

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

August 28, 2023

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis
Melissa Gibbons
Jaymee Miller
Gina Nappi - Absent
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti
Matthew Tencza
Peter Zarabozo

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; Supervisor of Special Education – Elementary Michelle Zeuschner; Co-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson; Principal of Berlin High School Katie Amenta; Assistant Principal of Berlin High School Brian Testroet; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Assistant Principal of McGee Middle School Tim Chiaverini; Principal of Griswold School Jonathan Campbell; 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 6:45 p.m. in the Board of Education (“the Board”) meeting room at 238 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Committee Reports

Ms. Sisti reported the Community Engagement Committee met on July 19, 2023 and reviewed the calendar for the *Berlin Citizen* and discussed articles that will be written.

B. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared thank you notes received from Paula Brown and Susan Terrill.

III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

None.

IV. PERSONNEL

A. Anticipated Administrative Appointments

1. Dean of Students – Emma Hart Willard School

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Ms. Miller, that the Board of Education appoint Danielle Salina to the position of Dean of Students at Emma Hart Willard School, with an effective date tentatively set for September 5, 2023.

FAVOR: 6; ABSTAINING 2

MOTION CARRIED: 6:0:2; including President Dennis; Board members Salina and Zarabozo abstaining

2. Supervisor of Special Education – Secondary

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Salina, that the Board of Education appoint Jenna DeRosa to the position of Supervisor of Special Education – Secondary, with an effective date to be determined.

FAVOR: 5; ABSTAINING 3

MOTION CARRIED: 5:0:3; including President Dennis; Board members Miller, Tencza and Zarabozo abstaining

B. Retirements

1. Teacher of Kindergarten – Mary E. Griswold School

Rosina Marquis, teacher of kindergarten at Mary E. Griswold School, submitted a letter of intent to retire at the end of the 2023-2024 school year.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to accept the retirement of Rosina Marquis, teacher of kindergarten at Mary E. Griswold School, effective June 30, 2024. 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

2. Supervisor of Special Education – Secondary

Cindy Martin, Supervisor of Special Education – Secondary, submitted a letter of resignation, into retirement, effective August 18, 2023.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to accept the retirement of Cindy Martin, Supervisor of Special Education – Secondary, effective August 18, 2023. Also to thank her for the seven 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

V. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes
 - 1. Special Meeting of July 17, 2023 – 5:15 p.m.
 - 2. Special Meeting of July 17, 2023 – 6:00 p.m.
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending July 31, 2023
- C. Facilities Update

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno provided a Facilities Update that has been posted in Schoology.

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

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

VI. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Superintendent's Report: District's Readiness for the Opening of School

Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni reported the first day of school for students was Thursday, August 24, 2023. Superintendent Benigni stated, this year 2,675 students enrolled, with an additional eight students waiting, and last year, there were 2,682 students enrolled. Superintendent Benigni noted the student population is flattening out. Superintendent Benigni acknowledged the outstanding work done by the custodial staff as the buildings overall, across the district, look fantastic.

- B. Staffing Update

Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni stated the district continues to attract highly-qualified candidates. For the start of the school year, he stated there are three open positions, two of which he hopes to fill by tomorrow, and one Special Education paraprofessional position remains to be filled. Superintendent Benigni provided Board members with a document listing new staff for the 2023-2024 school year. He stated the Chair of the Board of Finance, Sal Bordonaro, requested a list of all the

positions the district hired staff for 2023-2024, the cost and the differential between what was budgeted and the actual for the 3.6% increase to the Board's 2023-2024 Operating Budget. Ms. Dennis stated Mr. Bordonaro also questioned why there are 21 open positions on the website. Ms. Dennis stated she has not yet prepared a response, but when she does, she will copy the entire Board.

Superintendent Benigni stated the kindergarten position, which was kept in the budget last year, needed to be added; otherwise, class sizes at Griswold would have been over 20 students. Superintendent Benigni stated, other than a new IT position, every position is a replacement for a retiree or one the district already had. There are no other new staff positions.

C. Final Financial Report – 2022-2023 Fiscal Year

Director of Finance Ashley Dorsey provided a final report for the 2022-2023 fiscal year, which has been posted in Schoology. Ms. Dorsey stated, overall, there was \$443,083 in unallocated funds after negative balances were cleaned up for other operational spending. Ms. Dorsey stated the surplus/saving drivers were (1) benefits: pension and unemployment; (2) contracted services: copier contract and legal fees; (3) transportation: excess cost reimbursement and technical school services; and (4) tuition: excess cost reimbursement and magnet school tuition.

Ms. Dorsey stated the unallocated funds were put towards year-end priorities for classroom technology; student/staff technology; and classroom furniture. With regard to classroom technology, the district was able to secure projectors and white boards district-wide; the tricaster and weather station was funded for the Berlin High School television station; and funding for back-end storage for servers and G Suite district-wide was secured.

With regard to student/staff technology, the district was able to secure Chromebooks for Berlin High School ninth graders and McGee Middle School sixth graders; approximately 50 laptops were secured for incoming staff; and iPads were replaced district-wide for all second grade classrooms.

With regard to classroom equipment, the district was able to replace approximately two and one-half classrooms at McGee Middle School for the English Language Arts and Social Studies, and the district was able to purchase classroom equipment and furniture for the Allied Health Career Pathways classroom.

D. Chase Anderson Bench Placement at BHS

A bench is being donated for placement at Berlin High School in honor of Chase Anderson. The appropriate location has been determined by Principal Amenta and Security and Safety and Residency Director John Schmaltz. Board members were provided with a copy of a photograph depicting the bench's location, a copy which has been posted in Schoology.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to approve the location of the Chase Anderson memorial bench at Berlin High school as presented.

Superintendent Benigni stated it was a very sad event that took place last year, and this is a great way to memorialize Chase in a very peaceful setting.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

E. Pre-K Transportation Cost

The district's current practice is to only transport students that qualify for the district's Preschool Program, and not to provide transportation for role model students. Finance Director Ashley Dorsey provided an approximation of the additional cost to transport role model students. Ms. Dorsey stated, based on the 2023-2024 enrollment, 21 students are enrolled in the program. Ms. Dorsey stated the projection is for next year, using 2024-2025 rates and assuming 21 students will need transportation to and from home and school. Ms. Dorsey stated students can be transported on buses or vans. Although students can be legally transported by bus, she stated it is not recommended as students are too small. In addition to the daily cost of the bus, an aide will also need to be on each bus with students.

Ms. Dorsey stated the district will need three additional buses, one bus per school district for route efficiency, each at a daily rate of \$351.71, for 181 student days, for a total of \$190,989.39. In addition, the district would need a minimum of three aides, each at their daily rate, for a minimum of four hours, for 181 school days for a total of \$65,138.28. The total estimated cost for bus transportation is \$256,127.67, a .05% impact on the overall budget for next year, without any other contractual increases.

The other option, and parents' preference, is van transportation. Ms. Dorsey stated, because of a student's size, all students would need to be in a five-point harness. The district would need to purchase ten additional vans for Pre-School transportation as only two five-point harnesses fit in one van. The estimated start up cost is \$430,000. With regard to driving costs, Ms. Dorsey stated the district would need ten drivers, at their hourly rate, for a minimum of four hours, for 181 student days, which totals approximately \$326,243.40. The total estimated cost to transport students in vans is \$756,243.40, a 1.5% impact on the overall budget for next year, without any other contractual increases.

F. Proposed Dates for Coffee with Superintendent and Board Member

Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni stated, in his meetings, with the Community Engagement Committee, he suggested Coffee with Superintendent to provide the community an opportunity to meet face-to-face. He stated he would like to have one Board of Education member attend. Board members were provided with a list of proposed dates and times, which has been posted in Schoology.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

At 7:26 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Gibbons, to adjourn.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education