

# BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

November 23, 2020

## MINUTES

### ANNUAL MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis  
Steven Jenkins  
Jaymee Miller  
Timothy Oakes  
Adam Salina  
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.  
Tracy Sisti  
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 Human Resources Denise Parsons; Finance Director, effective December 1, 2020, Ashley Dorsey; and Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian.

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

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. in the Dr. Robert P. Long auditorium at Berlin High School, 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Ms. Dennis congratulated re-elected Board members Kari Sassu and Timothy Oakes and welcomed newly-appointed Board member Steven Jenkins. A moment of silence was held to honor Joseph Annunziata who passed away.

#### **II. SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS**

Superintendent Benigni recognized and thanked former Board members Richard Aroian, Mary Ellen Maloney and Matthew Tencza for their service to the Berlin Board of Education.

#### **III. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD**

##### A. Report of Student Representatives

Mr. McGowan reported on the National Honor Society Induction Ceremony, which was held virtually on Thursday, November 19, 2020. Mr. McGowan reported the spring musical *Mamma Mia* will be performed outdoors the end of April/beginning of May with each family buying a socially distance circle to watch the show; the fall play *The Rehearsal* has been filmed in school over the course of the past few weeks, with masks and social distancing, and will be available for streaming on December 4 and 5; and UpBeat has been holding meetings virtually and has completed over 1,000 hours of community service and 45 different projects and has started preparing for the annual Christmas tree sale project.

Miss Leary reported on Wednesday the virtual pep rally video will be released; the Berlin High School newspaper *The Redcoat* had its first issue published in late October, and students are currently working on the second issue; and the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) delayed the start of winter sports until January 2021; however, fortunately, all fall sports were able to complete their season successfully with the exception of football.

Miss Leary and Mr. McGowan requested the Board of Education extend the 20 minute lunch wave, especially during remote learning weeks.

B. Committee Reports

Ms. Dennis reported the Community Engagement Committee met with Superintendent Benigni to discuss Committee goals; social media; columns appearing in the *Berlin Citizen*; and next steps. At tonight's meeting, the Committee shared an abridged video from Ms. Dennis's and Ms. Sisti's interviews with teachers, staff and administrators, concerning the effects of COVID-19 on teaching and student learning.

C. CREC Report

Ms. Sisti reported she did not attend the CREC meeting as she attended the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education communications seminar. Ms. Sisti stated she learned from the seminar that Berlin is extremely transparent and offers quite a bit more than other districts with emails, social media and columns in the *Berlin Citizen*.

D. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared a thank you note from Mike Capasso.

**IV. REORGANIZATION**

A. Annual Election of Officers

The election of officers was conducted in accordance with State Statute 10-218. Elections shall be in open session. Board of Education past practice has been that elections are carried out using signed ballots. Also, according to Policy 9050, officers shall be elected from the Board, "...by majority vote of those Board members present and voting."

1. President: Ms. Sisti nominated Ms. Dennis. Mr. Jenkins seconded the nomination.

Superintendent Benigni collected the signed ballots and announced that Ms. Dennis was unanimously affirmed, 7:0. Superintendent Benigni presented the new gavel with stand to Ms. Dennis, and she presided over the remainder of the meeting.

2. Secretary: Ms. Dennis nominated Ms. Sisti. Dr. Sassu seconded the nomination.

Superintendent Benigni collected the signed ballots and announced that Ms. Sisti was unanimously affirmed, 7-0.

B. Appointment of New Board Members

On October 21, 2020, the Board interviewed twelve candidates to fill a September vacancy and two November vacancies on the Board. Mark Pruzin and Stephen Weber were selected to fill the November vacancies on the Board. They will each serve until the November 2021 election.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to appoint Mark Pruzin and Stephen Weber to fill the current vacancies on the Board of Education until the November 2021 election.**

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

C. MOTION for Annual Schedule of Regular Meetings

Board members were provided with two options for the recommended Board meeting dates for February 2021 through January 2022. The first option follows the regular calendar with two meetings a month with the first a business meeting and the second a Board workshop with the exception of June, July, August, November and December when only one meeting is held. The second option has one meeting a month. Board members contributed their thoughts on having two meetings a month versus one and the effectiveness of the Board workshops. This item was tabled to the December Board meeting to allow Board members an opportunity to consider what was discussed and to ask questions, if needed, prior to the next Board meeting.

D. MOTION for Fiscal Management

Approval of designees for the purpose of signing checks for the Berlin High School Enterprise Fund, Berlin Public Schools Activity Fund, and the Cafeteria Fund is necessary, in accordance with Policy 9046.

1. **Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Ms. Miller, that Ashley Dorsey be designated treasurer of the Berlin High School Enterprise Fund, the Berlin Public Schools Activity Fund, and the Cafeteria Fund.**

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

2. **Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Ms. Miller, that Ashley Dorsey, Deborah Batista and Doreen Guy be designated assistant treasurers of the Cafeteria Fund.**

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

3. **Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Ms. Miller, that each principal and the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction be designated assistant treasurers of the Berlin Public Schools Activity Fund.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis**

4. **Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Ms. Miller, that Eileen Eustis, Barbara Ventura, Katie Amenta, and Denise Parsons be appointed assistant treasurers of the Berlin High School Enterprise Fund.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis**

- E. ED-099 – Agreement for Child Nutrition Programs – Change of Authorized Signers

Action is needed to designate Ashley Dorsey, Finance Director, as an authorized signer of the ED-099 Agreement for Child Nutrition Program claims for reimbursement in the absence or incapacity of the superintendent of schools, effective December 1, 2020.

**Moved by Mr. Jenkins, seconded by Ms. Miller, that Ashley Dorsey, Finance Director, be designated as an authorized signer of the ED-099 Agreement for Child Nutrition Program claims for reimbursement in the absence or incapacity of the superintendent of schools, effective December 1, 2020.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis**

- F. Appointment of Board Legal Counsel for 2020-2021

In accordance with Board Policy 9055, the legal counsel to represent the Board of Education for the next year, 2020-2021, should be selected at this time.

**Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Ms. Miller, that the law firm of Shipman & Goodwin of Hartford be appointed to continue as the Board of Education counsel for the 2020-2021 year and that they should be so informed.**

In response to Mr. Salina's questions whether Shipman & Goodwin bills at a flat rate or an hourly rate and if Superintendent Benigni is pleased with the services they provide, Superintendent Benigni responded, Shipman & Goodwin bills at an hourly rate, and there is no retainer, and regardless of the

district's concerns, Shipman & Goodwin has an expert in that area. Superintendent Benigni considers Shipman & Goodwin to be the best firm, with the most knowledge, and their responsiveness is second to none.

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

**V. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

Superintendent Benigni stated he did not receive any comments from Berlin citizens for tonight's Board meeting; however, he did receive eight emails regarding the proposed calendar changes the Board is discussing tonight. Superintendent Benigni stated those individuals were contacted or their questions were answered from the announcements.

**VI. CONSENT AGENDA**

Add Item to the Consent Agenda:

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Oakes, that we add to the consent agenda a request for a leave of absence, without pay, for a paraprofessional at Berlin High School.**

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

- A. Approval of Minutes
  - 1. Regular Meeting of October 13, 2020
  - 2. Special Meeting of October 21, 2020
  - 3. Special Meeting of October 26, 2020
  - 4. Regular Meeting of October 26, 2020
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending October 31, 2020
- C. Request for Leave of Absence Without Pay – Paraprofessional – Berlin High School

Catherine Jones, paraprofessional at Berlin High School, requested a leave of absence, without pay, for the purpose of completing her student teaching requirement in her Master's Degree program at the University of Rhode Island. The leave would start on January 4, 2021 and end on April 9, 2021.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to approve the consent agenda as presented.**

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

**VII. NEW BUSINESS**

A. Facilities Related Updates

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno stated Innovative Construction & Design Solutions, LLC has been contracted to review the duct work at Berlin High School. They will start tomorrow and complete the review by the end of December. The Board should have a report no later than the first week of January. The contracted amount is \$8,330.

Mr. Cugno stated that the Town has contracted with Sustainable Engineering Solutions, LLC, Air Balancing Surface Co. and Automated Building Systems, Inc. for the commissioning and balancing study of the HVAC systems in the five schools. Together, they began their review, which is to be completed by December 31, 2020. The cost of the study, funded by the Town, is approximately \$196,000, and it is anticipated the Town will receive reimbursement from the State of Connecticut.

Mr. Cugno stated the Town has contracted with Consulting Engineering Services (CES) for the roof top unit at McGee Middle School and the fire alarm system replacement at Hubbard School. CES has started the planning and design for each of these projects. Mr. Cugno stated the fire alarm system replacement was estimated at \$150,000 and the roof top unit was estimated at \$225,000.

B. Weather Related Closures as Remote Learning Days

Superintendent Benigni stated that for the duration of the 2020-2021 school year, the State Department of Education approved that superintendents may choose to treat a “snow day” as a remote learning day or a day to be made up later in the school year. Superintendent Benigni recommended that schools close for the first three snow days and make the days up in June and beginning with the fourth snow day and beyond remote learning will be implemented.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Oakes, that schools will be closed for the first two snow days of the 2020-2021 school year and remote learning will be implemented on the third snow day and beyond.**

Board members discussed the number of snow days before remote learning will be implemented and the importance of snow days supporting students’ social and emotional health. Student representatives shared their thoughts on having snow days.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu to amend the motion that schools will be closed for the first three snow days of the 2020-2021 school year and remote learning will be implemented on the fourth snow day and beyond.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis**

C. Revisions to the 2020-2021 School Calendar

Superintendent Benigni stated as COVID-19 cases across Connecticut and here in Berlin continue to rise, the district is revising some of the plans and procedures to help maintain a safe and effective learning environment for students and staff. As social interactions and contacts of many students will be expanded as families gather for Thanksgiving and because the emergence of COVID-19 symptoms can take several days after exposure to develop, Superintendent Benigni requested the school schedule operate on a fully remote model for one week after Thanksgiving, November 30-December 4. It is also possible that the district will operate on this schedule for one week following the winter break. The district is mindful that every aspect of daily teaching has been altered, and many adjustments have needed to be made to pacing, curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. Superintendent Benigni proposed, beginning on Wednesday, January 6, and continuing through March 31, the district operates on an early release schedule across the district every Wednesday. Board members were provided with a revised calendar reflecting these revisions.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Jenkins, to approve the revisions to the 2020-2021 School Calendar, as presented, and the possibility of operating on a fully remote schedule for one week following the winter break.**

Superintendent Benigni explained his decision to not put the fully remote model for the winter break on the calendar at this time.

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

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

**At 7:31 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, to adjourn.**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education