

**BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**January 13, 2021**  
**MINUTES**  
**SPECIAL 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 – Absent  
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; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; Supervisor of Special Education – Elementary Michelle Zeuschner; Supervisor of Special Education – Secondary Cindy Martin; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Director of Literacy and Social Studies Laurie Gjerpen; Director of School Security, Safety and Residency John Schmaltz; District Technology Coordinator Craig Szymanski; Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis; Assistant Vice Principals of Berlin High School Barbara Ventura and Katie Amenta; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Assistant Principal of McGee Middle School Tim Chiaverini; Lead Teacher Interventionist of McGee Middle School Karen Despres; Principal of Griswold School David Kitzman; Lead Teacher of Griswold School Cara Quinn; Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza; Principal of Willard School Megan Sirois; Lead Teacher of Willard School Lauren Gaudino; and Athletic Director and K-12 Physical Education Health Coordinator David Francalangia.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Ms. Dennis called the remote meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**II. 2021-2022 PROPOSED BUDGET PRESENTATION**

A. Elementary Principals' Budget Presentations

Principals Sirois, Kitzman and Souza presented the Elementary Schools budget presentation. Ms. Sirois began the presentation by stating the Elementary Schools Budget being presented is similar to the budgets proposed for each of the three elementary schools last year. They were created to adequately support the needs of each school with the circumstances of the current fiscal year taken into consideration. The budgets reflect a minimum increase or a flat increase, based on needs, and reflects an effort to maintain the current level.

Elementary Budget Goals: Create learning experiences that promote a sense of purpose, ignite passion and foster a sense of pride; support the academic, social/emotional and developmental needs of the Pre-K to Grade 5 student; provide the instructional resources necessary to meet and challenge all students to fulfill their potential; and building safety for students and staff.

In alignment with the Superintendent's budget rationale, the elementary principals' requests do not assume current COVID precautions.

Elementary Staffing: Included in the Superintendent's proposed budget is a Math Interventionist, potentially funded with Choice Funds. Although not included in the Superintendent's proposed budget, the elementary teachers requested a 0.30 FTE Reading Teacher; a 1.00 FTE Writing Interventionist; a 0.60 FTE Art Teacher; and a 0.50 FTE Social Worker.

Elementary Equipment and Facility: Included in the Superintendent's proposed budget is emergency alert lights; tile replacement; painting; a band classroom at Griswold; closet cubbies and a library skylight at Hubbard; and parking lot lighting and playground upgrades at Willard. Although not included in the Superintendent's proposed budget, the elementary teachers requested Juno surround sound; lavatory upgrades; flexible seating; office millwork; and renovations to the health room at Griswold.

Operation/Instruction Budget: The Operation/Instruction Budget consists of instructional supplies; non-instructional supplies and equipment; textbooks; software and technology; and maintenance and repair.

## B. Secondary Principals' Budget Presentations

Principal Urso presented the McGee Middle School budget presentation.

McGee Middle School Budget Goals: Create learning experiences that promote a sense of purpose, ignite passion and foster a sense of pride; support the academic, social/emotional and developmental needs of the 6-8 grade student; provide the instructional supplies necessary to meet and challenge all students to fulfill their potential; and building safety, security and motivation.

McGee Middle School Staffing: Included in the Superintendent's proposed budget is a 1.00 FTE paraprofessional. Although not included in Superintendent's proposed budget Principal Urso requesting an additional 1.00 FTE paraprofessional to perform clerical work and classroom coverage.

McGee Middle School Equipment and Facility: Although not included in the Superintendent's proposed budget, Principal Urso requested the original library space be converted to science classrooms and the three science classrooms be converted to World Language classrooms; furniture, music library, instrument locking storage shelving system, windows for practice, small group instruction area and acoustic tiles for the band room/chorus; replacement of curtains, rigging, upgrades to lighting and upholstery for the auditorium; and lighting upgrades for the library media center.

Operation/Instruction Budget: The Operation/Instruction Budget consists of instructional supplies to support the ability to implement curriculum and provide meaningful, relevant learning experiences; non-instructional supplies and equipment to serve as tools and resources to structure, document, support and organize learning; textbooks to provide a guide for teaching and learning of identified curriculum; software and technology to increase learner engagement, efficiency and the latest available resources; and maintenance and repair to maximize the life of learning equipment and tools.

Principal Eustis presented the Berlin High School budget presentation.

Berlin High School Budget Goals: Maintain the breadth of course offerings in order to meet the individual needs and interests of students and grow programs appropriately; maintain the current staffing to provide students with social/emotional supports, post-secondary planning supports and appropriate class sizes; provide a safe and secure environment for students to do their best learning; create learning experiences that promote a sense of purpose, ignite passion and foster a sense of pride; and continue to support the work developing and implementing innovative practices with new resources, including technology and unique modern classroom spaces that support learning.

Berlin High School Staffing: Included in the Superintendent's proposed budget is funding to maintain the current level of staffing in all other areas in order to provide social/emotional supports and high level academic programming. Although not included in the Superintendent's proposed budget, Principal Eustis requested a 1.00 Tier II Intervention tutor, potentially funded with Choice Funds.

Berlin High School Equipment and Facility: Included in the Superintendent's proposed budget are technology support services for music upgrades for the radio station; repair and maintenance for the TV/radio station and auditorium; increased dues and fees; and miscellaneous instructional equipment for the auditorium, TV studio and virtual reality. Although not included in the Superintendent's proposed budget, Principal Eustis requested cafeteria seating as benches need replacement and flexible classroom seating.

Berlin High School Building Operation/Instruction Budget: The Operation/Instruction Budget consists of instructional materials and software to support a rigorous and relevant curriculum to meet all student learning needs, which includes CSP instructional software; math and Technology Education software; Library Media Center materials; online text subscriptions; and supplies and consumables. Included in the Superintendent's proposed budget is budgeting for department specific equipment maintenance and repairs for Art, Family Consumer Science and Technology Education.

### C. Curriculum & Instruction Budget

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk presented the Curriculum and Instruction Budget for 2021-2022. Board members were provided with the curriculum program budget summary. Dr. McGurk highlighted the following areas:

Instructional Supplies: Although Dr. McGurk requested \$95,000, included in Superintendent's proposed budget is \$78,500 for supplies and materials for curriculum revision and writing. Instructional supplies also provide flexibility as needs arise.

Other Certified Salaries: Dr. McGurk requested \$70,000 to support curriculum writing projects to maintain a viable curriculum, new courses and for the Equity and Social Justice Committee the Board put forth in October.

Teaching and Learning Software: Dr. McGurk stated, during the pandemic, teachers are using many more software applications and students are benefiting from the opportunity to participate with software they find engaging and supports the curriculum. Dr. McGurk stated that, although she requested

\$125,537, included in the Superintendent's proposed budget is \$97,927 for license subscriptions for Schoology, Seesaw, Atlas Rubicon and software that supports day-to-day instruction in the classroom.

In-district Professional Learning: Although Dr. McGurk requested \$93,450, included in Superintendent's proposed budget is \$78,950 for outside presenters and staff members to provide in-district learning opportunities for educators and staff members.

Out of District Professional Learning: Although Dr. McGurk requested \$33,030, included in Superintendent's proposed budget is \$23,030 for staff members and educators to attend out-of-district professional development.

Textbooks: Dr. McGurk is requesting funding for online subscriptions for Spanish, Physics and UCONN Chemistry, new math textbooks for Algebra and Geometry and a required replacement textbook for AP/UCONN ECE Biology.

#### D. Special Education Budget

Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian, along with Supervisor of Special Education – Secondary Cindy Martin and Supervisor of Special Education – Elementary Michelle Zeuschner, presented the 2021-2022 Special Education Budget and responded to questions from the Board concerning their presentation. Board members were provided with a copy of the presentation. Ms. Holian indicated their goal tonight was to provide Board members with an overview of Special Education trends state-wide as well as within Berlin, expenses and funding sources that help to offset the general education budget. This includes students serviced both in the Berlin school district as well as out-of-district and the staff currently that support the diverse needs of the students. Ms. Holian acknowledged Lora Curtis, Ashley Dorsey, Doreen Guy, John Richards, JoAnn Walicki, Sue McNally, Cindy Martin and Michelle Zeuschner for their help in creating tonight's budget presentation. Ms. Holian stated the Special Education Budget is a large part of the local budget.

Special Education Trend Data in Connecticut: The number of students with special needs continues to increase as overall student enrollment decreases. Many students with disabilities continue to require more resources to meet their individual needs. Included in Ms. Holian's presentation was the K-12 Special Education Prevalence Rate for Connecticut and Berlin for the past nine years, which shows the prevalence rate of Special Education continues to increase while overall numbers of enrollment decrease. Ms. Holian shared the total General Education expenditures (excluding fringe benefits); the total Special Education expenditures (excluding fringe benefits); and the total outside Special Education placement expenditures (excluding fringe benefits) trend line, which shows that General Education numbers are going down and Special Education continues to increase. Resources used were from the New England School Development Counsel, Berlin Special Education Trend Report for 2020-2021. Currently, the district has twenty-nine (29) students out of district, six (6) of which participate in the CHOICE program.

Pupil Personnel Services Today: As of October 1, 2020, one hundred sixty-seven (167) students are eligible to receive accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (ADA); twenty-nine (29) students receive services in out-of-district facilities; seven (7) students attend parent choice programs such as magnet schools; and five (5) students receive service plans. Four hundred forty-seven

(447) students receive direct Special Education services from the staff and schools. As of this evening, there are four hundred sixty-three (463) students receiving direct Special Education services from the staff and schools. In order to be eligible for Special Education services, students must be identified as having one of the eleven (11) disabilities referenced on the graph entitled Students By Primary Exceptionality. Autism is on the rise across the state.

As of July 1, 2020 through January 4, 2021 Unexpected Costs: Thirteen (13) new students have moved to Berlin requiring Special Education services. This does not include new referrals or students entering from the Birth to Three system; four (4) of the students are in kindergarten and require a significant amount of support from staff; and there have been three (3) students out placed since July 1, 2020.

Special Education Drivers 2021-2022: Administrative Salaries, Certified Salaries and Tuitions are the major drivers. Specialized programs have been developed, over a number of years, to meet significant needs of the students. These programs allow Berlin to keep students in-district. These programs have a smaller teacher to student ratio, which is the major driver in staff increases. The total Special Education staff has increased 24.2% over the past seven years due to new programs to meet the needs of students. As of today, there are 138.5 staff members. Included in the presentation was a breakdown of the number of Special Education students, Special Education teachers, paraprofessionals, specialized programs and related service staff for each school and the Berlin Transition Academy.

Included in the presentation was the tuition for out-of-district Berlin students and out-of-district Berlin/CHOICE students.

Special Education Department Operational Budget: Ms. Holian shared the Special Education Department Operating Budget for 2020-2021 school year.

Additional Special Education Funding Sources: Currently, 4.6 certified staff and 10 FTE paraprofessional positions are partially funded through the IDEA Part B, Section 611 grant. One FTE paraprofessional is funded through the IDEA 619 grant.

The Excess Cost grant is Connecticut's method for paying extraordinary Special Education costs. The Excess Cost grant reimburses districts when expenditures for educating a Special Education student are 4.5 times greater than the district's spending per pupil. Berlin's per pupil expenditure is \$18,025 x 4.5 or \$81,111. Reimbursement by the State is at 70%

Currently, the Medicaid Program funds one full time Occupational Therapist and provides professional development for related service providers as occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech and language pathologists and social workers require continuing education units to keep their licenses.

Included in the presentation was the additional CHOICE reimbursement.

2021-2022 Requests to Support Student's Academic and Social and Emotional Needs: Although not included in the Superintendent's proposed budget, Ms. Holian requested a 1.00 FTE Special Education Teacher for The Berlin Transition Academy (\$62,000); a van for the Berlin Transition Academy (\$40,000); a twenty (20) hour a week Transition Coordinator (\$34,400); nine (9) paraprofessionals; a

1.00 FTE Registered Behavioral Technician (\$30,000); and a 1.00 FTE Preschool Teacher. Included in the Superintendent's proposed budget are three (3) paraprofessionals.

Dr. Zeuschner stated currently, there are two classrooms that are part-day programs, with each session two and one-half hours and two classrooms that have extended hours. These students attend four days a week from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., with a half-day on Wednesday for up to twenty-two and one-half hours.

Effective School Solutions: Although not included in the Superintendent's proposed budget, Ms. Holian requested one Effective School Solutions (ESS) clinician at McGee Middle School (\$100,000). Berlin schools are dealing with a significant increase in students experiencing social and emotional distress. This includes both the general population as well as students receiving services on an IEP or 504 plan. There is an increase in family, school and social stressors as well as anxiety and depression. Students are lacking effective coping skills due to these stressors. As of tonight, there have been 46 DCF referrals, 16 reports of concern, 23 at risk reports, 3 risk assessments conducted by the district's consulting psychiatrist and 9 psychiatric evaluations.

Included in the presentation was the mission of ESS; a listing of the clinical services; ESS staffing; a partial list of the high risk student behaviors ESS has encountered with students in the Berlin Public Schools; student vignettes; a summary of the ESS Program in the Berlin Public Schools since beginning in 2015-2016; staff time savings; counseling sessions for marking period 1 School Year 2020-2021; and parent comments.

#### E. District-wide Non-instructional Programs/Athletics

Athletic Director and K-12 Physical Education Health Coordinator David Francalanga presented the 2021-2022 Athletics Budget. Board members were provided with a copy of his presentation.

Core Values: The student athletes' academic achievement will meet or exceed the level of the rest of the student body; the Athletic Department will produce student athletes and coaches who exemplify good sportsmanship, integrity, respect for others, commitment and dedication to goals and the ability to work as a valued member of a team; and the Athletic Department will produce student athletes and coaches who aspire and work toward the highest possible competitive standards, while maintaining competitive and personal integrity.

Included the Superintendent's proposed budget are cheerleading coach stipends for the fall and winter season and football and boys cross country uniforms. Mr. Francalanga stated the officials' budget will remain the same, and there is a slight increase for transportation, pursuant to the contract with New Britain Transportation.

#### F. Site and Building

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno stated requests include minor facilities development and maintenance to the district. Historically Board of Education Site and Building requests were budgeted in the Town Budget but now need to be included in the Board's Operating Budget. In addition to funds provided in the Board's Operating Budget, major expenses/upgrades are also budgeted by the Town Facilities Department. The total building district requests are \$126,000; the total recommendations from

Friar Associates are \$387,812; and the total funding proposed in the Superintendent's Budget for Site and Building/Capital Improvements is \$50,000.

#### G. Capital Requests

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno stated only anticipated purchases exceeding \$25,000 are eligible for the Town Capital Plan and anticipated purchases less than \$25,000 are budgeted for in the Board of Education Operating Budget. Initial building requests for the Town Capital Plan, made by the School Administrators, are \$2,116,000 and total recommendations from Friar Associates are \$8,065,836, which are not being funded at this point, except for issues dealing with HVAC. The following projects are proposed in the Town Capital Plan for consideration in the 2021-2022 budget: fire alarm upgrades at Willard School (\$150,000); vans (\$110,000); and ADA upgrades district-wide (\$50,000), and if a surplus is available, lighting in the library media Center at McGee (\$62,000); lighting in the Library Media Center at Hubbard (\$30,000); and floor tiles in all elementary schools (\$75,000).

Finance Director Ashley Dorsey provided an overview of the Technology Budget. Ms. Dorsey stated in fiscal year 2018-2019 the Board of Education established a budget for Information Technology equipment and software within the Board's Operating Budget. Prior to 2018, technology purchases were made with operating surpluses and/or grant funds, if available. Ms. Dorsey stated District Technology Coordinator Craig Szymanski requested \$1,638,159 for school/student hardware (\$262,661); district technology (\$517,690); infrastructure (\$468,200); and software, licensing and support (\$389,608). Included in the Superintendent's proposed budget is \$495,951 for school/student hardware (\$77,411); district technology (\$47,990); infrastructure (\$48,200) and software, licensing and support (\$322,350).

Ms. Dorsey stated in fiscal year 2019-2020, the district established a Security Department for the Berlin Public Schools. The Department is funded through the Town of Berlin and since its inception has expanded to a six member team including a Director of Security, Residency and Safety and five armed security guards. The proposed Security Budget for 2021-2022 is \$358,921, which consists of the Security, Safety and Residency Director (\$69,854); Security Officers (\$277,390); other professional services (\$2,835); contracted services (\$2,200); supplies (\$650); uniforms (\$2,734); and equipment (\$3,258).

#### H. Board of Education Overall Review

Superintendent Benigni stated the majority of the budget increase is for staff and contractual benefits to preserve the programs and class sizes Berlin has come to expect.

Ms. Dennis requested, prior to the budget discussion on Monday, January 25, 2021, a breakdown of the percentage requested, percentage for the proposed budget and the percentage increase from last year to this year over the last three years for Items A through G.

Superintendent Benigni and Ms. Dennis stated that if Board members have any further questions or need further information to reach out to Ms. Dennis and she will communicate with Superintendent Benigni.

**III. ADJOURNMENT**

**At 8:46 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to adjourn.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis**

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Dennis, President, Berlin Board of Education