

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION
December 14, 2020
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis
Steven Jenkins
Jaymee Miller
Timothy Oakes
Mark Pruzin
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti
Stephen Weber
Student Representatives: Ryan McGowan
Lindsey Leary - Absent

Also in attendance: Superintendent of Schools Brian J. Benigni; Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk; Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno; Finance Director Ashley Dorsey; and Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Dennis called the remote meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. A moment of silence was observed for Sandy Hook students, families, teachers and the community. Ms. Dennis welcomed newly-appointed Board members Mark Pruzin and Stephen Weber. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. SPECIAL STUDENT PRESENTATION – BERLIN HIGH SCHOOL MADRIGAL SINGERS

The Berlin High School Madrigal Singers perform under the direction of Tyler Boyle, Berlin High School music teacher. They have earned both silver and gold awards at music festival competitions and perform in period costumes. The group is chosen by audition and features many of the most talented young vocalists from Berlin High School. This year, due to COVID-19, the entire group was not able to perform at tonight's meeting. Singers Meredith Gendreau and Emily Roche each performed a solo.

III. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Mr. McGowan reported Upbeat students helped pack over 700 care packages for the Boxes to Boots Project; the Interact Club is bell ringing outside Stop & Shop to collect money for the Salvation Army and also collected toys for families in need; the Berlin High School Unified Sports Program was recognized as a National Unified Champion School; last Friday, the National Honor Society hosted Pajama Day to support the Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders at Connecticut Children's Medical Center; Habitat for Humanity is running a food drive this week; the Berlin High School fall play was released and streamed on-line on December 4; and four Berlin High School art students recently had their ornaments displayed at the White House in Washington, D.C. and student Emily Kobus had the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C. to tour the White House and speak with the First Lady. Mr. McGowan provided Board members with feedback concerning the district operating on a fully remote learning model after the Thanksgiving break.

B. Committee Assignments for 2020-2021

The Community Engagement Committee will consist of Board members Tracy Sisti (Chair), Mark Pruzin and Stephen Weber with Superintendent Brian Benigni serving as the administrative liaison.

The Finance and Operations Committee will consist of Board members Timothy Oakes (Chair), Julia Dennis and Adam Salina with Jeffrey Cugno and Ashley Dorsey serving as the administrative liaisons.

The Curriculum Committee will consist of Board members Kari Sassu (Chair), Jaymee Miller and Steven Jenkins with Assistant Superintendent Erin McGurk serving as the administrative liaison.

The Equity and Social Justice Committee will consist of Board members Kari Sassu, who will serve on the steering committee, Stephen Weber, Steven Jenkins and Mark Pruzin who will be part of a larger committee that will participate in trainings, question and answer groups and focus groups.

Timothy Oakes will Chair The Ad-Hoc Committee for Review of the Policy Book.

C. Committee Reports

There were no Committee reports this evening.

D. CREC Report

There was no report this evening. Ms. Sisti reported the next Capitol Region Education Council meeting is in January.

E. Correspondence to the Board

Principal Eustis shared a video regarding the 2020-2021 Cancellation Cup Season Snow Day Competition.

IV. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

There was no correspondence from the community for tonight's meeting.

V. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes – Regular Meeting of November 23, 2020

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

C. Request for Leave of Absence – Teacher of Kindergarten – Mary E. Griswold School

Jaime Ligas, teacher of Kindergarten at Mary E. Griswold School, requested an unpaid leave of absence, for childrearing purposes, to begin immediately following her maternity leave through the end of the 2021-2022 school year.

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

Dr. Sassu questioned if the timeframe for the leave of absence is accurate and will there be any difficulty in filling the position for one year. Superintendent Benigni responded, based on how the request is written, the timeframe is accurate, and he does not anticipate having any difficulty filling the position for one year.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Facilities Related Updates

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno stated the duct work at Berlin High School and the commissioning and balancing study of the HVAC systems in the five schools is moving forward and should be completed by the end of December.

B. Berlin High School Program of Studies for 2021-2022

Assistant Superintendent Erin McGurk and Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis presented to the Board of Education, for its consideration and approval, new course offerings and changes to the Berlin High School Program of Studies for 2021-2022. They highlighted the rationale for the changes. An overview of significant changes made to the Program of Studies and a draft copy of the Berlin High School Program of Studies for 2021-2022 were provided to Board members. The changes were reviewed and discussed by the Curriculum Committee at its meeting on October 13, 2020.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Pruzin, to approve the new course offerings and revisions to the Berlin High School Program of Studies for 2021-2022, as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

C. Motion for Annual Schedule of Regular Meetings

At the November meeting, the Board discussed changing from two meetings to one meeting a month. Board members were provided with two memos: Option 1 – having two meetings per month generally held on the second and fourth Monday; and Option 2 – having one meeting per month generally being held on the second Monday.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to approve the Annual Schedule of Regular Meetings as presented in Option 2 – having one meeting per month with meeting dates generally being held on the second Monday of each month.

Mr. Salina noted the difference between Option 1 and Option 2 is six meetings, and stated he believes the Board can accomplish its business in one meeting a month; however, if a second meeting is needed, a Special Meeting can be scheduled.

Mr. Oakes stated, in the event a Special Meeting is scheduled, careful thought and planning will need to occur as no other business, other than what is stated in the agenda, can occur during the Special Meeting.

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

D. Revision 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 its plans and procedures to help maintain a safe and effective learning environment for students and staff. The district knows that social interactions and contacts of many students will be expanded as families gather for the holidays. Because the emergence of COVID-19 symptoms can take several days after exposure to develop, Superintendent Benigni proposed adjusting the school schedule to operate on a fully remote model for one week after the winter break, January 4-8, 2021. The possibility of this change was discussed at the November 23 meeting. Board members were provided with a revised calendar reflecting the revision. Superintendent Benigni stated Group A will return on January 11, 2021.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Jenkins, to approve the revision to the 2020-2021 School Calendar, as presented.

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

E. Discussion of Proposed Changes/Possible Ratification of Contract – Head Custodians

At 6:49 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Jenkins, to go into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter, inviting the Superintendent.

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

In attendance for Executive Session were Board members Dennis, Jenkins, Miller, Oakes, Pruzin, Salina, Sassu, Sisti and Weber. In addition, Superintendent Benigni was present.

At 7:07 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

The Board and the Berlin Association of Head Custodians recently negotiated a new contract agreement for the period of July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2023.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to ratify the contract agreement between the Berlin Board of Education and the Berlin Association of Head Custodians for the period of July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2023, as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

At 7:08 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, to re-enter into Executive Session to discuss a different personnel item, inviting the Superintendent as well.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

In attendance for Executive Session were Board members Dennis, Jenkins, Miller, Oakes, Pruzin, Salina, Sassu, Sisti and Weber. In addition, Superintendent Benigni was present.

At 8:00 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:00 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Jenkins, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education