

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

January 24, 2022

MINUTES

SPECIAL MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis
Melissa Gibbons
Jaymee Miller – remotely
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; Finance Director Ashley Dorsey; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; Supervisor of Special Education – Elementary Michelle Zeuschner; 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; 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 Kitman; 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 6:01 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Ms. Dennis stated, if tonight's meeting is not adjourned by 6:45 p.m., the Board will recess to attend the boys basketball game as Berlin High School will honor basketball coach, Mike Veneziano, who recently passed away.

Ms. Dennis addressed her recommendation made at the last Board meeting to dismantle the Equity and Social Justice Advisory Committee. Ms. Dennis stated the prior Board Chair put the Committee in place without a vote, and she is able to dismantle the Committee without a vote as well. She stated the current Board needs to re-evaluate the structure moving forward. Ms. Dennis stated this item will appear on the next Board meeting agenda, and she encouraged all to attend and speak during the Audience of Citizens, which will have a two-minute limit, as it will be important for the Board to hear from all on this subject, prior to the Board's retreat. Ms. Dennis stated, if at any point the meeting becomes disruptive or reaches a level of disrespect, the meeting will be continued virtually.

II. DISCUSSION OF THE SUPERINTENDENT'S PROPOSED BUDGET FOR 2022-2023

The Board discussed the Superintendent's Proposed Budget for 2022-2023. Board members were provided with the Questions and Answers regarding the Superintendent's Proposed 2022-2023 Budget. Ms. Dennis thanked Ashley Dorsey, Superintendent Benigni and anyone else who took the time to answer the Board's questions.

Superintendent Benigni stated the Questions and Answers are accessible on the district's website and, for those attending tonight's meeting, outside the auditorium on the music stand.

Mr. Salina stated all schools have a flat Operation Budget, which was requested, and although it is a difficult year, he hopes the Operation Budget gets to a point where funds are allocated to line items for other supplies, materials, replacement of old textbooks and technology so the district can continue to maintain educational rigor and proceed in the right direction to provide students with an education that prepares them for college. Mr. Salina stated he appreciates the efforts of all the administrators and staff in putting the budget together and stated out of the 4.67% requested increase 3.68% is for salaries and benefits, leaving less than one percent of the overall budget that can be reduced.

Superintendent Benigni stated, although not listed, contractual obligations include a host of software that is used throughout the district, which includes PowerSchool, Atlas Rubicon and Canyon Creek.

Dr. Sassu stated the district needs to continue to expand to meet the needs of all diverse learners not only to prepare students for college but also for the pursuit of careers beyond high school. Dr. Sassu clarified the Questions and Answers accessible on the district's website are questions that were submitted by Board members.

Superintendent Benigni stated the district intends to use CHOICE funds to fund the Work Based Learning Coordinator position for fiscal year 2023.

In terms of the Operation/Instruction Budget, Mr. Tencza stated having a 0% increase, teachers and administrators are being asked to do more with less, and when inflation is factored in, there actually is a reduction in resources.

Ms. Dennis stated, at the next Board meeting, the Board will vote to move the Superintendent's 2022-2023 Proposed Budget forward. She asked if any Board member has any concerns or reasons why they would not support the Superintendent's 2022-2023 Proposed Budget this would be an opportunity to discuss.

Mr. Tencza stated he would be more comfortable if the overall proposed budget increase was below 4%; however, he understands what is being asked for in the Superintendent's Proposed Budget are items to move the district forward; therefore, he is in support of the Superintendent's Proposed Budget.

Ms. Dennis stated, with further reductions to the Superintendent's Proposed Budget, staff and opportunities for students will be lost.

Ms. Sisti stated she has shared with several people Question and Answer #84 as it breaks down the Superintendent's Proposed Budget increase simply, and she is in favor of the Superintendent's Proposed Budget.

Superintendent Benigni thanked Board members for providing him with the questions beforehand and Ashley Dorsey and the administrators for their help in answering. He stated the Questions and Answers and his entire Proposed Budget are available on the district's website.

In response to Ms Nappi's question is the district obligated to receive ESSER funds and if the district receives these funds are they indebted to the state in terms of what it does and does not do, Superintendent Benigni stated the ESSER funds are a grant, and the district does not have to take the funds that are allocated; however, there would be no gain to not take the funds. These funds can be used in a multitude of ways; however, 20% of these funds have to be used for learning loss. Superintendent Benigni stated ESSER funds are being used for the wellness suite at McGee Middle School, which is a construction project approved under the ESSER Grant, and if those funds were not used for this project, they would have to come from capital funds. Superintendent Benigni stated these funds do not raise the Operation Budget, and whether or not the district decides to receive ESSER funds, with the Governor's Executive Order, there is a mask mandate in place.

In response to Ms. Nappi's question do ESSER funds come with any contingencies, Superintendent Benigni stated other than the money needing to be spent in the areas the grant falls under, no.

III. ADJOURNMENT

At 6:23 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