

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

March 8, 2021

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

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; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza; Principal of Willard School Megan Sirois; and Principal of Griswold School David Kitzman.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. in the Dr. Robert P. Long auditorium at Berlin High School, 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Board Member Appreciation

The month of March is Connecticut Board of Education Member Appreciation month. Superintendent Brian Benigni thanked Board members for the time and effort they devote to Board business during the course of the year.

III. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Mr. McGowan reported the Berlin High School spring musical *Mamma Mia* will be performed the last weekend in April outside in the senior courtyard with an in-person audience; students are excited for the full in-person return to school; and the Rho Kappa Social Studies Honor Society Induction Ceremony will be held on March 25, 2021.

Miss Leary reported on March 24, 2021 all juniors will take the SAT test and freshman will take the PSAT test; this week and next week Berlin High School parent/teacher conferences will be held virtually, via Zoom; and the library/media center has organized a March Madness book bracket.

B. Committee Reports

Dr. Sassu reported the Curriculum Committee met prior to tonight's meeting and reviewed the proposed 2022-2023 school calendar; the graduation date for 2022; and the proposed revisions to the current school calendar.

Mr. Oakes reported the Finance & Operations Committee recently met to review the ESSER Grant.

C. CREC Report

There was no report this evening.

D. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared thank you notes from David Kitzman and eighth grade teachers at McGee Middle School.

Ms. Dennis reported on the phone call she received from House Representative John Larson on Thursday, March 3, 2021, regarding the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, HR 1319.

IV. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Alexis Guarino, 31 Barnard Road, Berlin, Connecticut, addressed the Board concerning the reasoning to have remote learning the week following April Break and the format for middle school students choosing fully remote instruction.

Jennifer and Eric Bryant, 22 South Slope Drive, Berlin, Connecticut, addressed the Board regarding lunchtime at the high school when students return to full in-person instruction.

Ms. Dennis shared three additional emails from parents concerning the purpose of early release Wednesdays at the elementary level and the removal of any professional development days if approved; how in-person learning and lunchtime will be handled safely at the high school when desks and students may not be six feet apart; and the reasoning for the full week of remote instruction following April Break and the continuation of early release Wednesdays through June 16, 2021.

Principals Eustis and Urso reported on each school's plan to provide lunch in a safe manner at Berlin High School and McGee Middle School.

Superintendent Benigni stated the district does not know exactly how many students will elect to come back on a full-time basis, but as stated in correspondence sent to parents, all mitigation strategies that are in place will be used; however, it may not be feasible to adhere, in all cases, to the maximized social distancing. When needed, students will be provided with a desk shield and students will continue to wear a face mask in school.

Superintendent Benigni stated students at the elementary level, receiving fully remote instruction, will stay with the same remote teachers they have been assigned to. Students at the middle school and high school, receiving fully remote instruction, will use the Zoom system with teachers teaching in a

synchronous learning system with students engaged in learning at the same time whether remotely into the classroom or in person.

The continuation of early release Wednesdays through June 16, 2021 and the scheduled week of remote instruction following April Break will be discussed later in the agenda.

V. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes
 - 1. Regular Meeting of February 8, 2021
 - 2. Special Meeting of February 8, 2021
 - 3. Special Meeting of February 10, 2021
 - 4. Special Meeting of February 11, 2021

- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending February 28, 2021

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

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

VI. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Facilities Related Updates

There was no report this evening.

- B. Proposed School Calendar 2022-2023 and Establishment of BHS Graduation Date for 2023

Board members were provided with the proposed school calendar for 2022-2023. Public Act 19-195, allows boards of education to establish a firm graduation date for students in Grade 12, for that school year, which, at the time of establishment, provides for at least 180 days of school. In accordance with Public Act 19-195, Superintendent Benigni recommended the Board set the date of the 2023 Berlin High School graduation for Friday, June 9, 2023. The ceremony will be held at Central Connecticut State University, beginning at 5 p.m.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Pruzin, to adopt the 2022-2023 Berlin Public Schools Calendar as proposed and set the 2023 Berlin High School graduation date for Friday, June 9, 2023.

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

C. Establishment of BHS Graduation Date for 2022

In accordance with Public Act 19-195, Superintendent Benigni recommended the Board set the date of the 2022 Berlin High School graduation for Friday, June 10, 2022. The ceremony will be held at Central Connecticut State University, beginning at 5 p.m.

Moved by Mr. Pruzin, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to set the 2022 Berlin High School graduation date for Friday, June 10, 2022.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

D. Revisions to the 2020-2021 School Calendar

Superintendent Benigni proposed the following revisions to the school calendar for 2020-2021:

- Continuation of early release Wednesdays through June 16
- A scheduled week of remote instruction following April Break (April 19-23)
- Reducing the number of student days from 179 to 177, making Monday, June 21, the last day of school for students through Grade 11; June 22 and 23 will be teacher professional development/curriculum days; and the last day for teachers will be Wednesday, June 23.

The proposed revisions were reviewed by the Curriculum Committee at its meeting earlier today.

Superintendent Benigni stated he is recommending the continuation of early release Wednesdays to allow teachers, especially at the grade 6 through 12 level, to coordinate both remote and in-person learning instruction and, at the elementary level, to allow teachers to collaborate with their colleagues.

Superintendent Benigni stated he is recommending a fully remote model for the one week after the April Break as many people are planning to travel. Also, having a scheduled week of remote instruction will allow a majority of teachers to receive their second vaccination dose. Superintendent Benigni stated the district did not see its numbers rise or have an issue with shutting schools or classrooms down following a week of remote learning after the Thanksgiving and winter breaks. Superintendent Benigni stated he is hopeful this will allow for in-person learning for the two weeks prior to April vacation and then through the end of the school year.

Superintendent Benigni stated state statute requires 180 student days and Berlin requires 181 student days; however, because of COVID, the Commissioner of Education has allowed, and the State Board of Education approved, 177 days, making the last day of school for students June 21, 2021.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Weber, to approve the revisions to the 2020-2021 School Calendar, as presented.

Mr. Jenkins stated, as of March 19, 2021, Connecticut's travel advisory will be modified from requirement to recommended guidance. Superintendent Benigni stated requirements for quarantine and testing become a recommendation and not a requirement, beginning March 19, 2021.

With regard to early release Wednesdays, Mr. Salina stated, speaking from personal experience, students have enjoyed having that block of time to meet with teachers after school, whether on-line or in person, and teachers have done an outstanding job being available. Mr. Salina stated he believes the half days have been beneficial for both staff and students, and is in favor of continuing them through the end of the school year. Mr. Salina stated he appreciates ending the school year on June 21, 2021.

Dr. Sassu stated she understands the challenges families have faced with respect to early release Wednesdays and remote learning but believes it is prudent and has proven to be the right choice so far for the reasons not only stated by Superintendent Benigni but also highlighted by Mr. Jenkins. With regard to the continuation of early release Wednesdays, Dr. Sassu stated she is in favor as faculty and staff have worked hard to use that time well and adapt their practices to accommodate student's needs during the current circumstances.

Ms. Dennis stated she is aware of a nearby school district going back to in-person learning prematurely, resulting in them having to shut down one of their schools. Ms. Dennis stated she believes inconsistency may be more detrimental to students than realized.

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

E. Budget Update

Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni reported last Wednesday evening he, along with Ms. Dennis and members of the Board of Education, attended the joint meeting of the Board of Finance, Board of Education and Town Council. At that meeting, Ms. Dennis presented the Board's Operating Budget. Superintendent Benigni stated, Employee Benefits, which rate is set by the Town and originally set at 10.26%, came in much lower, reducing the Board's overall increase to 3.82%. Superintendent Benigni stated, at this time, the Budget is in the hands of the Board of Finance for review and further recommendations. The Board of Finance will then turn the budget over to the Town Council where the Town Council can either pass or reduce the Budget.

Superintendent Benigni stated the annual Town budget public hearing is scheduled virtually for Tuesday, March 30, 2021, and noted it is important parents attend.

F. Air Quality Report Discussion

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported the Town Council has referred the final report concerning the commissioning and balancing study of the HVAC systems in the five schools to the Public Building Commission for its review and recommendations. Board members may access the report in their Schoology folder.

G. Berlin Transition Academy/YMCA Update

Superintendent Benigni briefed the Board regarding the planning for the YMCA Daycare to be located at Berlin High School, the future plans for the Berlin Transition Academy and the recent meeting with the Town Council regarding the projects.

Superintendent Benigni reported on Tuesday, March 2, 2021, he attended the Town Council meeting concerning the lease agreement between the Town of Berlin, Board of Education and the YMCA for the use of the YMCA building for the Berlin Transition Academy in lieu of classroom space at the high school for a YMCA daycare and preschool program. Superintendent Benigni stated, as the high school project has not been closed out and as the original education specifications did not allow for a daycare and preschool program, allowing the YMCA use of classrooms, within the high school, for a daycare and preschool program could potentially prevent the Town from receiving their maximum reimbursement from the State for the high school project. Superintendent Benigni stated that inasmuch as this was a good plan initially, at this time, it is not prudent to move forward. Superintendent Benigni stated he, along with Ms. Dennis, met today with Mayor Kaczynski and the Town Manger, to discuss other options for accommodating the Berlin Transition Academy. Superintendent Benigni thanked Board member Jenkins for reviewing the leases and for his time.

In response to Mr. Jenkins' request, Superintendent Benigni discussed the financial impact in finding a similar space to meet the needs of the students enrolled in the Berlin Transition Academy.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

At 7:00 p.m., a motion was made by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Pruzin, to adjourn.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education