

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION
December 13, 2021
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING

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

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 – Secondary Cindy Martin; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Director of Literacy and Social Studies Laurie Gjerpen; Director of Mathematics and Science Kara Watson; and Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. SPECIAL STUDENT PRESENTATION – BERLIN HIGH SCHOOL MADRIGAL SINGERS

The Berlin High School Madrigal Singers performed under the direction of Berlin High School music teacher Tyler Boyle. They have earned both silver and gold awards at music festival competitions and perform in period costumes. The group is chosen by audition and features many of the most talented young vocalists from Berlin High School. Student singers Robin Crisler, Max Ding, Nathaniel Elmani, Meredith Gendreau, Emily Lamoureux, Thomas Morisse-Corsetti, Laura Munch, Achilles Niecowski, Brynn Nogiec, Sara Rogan, Greg Swan, and Angelica Szczygla performed at tonight’s meeting.

III. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Miss Leary reported the National Honor Society hosted Pajama Day last Friday, December 10, 2021, with donations going to the Connecticut Children’s Medical Center; Upbeat has a new coordinator Sheel Patel, a former Berlin High School graduate; and the winter choral concert is tomorrow evening, featuring the Berlin High School and McGee Middle School choral ensembles.

Miss Negrao reported this week the Medical Club will be selling wristbands to raise money for cancer research with 90% of the profits donated to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, and rehearsals for the Berlin High School musical production *Into the Woods* have started with the opening night March 3, 2022.

B. Committee Assignments for 2021-2022

The Community Engagement Committee will consist of Board members Tracy Sisti (Chair), Julia Dennis and Melissa Gibbons. Superintendent Brian Benigni will serve as the administrative liaison.

The Finance and Operations Committee will consist of Board members Timothy Oakes (Chair), Adam Salina and Matthew Tencza. Jeffrey Cugno and Ashley Dorsey will serve as the administrative liaisons.

The Curriculum Committee will consist of Board members Kari Sassu (Chair), Jaymee Miller and Gina Nappi. Assistant Superintendent Erin McGurk will serve as the administrative liaison.

The Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision will consist of Timothy Oakes (chair), Tracy Sisti and Kari Sassu. Superintendent Brian Benigni will serve as the administrative liaison.

The Equity and Social Justice Advisory Committee will consist of Board members Melissa Gibbons and Gina Nappi. Assistant Superintendent Erin McGurk will serve as the administrative liaison.

C. Committee Reports

Mr. Oakes reported the Finance and Operations Committee met on Thursday, December 9, 2021, and discussed the contract with The New Britain Transportation Company, which will be discussed in more detail later in the agenda; the 2022-2023 Budget; and the 2022-2023 Capital Plan. Mr. Oakes stated one area of concern is many of the capital items have fallen into a funding category of surplus, which is looking at left over monies, at the end of year, to fund these items. Mr. Oakes stated Mr. Cugno will be speaking with the Town and the Board of Finance concerning the severity and importance of some of these projects.

Ms. Sisti reported the Community Engagement Committee met prior to tonight's meeting and discussed ways in which the Committee can reach out to the community and fine-tune what is already in place.

Dr. Sassu reported the Curriculum Committee met prior to tonight's Board meeting and Assistant Superintendent Erin McGurk and Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis shared with the Committee the Student Achievement Report, which will be presented by both of them later in the meeting.

D. CREC Report

There was no report this evening.

E. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared a thank you note from Patricia Pires.

IV. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Alan Verrastro, 535 Lower Lane, Berlin, Connecticut addressed the Board concerning the conversation of equity and equality. He asked the Board to look at what measures it will be taking to prevent the ideological teachings from overshadowing the academic teachings. Mr. Verrastro stated he has been informed of the webpage, equitablemath.org, and requested the Board consider not using this organization.

Ms. Dennis stated, later in the agenda, the draft steps for the Equity and Social Justice Subcommittee will be discussed.

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.

V. CONSENT AGENDA

Add Item to the Consent Agenda

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, to add an Item C to the Consent Agenda, a request for an unpaid leave of absence – Math Specialist – Hubbard School.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

- A. Approval of Minutes – Regular Meeting of November 22, 2021
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending November 30, 2021
- C. Request for Unpaid Leave of Absence – Math Specialist – Hubbard School

Stephanie Zappone, Math Specialist at Hubbard School, requested an unpaid leave of absence, for childrearing purposes, to begin immediately following her maternity leave through the 2022-2023 school year.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to approve the consent agenda as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Facilities Related Updates

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported on December 1, 2021, a grant application was made to the Marjorie Moore Charitable Foundation for an outdoor classroom at McGee Middle School for the BLAST program. Mr. Cugno stated the preliminary budget is approximately \$70,000, which was put together by Alan's Landscaping.

Mr. Cugno reported today Jim McCabe started as the new head custodian at McGee Middle School, and there are two finalists for the position of security guard.

B. Berlin High School Program of Studies for 2022-2023

Assistant Superintendent Erin McGurk and Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis presented to the Board of Education, for its consideration and approval, new course offerings and changes to the Berlin High School Program of Studies for 2022-2023. They highlighted the rationale for changes and respond to any questions from Board members. An overview of significant changes made to the Program of Studies and a draft copy of the Berlin High School Program of Studies for 2022-2023 was provided to Board members. The changes were reviewed and discussed by the Curriculum Committee at its meeting on November 22, 2021.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Salina, to approve the new course offerings and revisions to the Berlin High School Program of Studies for 2022-2023, as presented.

Dr. Sassu stated she appreciates the work that has gone into expanding and altering the curriculum, and with respect to the Emergency Medical Services courses, students carry those skills with them regardless of their next steps beyond high school.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

C. Student Achievement Report

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk and Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis shared a number of measures of student achievement and responded to the Board's questions. The presentation, a copy which was provided to Board members, included the results of the accountability assessments, including Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) scores for students in Grades 3-8; Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) results for students in Grades 5, 8 and 11; the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) School Day results; and the Advanced Placement (AP) Program. The information shared will help to explain trends in the student performance data, the impact on planning for continuous improvement, related to professional development, and curriculum to be reviewed. The Curriculum Committee met earlier today to review the report.

Dr. McGurk began the presentation with the Smarter Balanced Results for 2021. Dr. McGurk reviewed the results of the state level data analyses; Connecticut Statewide Data Trends for school years 2018-

2019 and 2020-21 for students with high needs and students without high needs; percentage of students achieving levels 1 – 4 by Grade; 2021 subgroup performance; and the DRG comparison for English Language Arts and Mathematics. Ongoing work and next steps for the elementary and middle schools include providing professional development for multiple departments related to the teaching of reading, writing and math; ongoing examination and revision of the sequencing of units and expectations in literacy and math; review and revise protocols for test preparation; strengthening use of formative assessment data to provide targeted support and enrichment opportunities for students; collaboration with the Pupil Personnel Services Department to align and extend instruction; and utilizing the Data Warehouse to monitor student progress.

With regard to the NGSS results for 2021, Dr. McGurk reviewed the Connecticut statewide data; the percentage of students achieving levels 1 – 4 by Grade; and the 2021 subgroup performance. Ongoing work and next steps for the elementary, middle and high schools include professional development opportunities; review and revision of units and assessments; and review and revise protocols for test preparation.

With regard to the 2021 SAT school day results, Dr. McGurk reviewed the SAT Scores & Subscores; Connecticut Statewide Data; the DRG comparison; and the 2021 results by subgroup for Grade 11 evidenced-based reading, writing and mathematics.

With regard to the AP Program, Principal Eustis reviewed the AP courses offered at Berlin High School; AP performance; percentage of AP exams scoring 3 or higher; additional college credit-bearing courses at Berlin High School; UCONN ECE course offerings and participation data; number of enrollments in college credit-bearing courses at Berlin High School; graduation rates; post secondary plans for the class of 2021; post-secondary school persistence data; and additional student achievement highlights.

Ongoing work and next steps include specific SAT/NGSS lessons created and implemented in English, Math, Social Studies and Science for all students in grades 9 -11; increased collaboration with special education – sharing of lessons, resources, data, professional development, etc.; student performance data analysis to identify students not meeting benchmarks – interventions implemented through Math Problem Solving Lab, Academic Reading, Academic Resource Center, IXL, Khan Academy and Common Lit; realignment of mathematics units and courses – elimination of BAG track, adjustment of the geometry curriculum; increase in college credit course opportunities for broader range of students – additional offerings through Tunxis Community College and a new partnership with Southern Connecticut State University; and highlighting additional measures of achievement beyond standardized test scores.

D. 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.

Dr. McGurk shared the draft action steps that have been created by the subcommittees and responded to questions from Board members. A copy of the draft action steps were provided to Board members.

At the suggestion of Ms. Dennis, Board members entered into a discussion concerning tabling this item to the next Board meeting to allow Board members an opportunity to review what was presented and to ask any questions prior to the next Board meeting.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, to table this item to our next meeting.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

E. Transportation Contract

At 8:28 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, to go into Executive Session to discuss a contractual matter, inviting Ashley Dorsey, Jeff Cugno and Superintendent Benigni.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

In attendance for Executive Session were Board members Dennis, Gibbons, Miller, Nappi, Oakes, Salina, Sassu, Sisti and Tencza. Also in attendance were Superintendent Benigni, Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno and Finance Director Ashley Dorsey.

At 8:48 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

It is the recommendation of The Finance and Operations Committee that the contract with The New Britain Transportation Company be extended through June 30, 2027.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to extend the contract with The New Britain Transportation Company through June 30, 2027, as negotiated.

Mr. Salina thanked The New Britain Transportation Company for their continued service to the Town.

Superintendent Benigni thanked Peter Agostini for all he has done for the Berlin schools.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

VII. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:49 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education