

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION
January 11, 2021
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis
Steven Jenkins
Jaymee Miller
Timothy Oakes
Mark Pruzin
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti - Absent
Stephen Weber
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; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; and Finance Director Ashley Dorsey.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Dennis called the remote meeting to order at 6:01p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Add Item to the Agenda:

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, to add an Item to the Agenda labeling it Item D in the New Business – Part 1 to discuss election results. Also, further to move New Business - Part II, Item D to Item E.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

II. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Miss Leary reported the musical auditions for this year's production of *Mamma Mia* will be submitted virtually, and the Berlin Robotics Team, the Techno-Nuts, began their season on January 9, 2021 with an informational broadcast concerning upcoming competitions and beginning work on the season's game plan.

Mr. McGowan reported the Capstone Presentation Day is next Wednesday, and due to COVID-19 precautions, students will present their Capstone individually to their teacher and a few guests. Mr. McGowan reported Principal Eustis sent an email today to all seniors giving them an opportunity to individually meet.

B. Committee Reports

Mr. Oakes reported the Finance and Operations Committee recently met concerning the proposed 2021-2022 budget.

C. CREC Report

There was no report this evening.

D. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared thank you notes received from Jenn O'Brien and Kristen, Joey, Grayson and Gabriella Pandolfi.

Ms. Dennis reported she received emails regarding the quarantine guidelines and stated today Superintendent Benigni's office sent out correspondence to parents concerning the new CDC guidelines regarding the required quarantine time. This information is posted on the district's website along with updated protocols for travel outside of Connecticut.

III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Superintendent Benigni stated he received one email last Wednesday requesting a second week of remote learning following the winter break.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes
 - 1. Regular Meeting of December 14, 2020
 - 2. Special Meeting of December 18, 2020
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending December 31, 2020

Moved by Mr. Jenkins, seconded by Mr. Pruzin, to approve the items on the consent agenda.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

V. NEW BUSINESS – PART 1

- A. Facilities Related Updates

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno stated the report concerning the duct work at Berlin High School is complete and has been sent to the Town Manager for review, and the report concerning the commissioning and balancing study of the HVAC systems in the five schools is also complete and should be received by the Board this week.

- B. Policy Review/Revision – First Reading – Revised Policy #9085 – Time, Place and Notice of Meetings

At the December 14, 2020 Board meeting, action was taken to schedule regular meetings on the second Monday of each month (instead of the second and fourth Monday) beginning in February 2021. This

policy has been revised to reflect the change. Since this is a first reading, no action is required; the second reading/adoption will take place at the January 25 Board meeting.

C. Berlin Transition Academy Lease/YMCA Daycare

Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian provided Board members with an overview of the Berlin Transition Academy, which included transition services requirements; transition only services; what is transition planning; components of the program; community experiences; program expenses; and future goals for the Berlin Transition Academy.

Superintendent Benigni stated the Berlin Public Schools will be partnering with Cromwell Public Schools next year for educating students aged 18-21 receiving transition services. Superintendent Benigni requested authority to enter into an agreement with the YMCA to utilize two classrooms at Berlin High School and a third classroom at Berlin High School or another school for its daycare program in lieu of rent for the Berlin Transition Academy to be located at 362 Main Street, Berlin, Connecticut. It is anticipated that the program will increase from 11 students to over 25 for the 2021-2022 school year. This increase, and the potential for adding additional students and districts, necessitates the need for greater space for the program. The current location, at 362 Main Street in Berlin, provides an optimal learning environment outside of the schools and an appropriate location in the community in terms of access. Berlin Public Schools would allow the YMCA to use three classrooms for daycare and preschool of which two will be in Berlin High School and a third in Berlin High School or another school in the district. In return, the YMCA would allow Berlin Public Schools full use and access of 362 Main Street with the intention of entering into a multi-year lease agreement. The benefits of this agreement extend beyond the fiscal savings as having both preschool and younger students at Berlin High School will provide the needed opportunity for students to have required field study opportunities in the Child Development and Psychology courses.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Pruzin, to authorize the Superintendent of Schools to enter into an agreement with the YMCA to utilize two classrooms at Berlin High School and a third classroom at Berlin High School or another school for its daycare program in lieu of rent for the Berlin Transition Academy to be located at the YMCA, 362 Main Street, Berlin, CT.

Superintendent Benigni and Ms. Holian responded to the Board's questions regarding where the classrooms would be located; the timeframe and length of the lease; the set up of the preschool classrooms; responsibility for the expenses; COVID protocol; schedule; liability issues; cleaning of the rooms; and outside play area.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

D. Discussion of November 2020 Election Results

Superintendent Benigni stated that, after consultation with Board member Tim Oakes and the Board of Education, he has been in contact with Mayor Mark Kaczynski and the Town Manger several times regarding the November 2020 election results. Superintendent Benigni stated, since the Board is represented by Shipman & Goodwin and they also serve as labor counsel to the Town, in order to have

Shipman & Goodwin represent the Board with this issue, the Town needs to waive the conflict of interest. Since that has not yet occurred, the Board discussed securing different counsel to file the necessary paperwork to challenge the Charter. Superintendent Benigni stated Attorney Richard Mills has provided him with recommendations.

Moved by Mr. Jenkins, seconded by Ms. Miller, to authorize the Superintendent, between meetings, to secure adequate counsel in furtherance of the December motion that has previously been passed by the Board.

Mr. Oakes stated the Town may choose to sign the waiver or put forth language that addresses this issue; however, he is concerned that it will only address the issue for the November 2020 election results and not acknowledge the interpretation of the Charter, which could have ramifications on subsequent elections and future Board members; therefore, it would be in the best interest of all to move forward. Mr. Oakes stated he has spoken with a firm that is familiar with municipal law and has confirmed they do not have any conflicts with the Town or Board of Education.

Dr. Sassu inquired of the scope and associated costs. Superintendent Benigni stated once a firm is secured, he anticipates they would be able to provide an estimate for attorney's fees.

FAVOR: 7 in favor; 1 abstained

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0:1; including President Dennis; Mr. Oakes abstained

VI. 2021-2022 SUPERINTENDENT'S PROPOSED BUDGET PRESENTATION

Superintendent Benigni presented his proposed 2021-2022 budget to the Board. The presentation was guided by the budget priorities that were identified by the Board and Administrative Council. Board members were provided with a copy of the presentation.

Superintendent Benigni thanked Ashley Dorsey, Jeffrey Cugno, Debbie Batista, Erin McGurk, Linda Holian, Denise Parsons and Laura Curtis in preparing the proposed 2021-2022 budget. Superintendent Benigni stated, given the economic times, the proposed 2021-2022 budget is lean, and his major focus is to continue to provide class sizes and programs essential to the Berlin Public Schools to provide quality education for all students. Superintendent Benigni shared his goals for the proposed 2021-2022 budget.

The proposed budget has an overall increase of \$2,117,627 or 4.56%.

In terms of Administrative Salaries, there is an increase of \$118,807 or 4.34%, which is driven by contractual obligations, step increase, and a separation of the Director of Business Operations position to Operation & Finance Directors.

In terms of Certified Salaries, there is an increase of \$645,514 or 3.09%, which is based on contractual obligations, step increase, and for one elementary position. Superintendent Benigni provided the five year FTE comparisons for teachers/certified staff and all 2021-2022 new staffing requests, which, other than the elementary position, are not present in Superintendent Benigni's proposed budget.

In terms of Non-Certified Salaries, there is an increase of \$255,168 or 3.41%, which is based on an increase due to contractual obligations, three (3) Special Education Paraprofessionals for the Berlin

Transition Academy; and increased funding for substitute teachers and five (5) permanent building substitute teachers.

In terms of Employee Benefits, there is an increase of \$662,762 or 10.26%, which is based on a 10.26% increase projected for new employees. This rate is set by the Town.

In terms of Contracted Services, there is an increase of \$129,964 or 7.31%, which is based on all operational and educational systems, which increase three (3) to five (5) percent annually; software and licensing (\$60,000); and nursing services for an incoming student with special needs (\$60,000).

In terms of Utilities, there is no increase.

In terms of Transportation, there is an increase of \$39,199 or 1.22%. The contractual costs with New Britain Transportation are three (3) percent or \$96,362, which is offset by the use of the Special Education Excess Cost Grant and a reduction in repairs and maintenance.

In terms of Tuition, there is an increase of \$114,928 or 5.33%, which is based on magnet school and private and public rate increases and an additional outplacement (\$80,000).

In terms of Supplies, Textbooks and Materials, there is an increase of \$28,306 or 2.64%. There is an increase of \$26,211 for a required replacement of AP/UCONN ECE Biology text and for Algebra and Geometry texts.

In terms of Equipment, there is an increase of \$72,876 or 47.26%. A majority of the increase is allocated for technology, which includes infrastructure, classroom, student and school technology. In addition, all items under \$25,000 are to be funded in the Operating Budget based on the process implemented by the Town.

In terms of Other Expenditures, there is an increase of \$50,103 or 80.57%. Superintendent Benigni stated the original requests were over \$1,000,000. There is a savings of \$6,000 from the Berlin Transition Academy lease agreement.

Superintendent Benigni presented the Hartford Open Choice Enrollment; the Choice Grant FY 2020-2021 Budget Projection; the proposed budget for 2021-2022 Open Choice Funds; and the Choice Grant FY 2021-2022 Budget Alternatives.

Superintendent Benigni provided a comparison of the five-year average increases of adopted education budgets of surrounding towns. Berlin's five-year average increase is 2.08%.

Superintendent Benigni provided the budget funding history; net current expenditures per pupil; Berlin and Sate per pupil expenditure; federal funding; state funding; five year FTE comparisons; and elementary, middle and high school enrollment projections.

The Board will meet again on Wednesday, January 13, 2021, and will have individual presentations from the elementary, middle school and high school principals, Curriculum and Instruction and Special Education.

VII. NEW BUSINESS – PART 2

E. Discuss Personnel Matter

At 7:53 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Pruzin, seconded by Mr. Weber, to go into Executive Session, inviting our Superintendent.

In response to Mr. Oakes' question why the Board is entering into Executive Session, Ms. Dennis responded to discuss a personnel matter.

At 7:53 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Pruzin, seconded by Mr. Salina, to move into Executive Session and also invite the Superintendent of Schools to discuss a personnel matter.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

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

At 8:12 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:14 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Pruzin, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Dennis, Berlin Board of Education