

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

October 12, 2021

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis
Steven Jenkins
Jaymee Miller - Absent
Timothy Oakes
Mark Pruzin
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti
Stephen Weber
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 – Elementary Michelle Zeuschner; 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; and Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Ms. Dennis stated the Debate & Youth and Government Clubs of Berlin High School will present a Board of Education Candidate Public Forum on Wednesday, October 13, 2021, in the Berlin High School Auditorium.

Ms. Dennis expressed her appreciation for serving as the Board Chair this year and thanked Steven Jenkins and Stephen Weber for serving a one-year vacancy. Ms. Dennis wished Board members, on the ballot November 2, 2021, the best of luck.

II. STUDENT PRESENTATION – EMMA HART WILLARD SCHOOL

Mrs. Denise Marshall, Willard Library Media Specialist, brought fourth and fifth-grade students Spencer Beatman, Angelina Blair, Amelia Brown, Leah Buchholz, Paul Evans, Lillianna Fiertek, Sofia Fiertek, Alena Helming, Maya Miller and Maya Olewicz to the meeting to discuss having the library open this year and how they participated in a library scavenger hunt and book tastings. The focus of this presentation was on the book groups they participated in to prepare for the upcoming visit by Lesa Cline-Ransome.

A short recess was taken from 7:16 p.m. until 7:22 p.m.

III. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Miss Leary reported on the events that will occur during Spirit Week, October 18 – 22, at Berlin High School. Miss Leary reported the fall play, *A Voice in the Dark*, will be performed by the Berlin High School Theater Department on November 12 and 13, and the National Honor Society Induction ceremony will be held on November 18. Miss Leary gave a shout out to the fall sports teams and The Red Sea for their support.

Miss Negrao reported the Berlin High School music and theater art departments will be presenting the Cabaret and Choral Revue on October 15, 2021; tomorrow, freshman, sophomore and junior students will be taking the PSAT testing while seniors participate in workshops for college and post-secondary planning; and Upbeat will hold its Freshman/Sophomore training weekend on October 16 and 17.

B. Committee Reports

Dr. Sassu reported the Curriculum Committee met earlier this evening and discussed concerns relating to a decline in participation in Advance Placement exams and the District Continuance Improvement Plan, which will appear later in the agenda for approval.

Mr. Oakes reported the Finance and Operations Committee met last Thursday evening and discussed the Capital Equipment and Site and Building Budget Requests; the transportation contract; recruiting and retaining staff; the YMCA with respect to the daycare facility; and the Central Connecticut Transition Academy.

C. CREC Report

There was no report this evening.

D. Eagle Scout Project – Flower Boxes – Emma Hart Willard School

Superintendent Benigni stated, while working on his Eagle Scout badge, Tyler Barber designed and built flower boxes for installation in the Willard School Courtyard. Tyler enlisted in the Marines and left for Parris Island in early September. Before he left, he donated the boxes to support projects by students in the Blast Program at Willard School. Students and staff in the program are in charge of maintaining the flower boxes. Superintendent Benigni thanked Tyler for his work.

E. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared thank you notes received from Lisa Orabi, Chris Fazzina and Leonilda DiTomasso.

IV. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Mary Kathryn Larose, 26 Woodruff Lane, Kensington, Connecticut addressed the Board concerning Board committee meetings and whether they are open to the public and Policy 1316 – Civility/Respectful Communications and Actions.

Ms. Dennis stated Committee meetings are posted and open to the public, and Policy 1316 Civility/Respectful Communications and Actions will be discussed further later in the agenda.

V. PERSONNEL

Retirements

1. Teacher of Special Education – Emma Hart Willard School

Cheryl Volz, teacher of special education at Emma Hart Willard School, submitted her letter of intent to retire at the end of the 2021-2022 school year.

Moved by Mr. Pruzin, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to accept the retirement of Cheryl Volz, teacher of special education at Emma Hart Willard School, effective June 30, 2022. Also to thank her for the 20 years of service she has provided to the youth of Berlin and wish her good health and happiness in her retirement years.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

2. Teacher of Kindergarten – Emma Hart Willard School

Eileen Cutler, teacher of kindergarten at Emma Hart Willard School, submitted her letter of intent to retire at the end of the 2021-2022 school year.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Weber, to accept the retirement of Eileen Cutler, teacher of kindergarten at Emma Hart Willard School, effective June 30, 2022. Also to thank her for the 36 years of service she has provided to the youth of Berlin and wish her good health and happiness in her retirement years.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

3. Teacher of Business – Berlin High School

Lorraine Wicklund, teacher of business at Berlin High School, submitted her letter of intent to retire at the end of the 2021-2022 school year.

Moved by Mr. Pruzin, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to accept the retirement of Lorraine Wicklund, teacher of business at Berlin High School, effective June 30, 2022. Also

to thank her for the 18 years of service she has provided to the youth of Berlin and wish her good health and happiness in her retirement years.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

VI. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes
 - 1. Regular Meeting of September 13, 2021
 - 2. Special Meeting of September 29, 2021
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending September 30, 2021
- C. Requests for Leave of Absence
 - 1. Teacher of Grade 5 – Emma Hart Willard School

Kaitlin Fritsch, teacher of Grade 5 at Emma Hart Willard School, requested an unpaid leave of absence, for childrearing purposes, to begin immediately following her maternity leave through June 2022.

- 2. Teacher of Grade 3 – Emma Hart Willard School

Nicole King, teacher of Grade 3 at Emma Hart Willard School, requested an unpaid leave of absence, for childrearing purposes, to begin immediately following her maternity leave through June 2022.

- D. Overnight Field Trip Requests
 - 1. Berlin High School – Orlando, FL – April 7-13, 2022

Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis requested permission for approximately 22 student athletes, in the softball program, to travel to Orlando, FL on April 7-13, 2022 to attend Spring Training at the Disney Wide World of Sports complex. This trip provides a unique opportunity for the athletes to compete against athletes from both around the country and internationally at an incredibly safe and secure site that caters to the needs of the various athletes.

- 2. Berlin High School – Washington, DC – February 19-22, 2022

Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis requested permission for approximately 25 students to travel to Washington, DC, to participate in the Close Up Program on February 19-22, 2022. This program provides students with a hands-on experience in the government process. Students not only learn the importance of citizenship, but also the importance of participation.

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

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Facilities Related Updates

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported the duct work at Berlin High School is going well, within budget and will soon be completed; the Berlin High School lighting project is moving forward and also will soon be completed; the bid for the Library/Media Center project at McGee Middle School will be before the Town Council next week; and the band room at Griswold School and the classroom storage units at Hubbard School are in the design phase with Jacunski Humes Architects, LLC.

B. Official 2021-2022 District Enrollment Report

Superintendent Benigni highlighted the district enrollment as of October 1, 2021, which was provided to Board members. School districts are required each year to report their October 1 enrollment figures to the Connecticut State Department of Education. Superintendent Benigni reported enrollment as of October 1, 2021 is down 43 students (1.60%), 12 of which are students in the Open Choice Program.

Superintendent Benigni stated there is a concern with the number of students in the Open Choice Program currently in district. Typically, students in the Open Choice Program account for between 4.5 and 4.6 percent of Berlin's total population. Superintendent Benigni stated this year, 12 students withdrew, which is not typical. Superintendent Benigni stated ten seats were offered this year, which would have kept the district at the similar percentage; however, seven were filled. Superintendent Benigni stated there are no students left that are interested in the Open Choice Program. Superintendent Benigni stated if the district falls below 4%, the reimbursement rate changes.

C. Approval of the District Continuous Improvement Plan 2021-2022

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk provided a presentation on the progress of last year's plan and also presented the District Continuous Improvement Plan for 2021-2022, a copy which was provided to Board members. Finance Director Ashley Dorsey, Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno, Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons, Director of Pupil Personnel Linda Holian and District Technology Specialist Craig Szymanski provided the goals and timeline for each of their departments. Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni, on behalf of Athletic Director David Francalanga, provided the goals and timeline for the Athletic Department.

Moved by Mr. Jenkins, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to approve the District Continuous Improvement Plan 2021-2022 as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

D. Approval of Capital Equipment and Site and Building Budget Requests

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported on the Capital Plan requests for Fiscal Year 2023 that involve the use of Capital funds. The budget guidelines for the 2022-2023 Capital Equipment and Site and Building requests were also shared along with the items requested. Board members were provided with a Memorandum containing the requests submitted to the Business Office, to date, for consideration in the Capital Plan. Mr. Cugno stated all figures are preliminary budget estimates. Only infrastructure,

acquisitions or construction with an estimated cost of \$25,000 or more and a useful life of at least five years are included. The Finance & Operations Committee met on October 7 to review the budget requests for McGee Middle School, each individual elementary school, the elementary schools in general and transportation; however, Mr. Cugno stated the requests for the replacement of the main entrance doors at Berlin High School and the security projects included in his Memorandum were added subsequent to that Committee meeting. Mr. Cugno stated all requests, approved by the Board of Education, will be submitted to the Town on October 15, 2021.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to approve the Capital Equipment and Site and Building budget requests, as presented, for submission to the town of Berlin.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

- E. Policy Review/Revision – Second Reading/Adoption
 - 1. New Policy 6200 – Adult Continuing Education Program

This policy is needed for an upcoming compliance review. Shipman & Goodwin provided the proposed policy, and the Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision met on September 28, 2021, to review the proposed policy. A first reading of the policy took place at the special Board of Education meeting on September 29, 2021. The second reading/adoption took place this evening.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Weber, to adopt Policy 6200 – Adult Continuing Education Program, as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

- 2. New Policy 1316 – Civility/Respectful Communications and Actions

A Board of Education has every right to expect civility, respect, and orderly conduct among all individuals on school property or at school events. The purpose of a civility policy is to promote civility and respectful communications among district employees, students, parents, and the public. A powerful example is set for the student population when the district indicates that it expects mutual respect, civility and orderly conduct from the adults with whom the district interacts. Shipman & Goodwin provided the proposed policy and the Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision met on September 28, 2021, to review the proposed policy. A first reading of the policy took place at the special Board of Education meeting on September 29, 2021. The second reading/adoption took place this evening.

Superintendent Benigni stated the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) recommended that Boards of Education have this policy in their policy manual. Also, this policy is a requirement for receiving the CABE Board of Distinction Award.

Moved by Mr. Weber, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to adopt Policy 1316 – Civility/Respectful Communications and Actions, as presented.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

F. Anticipated Ratification of Contract – Custodians (Executive Session Anticipated)

There was no Executive Session this Evening.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:32 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Pruzin, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education