

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

October 13, 2020

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Richard Aroian
Julia Dennis
Mary Ellen Maloney - Absent
Jaymee Miller
Timothy Oakes – Arrived 6:03 p.m.
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti
Student Representatives: Ryan McGowan - Absent
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 Human Resources Denise Parsons; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; and Athletic Director and K-12 Physical Education Health Coordinator David Francalanga.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Aroian called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Mr. Aroian provided information concerning the Board of Education vacancies, which appeared in the *Berlin Citizen* and is posted on the town's website and the Board's Facebook Page. Mr. Aroian stated Board members Sassu and Oakes are running for re-election in November; he, along with Board member Maloney, is not running for re-election in November; and Matthew Tencza resigned last month. Mr. Aroian stated he has enjoyed being able to serve the community these past three years and is thankful to have had the opportunity.

II. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Miss Leary reported the Technology Team is now able to live stream the Berlin High School soccer and volleyball games; cross country is taking place at Pistol Creek; the football team will participate in seven vs. seven games in place of their normal season; Wednesday is PSAT Day for juniors and sophomores with seniors and freshmen learning remotely; Berlin High School conferences were held this past week and are also scheduled for October 22, 2020 virtually, via Zoom; and there are plans to hold a virtual fall play and cabaret performance.

B. Committee Report

Dr. Sassu reported the Curriculum Committee met prior to tonight's meeting. Principal Eustis provided an update on the Honor's College and potential new and revised courses, and Dr. McGurk reviewed the District Continuance Improvement Plan, which she will present later in the agenda. The Committee reviewed its goals and objectives, which will be presented at the October 26, 2020 Board meeting.

Mr. Oakes reported the Finance and Operations Committee met last Friday to discuss the Capital Plan and Site and Building requests, which will be discussed later in the agenda.

C. CREC Report

There was no report this evening.

D. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared a thank you note from Michael Capasso.

III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Debbie Olson, 262 Fairview Drive, Berlin, Connecticut, asked now that the hybrid plan has been extended will there still be snow days? Superintendent Benigni responded the thought is that the virtual learning environment could be used for snow days; however this still needs to be officially approved by the State of Connecticut Board of Education.

Mr. John Richards, 239 Hawthorne Drive, Berlin, Connecticut, requested that, when the Board gets to new business in the agenda, that Item VI.D. – Approval of Capital Equipment and Site and Building Budget Requests be moved up in advance of VI.A. as he will be attending the Board of Finance meeting at 7:00 p.m. this evening.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Salina, to move Item VI.D. in advance of VI.A.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Aroian

IV. PERSONNEL

Retirements

1. Remote Teacher/Library Media Specialist – Hubbard School

Superintendent Benigni presented Debbie Lamond's letter of intent to retire as remote teacher/library media specialist at Richard D. Hubbard School at the end of the 2020-2021 school year.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to accept the retirement of Debbie Lamond, remote teacher/library media specialist at Richard D. Hubbard School, effective June 30, 2021. Also to thank her for the 31 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: 7:0; including President Aroian

2. Teacher of Special Education – McGee School

Superintendent Benigni presented Stephanie Begen’s letter of intent to retire as teacher of special education at Catherine M. McGee School at the end of the 2020-2021 school year.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to accept the retirement of Stephanie Begen, teacher of special education at Catherine M. McGee School, effective June 30, 2021. Also to thank her for the 22 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: 7:0; including President Aroian

3. Teacher of Physical Education – Griswold School

Superintendent Benigni presented Nancy Cavaliere’s letter of intent to retire as teacher of physical education at Mary E. Griswold School at the end of the 2020-2021 school year.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Ms. Sisti, to accept the retirement of Nancy Cavaliere, teacher of physical education at Mary E. Griswold School, effective June 30, 2021. Also to thank her for the 20 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: 7:0; including President Aroian

V. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes

1. Regular Meeting of September 14, 2020

2. Regular Meeting of September 28, 2020

B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending September 30, 2020

C. Request for Leave of Absence – Teacher of Chemistry – Berlin High School

Jennifer Winkler, teacher of chemistry at Berlin High School, requested an unpaid leave of absence, for childrearing purposes, to begin immediately following her maternity leave through June 2021.

Moved by Ms. Dennis, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to approve the consent agenda as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Aroian

VI. NEW BUSINESS

D. Approval of Capital Equipment and Site and Building Budget Requests

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported on the status of current projects that involve the use of Capital and Site and Building funds. Mr. Cugno shared the budget guidelines for the 2021-2022 Capital and Site and Building requests along with the items requested and stated only infrastructure, acquisitions or construction with an estimated cost of \$25,000 or more and a useful life of at least five years are included. Mr. Cugno provided Board members with the draft Board of Education Initial Principal Capital Plan and Site and Building Requests for 2022 and the draft Code Analysis and Building and Grounds Survey Friar Associates/Summer 2020 for Berlin Public Schools. The Finance & Operations Committee met on October 9, 2020 and reviewed the budget requests.

With regard to the facilities study performed by Friar Associates, Mr. Cugno stated there is a separate report for each of the five facilities, which is in-depth and provides some level of cost estimates, ideas and recommendations to consider moving forward. Mr. Cugno stated the draft Code Analysis and Building and Grounds Survey will be used to speak to the Town Facilities Department and Board of Education.

Mr. Cugno stated the Town Council approved approximately \$198,000 for the town to contract for a ventilation study for each of the five schools, which is expected to be done by the end of the year and before the full budget process begins.

Mr. Cugno stated the Town Manager requested the initial requests for the Capital Plan be submitted to them by this Friday.

In response to Mr. Aroian's question as to why the Wi-Fi system at Sage Park is on the capital list, Mr. Cugno responded the original estimate of \$20,000 could be more expensive and stated if the Wi-Fi system is not addressed in the Capital Plan, it will move down to the Board's budget and become part of the Informational Technology budget.

In response to Mr. Aroian's question concerning why the amount requested for the emergency alert lights is noted as plus, Mr. Cugno stated he did not want to use the amount from the State's contract list as it is not specific to the district, and as of tonight, the estimate has not been received.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, to approve the Capital Equipment and Site and Building budget requests, as presented, for submission to the town of Berlin.

In response to Mr. Salina's question concerning the redesign of the science labs at McGee Middle School, Principal Urso provided a presentation for the request for the facility work at McGee Middle School for school year 2021-2022.

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

A. Facilities Related Updates

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported on the facilities related updates during his presentation of the Capital Equipment and Site and Building Budget Requests.

B. Official 2020-2021 District Enrollment Report

Superintendent Benigni highlighted the district enrollment as of October 1, 2020, which was provided to Board members. School districts are required each year to report their October 1 enrollment figures to the Connecticut State Department of Education. Superintendent Benigni reported enrollment as of October 1, 2020 is down 47 students (1.72%). Superintendent Benigni stated this enrollment follows the projections in the Prowda Report as well as the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) report.

C. Approval of the District Continuous Improvement Plan 2020-2021

Assistant Superintendent Erin McGurk provided a presentation on the progress of last year's plan and also presented the District Continuous Improvement Plan for 2020-2021, a copy which was provided to Board members. Dr. McGurk also responded to the Board's questions regarding her presentation. Action is needed for approval of the plan.

Moved by Ms. Dennis, seconded by Ms. Miller, to approve the District Continuous Improvement Plan 2020-2021 as presented.

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

E. Set Time for Friday Evening BHS Graduation Ceremonies

With the recent change in graduation, from a Sunday afternoon to a Friday evening, the Board discussed the starting time for the Friday evening graduation ceremonies. Superintendent Benigni stated a time needs to be set to allow families to plan and in the event graduation is moved to a different location other than Welte Hall. Principal Eustis stated Welte Hall is available all day and evening on the date set for graduation. Principal Eustis provided the rationale for having a start time within the hours of 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Ms. Miller, to set the time for Friday evening BHS graduation ceremonies to begin at 5 o'clock p.m.

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

F. Charges for Committee on Equity and Social Justice

At the September 28, 2020 Board meeting, volunteers were requested in order to form an Ad-Hoc Committee of the Board to develop charges for the Committee on Equity and Social Justice to develop an Equity and Social Justice Plan for the district. The Ad-Hoc Committee, consisting of Board

Members Sassu, Dennis and Maloney, met on Monday, October 5, with Dr. McGurk and Superintendent Benigni to develop the charges for the Committee. Ms. Dennis reported the Committee went through the document that was presented at the Board's last workshop from the National School Boards Association and made revisions as to the needs of Berlin Public Schools, which will be shared with anyone interested in serving on the Committee. Dr. Sassu stated the Committee discussed its function in facilitating communication and inviting members of the larger Berlin community to serve on the Committee.

G. Discussion and Possible Action to Delegate Impartial Hearing Officer

Superintendent Benigni stated that typically members of the Board of Education will sit in a residency or disciplinary hearing. The district would like to be able to have the option to delegate an impartial hearing officer so Board members are not placed in a position to pass judgment on a member of the community.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, to approve Elisa Bartlett as the impartial hearing officer for (1) school accommodations hearings, including transportation, under Connecticut General Statutes 10-186; and (2) student expulsion hearings under Connecticut General Statutes 10-233d et seq., including hearings relating to expungement of expulsion decisions, for the 2020-2021 school year.

In response to Mr. Aroian's question who is Elisa Bartlett and Mr. Oakes' question concerning the selection process, Superintendent Benigni stated Ms. Bartlett is an attorney who acts in this capacity, and he knows she has worked in other districts in the same capacity. Superintendent Benigni stated Ms. Bartlett has been referred by Shipman & Goodwin, and he will provide the Board with her resume.

Mr. Oakes requested if a Board member knows Ms. Bartlett or has a conflict of interest to come forward.

In response to Mr. Aroian's question concerning financial obligations, Superintendent Benigni stated Ms. Bartlett is not on a retainer.

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

H. Discussion of Attorney-Client Privileged Communication Concerning Possible Loaning of Football Equipment

At 7:02 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Ms. Miller, to go into Executive Session to discuss an attorney-client privileged communication, inviting the Superintendent and the Athletic Director.

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

In attendance for Executive Session were Board members Aroian, Dennis, Miller, Oakes, Salina, Sassu and Sisti. In addition, Superintendent Benigni and Mr. Francalanga were present.

At 7:24 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

Moved by Ms. Sisti, seconded by Mr. Oakes, that the Board authorize the Administration for the Berlin Public Schools to loan football equipment owned by the Berlin Public Schools to students enrolled at Berlin High School, for their personal use, for the period October 14, 2020 through December 21, 2020, in accordance with procedures established by the Administration, provided that the Administration shall advise the parents or legal guardians of any students seeking to borrow such equipment that any personal use of such equipment does not constitute a school district activity and has no affiliation with the Berlin Public Schools, and provided further that the parents or legal guardians of any students seeking to borrow such equipment must sign and submit the Notice of Risk, Waiver and Informed Consent document provided by the Administration in order to borrow such equipment.

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

VII. ADJOURNMENT

At 7:26 p.m., a motion was made by Ms. Miller, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to adjourn.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Dennis, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education