

**BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**February 23, 2022 – 5:45 p.m.**  
**MINUTES**  
**SPECIAL MEETING**

Attendance: Julia Dennis  
Melissa Gibbons  
Jaymee Miller - Absent  
Gina Nappi  
Timothy Oakes  
Adam Salina  
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.  
Tracy Sisti  
Matthew Tencza  
Student Representatives: Lindsey Leary - Absent  
Samantha Negrao - 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 Literacy and Social Studies Laurie Gjerpen; Director of Mathematics and Science Kara Watson; Director of School Security, Safety and Residency John Schmaltz; Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis; Assistant 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; Principal of Griswold School David Kitzman; Principal of Willard School Megan Sirois; and Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 5:51 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut.

**II. 2022-2023 BUDGET OVERVIEW TO THE PUBLIC**

The Board held an informational meeting for the public so community members could provide input on the budget prior to approval. Ms. Dennis provided a slideshow of the Proposed Operating Budget for 2022-2023. Ms. Dennis stated the district's goals for the 2022-2023 Operating Budget are to continue to provide quality education to all students at the standard that Berlin parents expect; provide students with an education that prepares them for multiple options and opportunities upon graduation; maintain favorable class sizes and adequate course offerings; consistent support for technology use with adequate funding of hardware, software, infrastructure and IT support; and an ongoing commitment to implementing safety measures, equipment and systems that provide all students and staff a safe learning environment.

Ms. Dennis stated the 2022-2023 proposed budget is \$50,122,596 and has an overall increase of 4.67% of which 3.68% (\$1,759,940) is for contractual obligations (certified salaries; non-certified salaries; administrative salaries; and employee benefits) and the remaining 0.95% (\$477,024) is for everything else (contracted services; transportation; utilities; supplies; materials and textbooks; equipment and other; tuition; and a 0.50 increase for the Director of Human Resources position). The slideshow presentation consisted of a summary of the district's goals;

contractual obligations; six year FTE comparisons teachers/certified staff; other fiscal obligations; budget funding history; and five year average increase for Berlin's adopted budgets, including area town comparisons.

Ms. Dennis stated a school district's budget reflects the commitment of the community to invest in the future of its children and the erosion of funding for education challenges the sustainability of Berlin as a competitive school district with rich educational and extracurricular opportunities for students.

George Miller, 1231 Orchard Road, Kensington, Connecticut commented on the Town Comparisons chart for the five year average increase adopted budget and stated, for his own understanding and knowledge, he looked at the per pupil expenditure for 2021 and 2022 for each town and determined that Berlin has the second highest per pupil expenditure of the towns in this chart.

Ms. Dennis apologized for not provided the per pupil expenditure tonight; however, she stated that information is available online.

Superintendent Benigni stated the Town Comparisons chart shows the adopted budget amount each town, or the public, approved for the Board of Education, and up until the last three years, Berlin was in the bottom of these towns. With regards to per pupil expenditures, Superintendent Benigni stated it is calculated differently for each town based on how certain accounts are accounted for. He stated within his full presentation there is a chart for Berlin's DRG, which does show Berlin is ranked in the middle; however, comparing these towns within the Town Comparisons chart, Berlin is second for per pupil expenditure.

Finance Director Ashley Dorsey stated the Connecticut State Department of Education recently provided new information, effective January 2022, and as of that data, Berlin's net per pupil expenditure has actually gone down from what was reported in October.

In response to Mr. Miller's comment it appears there is a consistent pattern of overstating the funding request as absolutely bare bones yet he does not hear anything detrimental in terms of the level of service or quality of education, Ms. Dennis and Superintendent Benigni further expanded on the budget funding history and FTE Certified Staff slides. Ms. Dennis stated there have been reductions in the number of teachers and administrations, and the Board has made adjustments.

In response to Mr. Miller's question what are contractual obligations in terms of salaries and step increases, Superintendent Benigni stated most contracts for teachers and administrators are for three years, and a number of times groups have been held to a zero increase. Superintendent Benigni stated he was asked by members of the Board of Finance why he did not hold teachers at a zero increase this year. He stated it was not prudent, did not believe the district would actually win in arbitration, monies spent on arbitration (\$50,000) would be wasted, the state average was much greater than Berlin settled for and other districts were not asking for a zero increase after going through the pandemic. Superintendent Benigni stated Berlin's wealth ranking is 60 out of 169 towns yet the amount Berlin spends on education ranks 100 out of 169 towns.

**III. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 6:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education