

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

January 10, 2022

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis
Melissa Gibbons
Jaymee Miller - remotely
Gina Nappi
Timothy Oakes - Absent
Adam Salina - Absent
Kari Sassu, Ph.D. - Absent
Tracy Sisti
Matthew Tencza
Student Representatives: Lindsey Leary
Samantha Negrao

Also in attendance: Superintendent of Schools Brian J. Benigni; Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno; Finance Director Ashley Dorsey; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Director of Literacy and Social Studies Laurie Gjerpen; Director of Mathematics and Science Kara Watson; Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis; 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; Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza; and Athletic Director and K-12 Physical Education Health Coordinator David Francalanga.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Moved by Ms. Sisti, seconded by Ms. Nappi, to remove Item VII.C. and add Athletics and Capital Equipment and also add an Executive Session at the end to discuss the custodial contract.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis

II. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Miss Leary reported Capstone Presentation Day is Thursday, January 13, 2022, with the Capstone Exhibition in the evening, and the winter band concert is tomorrow evening.

Miss Negrao reported winter sports are going well and teams are having a fairly normal, successful season. Miss Negrao reported the unified theater production *Campfire Stories* will be held on January 27, 2022.

B. Committee Reports

Mr. Tencza reported the Finance & Operations Committee met on Wednesday, December 22, 2021, and discussed the 2022-2023 Budget with Superintendent Benigni and the Business Office.

C. CREC Report

There was no report this evening.

D. Correspondence to the Board

There was no correspondence to the Board this evening.

III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Alan Verrastro, 535 Lower Lane, Berlin, Connecticut addressed the Board concerning the Equity and Social Justice Advisory Subcommittee Action Steps. Mr. Verrastro stated he believes cultural issues need to be addressed in the home and not in the schools as teaching for equity and social justice will take an astounding amount of resources and time across different curriculums and subjects.

Ms. Dennis stated, since the last Board meeting, revisions to the Equity and Social Justice Subcommittee Action Steps have been made, which will be discussed later in the agenda.

Mary Kathryn Larose, 26 Woodruff Lane, Kensington, Connecticut, addressed the Board concerning the two minute time limitation for Audience of Citizens and asked the Board to consider eliminating the time restriction.

Nikki Sambitsky, 947 Chamberlain Highway, Berlin, Connecticut, addressed the Board concerning the two minute time limitation for the Audience of Citizens and the Equity and Social Justice Advisory Subcommittee. She expressed her opinions why teaching for equity and social justice should not be in the schools.

Ms. Dennis stated the Board has not met since the last Board meeting. The two minute time limitation for Audience of Citizens will be addressed during the Board of Education retreat. With regard to teaching the 1619 Project mentioned by Ms. Sambitsky, Ms. Dennis requested Ms. Sambitsky email her where that is found in the curriculum so she can speak with Superintendent Benigni and provide her with more information.

Bill Uliasz, 25 Gateway Drive, Berlin, Connecticut, addressed the Board regarding the Equity and Social Justice platform. He stated adding this to the curriculum is a significant change, which requires review of more than one program. Before the Board votes to implement a plan, he encouraged the Board to review other options and suggested the Foundation Against Intolerance & Racism (FAIR), which can be found at fairforall.org.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes – Regular Meeting of December 13, 2021

B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending December 31, 2021

Moved by Mr. Tencza, seconded by Ms. Sisti, to approve the consent agenda as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis

V. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Equity and Social Justice Subcommittee Action Steps

In September, 2021, the Board reviewed the following goals for the Equity and Social Justice Committee for the 2021-22 school year:

1. Development of a District Equity Statement. Process to be determined by the Board of Education.
2. Each subcommittee will develop 3-5 action steps, to be reviewed and approved by the Board of Education in December, 2021.
3. Each subcommittee will prepare and present a brief report on their work and recommendations for future action to the Board in September, 2022.

At the December 13, 2021 Board meeting, Dr. McGurk shared the draft action steps that had been created by the subcommittees. At that meeting, this item was tabled until the next meeting to allow Board members an opportunity to review what was presented and to ask questions.

Superintendent Benigni shared the abridged and modified draft subcommittee action steps, a copy which was provided to Board members, and responded to questions from Board members and members of the audience. Superintendent Benigni began his presentation by stating this work is advisory; the Committee cannot make changes without approval from the Board; and the curriculum, which has been online for over ten years, is open to the public.

A short recess was taken from 6:44 p.m. until 6:50 p.m.

The Board reconvened.

Superintendent Benigni and Mr. Tencza provided clarification for the Committee. In response to Mr. Tencza's question whether the curriculum audit would be internal or external, Superintendent Benigni stated the audit would be internal.

In response to Mr. Tencza's question regarding how the Committee will reach out to families and students from different communities to interact socially, Superintendent Benigni stated typically it would be by invite or an advertisement to anyone that is interested.

In response to Mr. Tencza's question how does someone become involved with the Committee, Superintendent Benigni stated the Committee is open to anyone interested in joining, and they can email Assistant Superintendent McGurk or call the Board of Education.

In response to Mr. Tencza's question who would the develop a district-wide equity statement to ground the Committee's collective work, Superintendent Benigni stated ultimately it would come before the Board of Education for approval or modification.

With regard to school culture and student opportunities, Mr. Tencza stated he hopes the opportunities are inclusive and provide good learning opportunities for students.

The Board entered into a lengthy discussion and at times the audience provided their thoughts and opinions regarding the modified draft actions steps; the learning for justice standards; criteria that teachers need to meet; tabling this item, once again, to the next Board meeting; and holding a community forum prior to the next Board meeting.

Moved by Ms. Sisti, seconded by Ms. Gibbons, to table the draft action steps, as presented, to the next meeting.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis

VI. NEW BUSINESS

Facilities Related Updates

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported the district received the bids for the YMCA Daycare Projects at McGee Middle School and Hubbard School. Mr. Cugno stated today he met with the Facilities Director, architects, engineers and the two low bidders to navigate the start of the project. Mr. Cugno stated it is anticipated these project will be completed over the next two or three months.

Mr. Cugno stated bids for the classroom storage units at Hubbard School and the new band room at Griswold School have been received, and he will meet with the bidders this Thursday.

VII. 2022-2023 SUPERINTENDENT'S PROPOSED BUDGET PRESENTATION

Superintendent Benigni presented his proposed 2022-2023 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's proposed budget (\$50,122,596) has an overall increase of 4.67%. Superintendent Benigni stated it is important to note that 3.8% of the 4.67% increase is required to meet the contractual obligations of all current staff employed by the Berlin Public Schools, and the only new staff being proposed is an increase in hours for a current position from 0.60 FTE to 0.80 FTE.

Superintendent Benigni shared his goals for the proposed 2022-2023 budget. Superintendent Benigni stated initial staff requests for the Operating Budget total \$912,065. Total initial staffing requests were \$1,153,755. Included in Superintendent Benigni's proposed 2022-2023 budget is \$24,075 for an increase of 0.20 FTE hours for the Director of Human Resources position. Superintendent Benigni stated total staffing requests for the proposed Operating Budget are \$178,900. Superintendent Benigni stated initial requests for new staff included an increase of 13.8 FTEs in the General Fund Budget; armed security guards are funded through the town, and therefore, salary and benefits for the positions

are not reflected in the Non-Certified salary account for fiscal year 2023; and the district intends to use CHOICE funds to fund the Work Based Learning Coordinator position for fiscal year 2023.

In terms of Administrative Salaries, there is an increase of \$118,939 or 4.16%, which is driven by an annual contract increase with step (2.50%); a 0.20 FTE increase for the Director of Human Resources position to 0.80 FTE; and four administrators have a step increase.

In terms of Certified Salaries, there is an increase of \$975,644 or 4.53%, which is based on contractual obligations (3.12%); 140 teachers are on max step for the 2022-2023 school year; 137 teachers advance a step for the 2022-2023 school year; 7 teachers have a salary lane change; and a 50/50 cost sharing at the Central Connecticut Transition Academy (CCTA) with Cromwell.

In terms of Non-Certified Salaries, there is an increase of \$313,873 or 4.10%, which is based on an annual contract increase (approximately 3.0%); increased funding for custodial overtime; and 50/50 cost sharing for a paraprofessional at the CCTA.

In terms of Employee Benefits, there is an increase of \$375,559 or 5.54%, which is based on a 10% rate increase for medical insurance, which is set by the Town, and the employer percentage for staff groups has been adjusted to meet the contractual obligation for each group.

In terms of Contracted Services, there is an increase of \$171,923 or 9.23%, which is based on all operational and educational systems, which increase three (3) to seven (7) percent annually; additional cyber security software required by insurance company; increase in legal fees and anticipated copier contract; and the CCTA budget reallocated from the General Special Education Budget.

In terms of Utilities, there is an increase of \$12,067 or 2.97%, which is based on the increase of utilities trending up; however, the district continues to adjust the usage for appropriately budgeting for the 2022-2023 school year. Berlin and Cromwell will split the utility costs for the CCTA program at 50%.

In terms of Transportation, there is an increase of \$81,078 or 2.49%. The contractual increase for the 2022-2023 school year is 3.45% with New Britain Transportation. The district intends to use a portion of the Excess Costs funds to offset Special Education transportation.

In terms of Tuition, there is an increase of \$109,573 or 4.83%. No funds have been budgeted for anticipated out placements for 2022-2023. The anticipated increase for CREC Magnet Schools is 12%. The budget also assumes the current Pre-K (non-tuition students) will continue through the magnet school system as a tuition student in the next fiscal year.

In terms of Supplies, Textbooks and Materials, there is an increase of \$52,257 or 5.37%. School buildings and most departments are taking a 0% increase from the 2022-2023 budget. Principals and department leaders have redistributed funds from supplies, equipment, and all other expenditures to best fit the needs of their students and programs for the 2022-2023 school year. There is an increase of \$67,652 for new textbooks for the math department, high school and digital textbooks.

In terms of Equipment, there is an increase of \$49,226 or 27.81%. School buildings and most departments are taking a 0% increase from the 2022-2023 budget. Principals and department leaders

have redistributed funds from supplies, equipment, and all other expenditures to best fit the needs of their students and programs for the 2022-2023 school year.

In terms of All Other Expenditures, there is a decrease of \$23,175 or -20.08%. Superintendent Benigni stated the district is taking a 0% increase from the original July 1, 2021 budget for All Other Expenditures. The budget, as of December 1, 2021, includes Board approved transfers of \$20,000 for the Griswold Band Room. The proposed budget redistributes funds to the original category or to other line items within the All Other Expenditures category.

Superintendent Benigni presented the Hartford Open Choice Enrollment; the anticipated budget for 2022-2023 Open Choice Funds; and Budget Funding History.

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 2.49%.

Superintendent Benigni provided the five year mill rate comparisons; net current expenditures per pupil; Berlin and State per pupil expenditure; federal funding; ESSER II funding; ESSER ARP funding; state funding; five year FTE comparisons; elementary, middle and high school enrollment projections; 2021-2022 Recognitions; and the Berlin High School Advanced Placement Data over the past thirteen (13) years.

A. Elementary Principals' Budget Presentations

Principals Sirois, Kitzman and Souza presented the Elementary Schools budget presentation.

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.

Elementary Staffing: There are no new staff requests. Although not included in the Superintendent's proposed budget, the elementary teachers requested a Writing Interventionist.

Operation/Instruction Budget: The Operation/Instruction Budget includes instructional supplies, non-instructional supplies/equipment, textbooks, software/technology and maintenance and repair. The Operation/Instruction Budget has a 0% increase.

B. Secondary Principals' Budget Presentations

Principal Urso presented the McGee Middle School budget presentation.

McGee Middle School Budget Goals: Deliver purposeful learning experiences that promote a sense of purpose and foster a sense of pride; support the positive academic, emotional and social growth/development of all members of the school community; implement use of quality instructional resources (human, electronic, otherwise) to meet the district goals and adjust when necessary; and provide a safe, orderly and positive environment.

McGee Middle School Staffing: There are no new staffing requests.

Operation/Instruction Budget: The Operation/Instruction Budget consists of instructional supplies for providing/assessing meaningful learning experiences; non-instructional supplies in support of structure/organization of resources; textbooks to provide a guide/framework for teaching/learning identified curriculum; and software and technology to support learner engagement, efficiency and the latest and greatest motivational 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; provide support personnel to assist students in experiencing authentic work-based and career opportunities; provide a safe and secure environment for students to do their best learning and feel supported emotionally and academically; and continue to support the work developing and implementing innovative practices with new resources including personnel, technology and unique modern classroom spaces that support learning.

Berlin High School Staffing: Included in the Superintendent's proposed budget is a 1.00 FTE Work Based Learning Coordinator and stipends for additional firefighting and EMS course offerings. Although not included in the Superintendent's proposed budget, Principal Eustis requested funding to maintain the current level of staffing in all other areas in order to provide social/emotional supports and high level academic programming.

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; increased cost of supplies and consumables; desktop computer upgrades for computer labs; and budgeting for department specific equipment maintenance and repairs for Art, Family Consumer Science and Technology Education. Although not included in the Superintendent's proposed budget, Principal Eustis requested funding for all students for AAPPL Testing in World Language and AP Testing.

C. District-wide Non-instructional Programs/Athletics

Athletic Director and K-12 Physical Education Health Coordinator David Francalangia presented the Berlin Athletics budget presentation.

Berlin High School Budget Goals: Maintain the current athletic programs in order to meet the individual needs and interests of the students; provide a safe and secure environment for students to do their best on and off the field, while making sure that students feel supported emotionally and academically; and continue to support the athletic programs, using a priority system with all coaches,

Operation/Instruction Budget: Mr. Francalangia stated costs for transportation and official's charges have increased. Included the Superintendent's proposed budget are funds for the repair and maintenance of the football and lacrosse helmets; All-State award plaques; and uniforms for individual/team sports at Berlin High School and for boys and girls basketball at McGee Middle School.

D. Capital Requests

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno stated included in the Superintendent's proposed budget is \$17,000 for district-wide building improvements, which is down 42% from this year's budget

Mr. Cugno shared the summary of proposed funding for Capital Improvement Plan Requests. The following projects are proposed in the Town Capital Plan for consideration in the 2022-2023 budget: paving and repair of the Hubbard School playground (\$200,000); fire alarm upgrades at Willard School (\$150,000); and new vans (\$110,000). Mr. Cugno stated proposed in the Town Capital Plan for consideration in the 2023-2024 school year are fire alarm upgrades at Griswold School (\$150,000) and replacement equipment for the Willard School Playgrounds (\$150,000). In addition, included in the Capital Improvement Plan Requests are \$1,860,490 for projects if a surplus is available. Mr. Cugno stated the Finance & Operations Committee earmarked the lavatory upgrades at the elementary schools (\$350,000) and the repair/replacement of a skylight at Hubbard School (\$75,000) as a priority if a surplus is available.

Mr. 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. Board members were provided with the facility requests (\$474,700) for the General Fund Budget for each of the schools.

VIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 8:59 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Tencza, seconded by Ms. Sisti, to go into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter, custodial contract, inviting Ms. Parsons and Superintendent Benigni.

**FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis**

In attendance for Executive Session were Board members Dennis, Gibbons, Miller (via telephone), Nappi, Sisti and Tencza. Also in attendance were Superintendent Benigni and Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons.

At 9:18 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

Moved by Mr. Tencza, seconded by Ms. Miller (via telephone), to adopt the custodial contract for the term July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2024, as presented in Executive Session.

**FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis**

IX. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:21 p.m., a motion was made by Ms. Sisti, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education