was revised on August 21 to change the first day of school, teacher orientation, professional development days prior to the start of school, and the last day of school. Action is needed to approve the revised calendar. Due to the change in the first day of school, the last day of school will now be on June 18, 2021. The graduation date was previously set for Friday, June 11, 2021, at Welte Hall. Superintendent Benigni stated that if the date changes, Welte Hall is not available and other options would need to be explored for graduation. A copy of the revised 2020-21 school calendar was provided to Board members.

Moved by Ms. Dennis, seconded by Ms. Sisti, to approve the revisions to the adopted 2020-21 School Calendar as presented.

A discussion took place concerning moving the last day of school to June 18, 2021 and whether to keep graduation on June 11, 2021 or change the date.

Superintendent Benigni stated, if remote learning takes place on snow days, the district needs approval from the state to have those days count.

Principal Eustis shared the plan she would have in place for seniors to complete final exams and graduate on June 11, 2021.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Aroian

F. Discuss Personnel Item

At 7:12 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, to enter into Executive Session to discuss a personnel item, inviting the Superintendent.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Aroian

In attendance for Executive Session were Board members Aroian, Dennis, Mahoney, Miller, Oakes, Salina, Sassu, and Sisti. In addition, Superintendent Brian Benigni was present. Mr. Tencza was not in attendance for Executive Session.

At 7:51 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

At 7:51 p.m., a motion was made by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Aroian

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Dennis, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education