

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

April 24, 2023

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

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

Also in attendance: Superintendent of Schools Brian J. Benigni; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Co-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson; Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; and Assistant Principal of McGee Middle School Tim Chiaverini.

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. in the Board of Education (“the Board”) meeting room at 238 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. SPECIAL PRESENTATION

Berlin Fine Arts Video

Tyler Boyle, K-12 Fine Arts Supervisor, shared a video highlighting the work of Berlin’s fine arts students and staff across the district in celebration of Music In Our Schools Month and Youth Art Month throughout the month of March.

Superintendent Benigni stated the district-wide art show opening reception will be held on Wednesday, April 26, 2023, at The New Britain Museum of American Art.

III. STUDENT PRESENTATION – CATHERINE M. MCGEE SCHOOL

McGee Middle School is proud to share the work of students and staff in the science department, as the courses are consistently named as favorites among the core classes. One of the reasons that middle school students enjoy science classes is due to the high levels of engagement. Student learning is framed in relevance and inquiry and made to include hands-on and collaborative experiences. Students use equipment that ranges from low-tech classic glass and hardware to higher-tech digital tools and simulators to learn about the natural, physical, and chemical world in which they live. The presentation this evening demonstrated how science students and staff use their time in class. Grade 8 teachers Andrea Gallo and Jen Zaitoun shared some instructional strategies and assignments that make science engaging at McGee. Student presenters, Aiden DeAngelis, Matt Dzierlatka, Adrian Grabek, and Viktor Naporowski, discussed their work and experiences in the science lab to demonstrate what they have learned as students in the Berlin Public Schools.

IV. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Mr. Saunders reported AP testing will take place throughout the first and second weeks of May; the National Honor Society will induct new members on Thursday, April 27, 2023; this week is spirit week at Berlin High School, ending with the class color wars and pep rally; and this past week AP Government students returned home from Washington, D.C.

Ms. Negrao reported this month is Autism Awareness Month, and today, for the first day of spirit week, students wore blue in honor of autism awareness; Upbeat students will attend the May Leadership Training at Camp Jewell May 12-14, 2023; the National Honor Society partnered with students from Central Connecticut State University to design and modify two custom ride-on cars to help children with mobility issues; and the Broadcast Club has been nominated for four Mascot Media Broadcast awards.

B. Committee Reports

Dr. Sassu reported the Curriculum Committee met prior to tonight's meeting and discussed objectives for the 2023-2024 school year; revisions to the current school calendar; and grading practices at the secondary level.

Mr. Tencza reported the Finance & Operations Committee met prior to tonight's meeting and discussed committee goals and objectives for the 2023-2024 school year.

C. CREC Report

There was no report this evening.

D. Correspondence to the Board

There was no correspondence to the Board this evening.

Ms. Dennis reported on her opportunity, along with Superintendent Benigni and Dr. Sassu, to present at the National School Boards Association (NSBA) Equity Symposium on January 28, 2023 and the Annual Conference on April 1, 2023. Ms. Dennis reported together they presented on approaching misconceptions around equity, oppression and marginalization within a community at the Equity Symposium and on the relationship between decision making, power and oppression at the Annual Conference.

Ms. Dennis and Ms. Gibbons reported on their opportunity to attend classes at Berlin High School, participating in the Project Citizen Research Program.

V. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Ruth Lerro, 141 Four Rod Road, Kensington, Connecticut, addressed the Board of Education regarding gun safety. She repeated her request that the school district send a letter to all parents and guardians of Berlin students, reminding them to make sure their firearms are secured and stored safely.

Brenda Dzwil, 11 Sugar Maple Lane, Berlin, Connecticut, addressed the Board regarding gun safety.

VI. PERSONNEL

Retirement – Berlin High School – Teacher of World Language

Superintendent Benigni presented Susan Terrill’s letter of intent to retire as teacher of World Language at Berlin High School, effective June 30, 2023.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Ms. Gibbons, to accept the retirement of Susan Terrill, teacher of World Language at Berlin High School, effective June 30, 2023. Also to thank her for the 37 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

VII. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes – Regular Meeting of March 13, 2023
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending March 31, 2023
- C. Facilities Update

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno provided a facilities update, which is posted in Schoology.

- D. Overnight Field Trip Request – Upbeat – YMCA Camp Jewell, Colebrook, CT – May 12-14, 2023

Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis and Director of Upbeat Sheel Patel requested permission for students to attend the Upbeat May Leadership Training at YMCA Camp Jewell in Colebrook, CT, on May 12-14, 2023. The purpose of this trip is to provide students with the opportunity to develop leadership skills, build relationships with their peers and staff members, and plan and facilitate a service project for a group in need in the community.

Moved by Ms. Gibbons, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

Ms. Patel shared the new experiences offered to students at Camp Jewell. Ms. Patel stated students will need to provide a deposit, which will be returned as long as the student attends the weekend; however, in the event, a student cancels, with less than a week’s notice, the deposit will not be returned. Ms. Patel stated she is very grateful for the incomparable memories and experiences students have from attending Camp Woodstock.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Status of the Board of Education's Adopted Budget for 2023-2024

Superintendent Benigni reported tomorrow is the Referendum for the Town Budget and Board of Education Budget. Superintendent Benigni stated the Board of Education's Operating Budget for 2023-2024 is moving forward with a 3.0% increase. Superintendent Benigni stated his proposed Operating Budget had a 4.87% increase, which the Board of Education raised and adopted with an overall increase of 5.82%; however, after discussions between the Town Council and the Board of Finance, it was determined that a 3.0% increase would move forward to Referendum.

Ms. Dennis thanked Superintendent Benigni, his team and Board members for all their work this budget season.

Superintendent Benigni went on record to state a 3.0% budget increase does not work without making cuts and stated the document he produced, along with members of the administrative cabinet, shows what cuts would be necessarily recommended if the Board's Operating Budget is at a 3.0% increase. Superintendent Benigni stated a 3.2% increase also does not work. Superintendent Benigni stated a 4.23% increase is needed to maintain all staff that are listed to be reduced because of a budget below that number. If anyone has further questions, Superintendent Benigni requested they call or email him to have further discussions.

B. Non-renewal of Contracts for Non-tenured Staff

Superintendent Benigni recommended the non-renewal of contracts of employment for the following non-tenured staff who were hired for a one-year assignment or as a long-term substitute: Sarah Britton and Melissa Dresko.

Moved by Mr. Tencza, seconded by Ms. Nappi, that the contracts of employment for non-tenured teachers Sarah Britton and Melissa Dresko not be renewed for the 2023-2024 school year, upon their expiration at the end of the current school year.

In response to Mr. Salina's comment that the non-renewal of contracts is not a negative reflection on their performance while working in the school district but rather that these staff have fulfilled their one-year assignment or long-term substitute, Superintendent Benigni stated absolutely.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

C. State Healthy Food Certification Statement for July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024

Section 10-215f of the Connecticut General Statutes requires that all Connecticut public school districts that are eligible to participate in the healthy food certification take action to certify whether all food items sold to students will or will not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published pursuant to Section 10-21e of the Connecticut General Statutes for the period of July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024, and whether to allow food and beverage exemptions. Two motions are required.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, that pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the Berlin Board of Education certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups.

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

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, that the Berlin Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes, provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food and beverage items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An “event” is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The “regular school day” is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food and beverage sales.

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

D. Fiscal Management

Approval of designees for the purpose of signing checks for the Berlin High School Enterprise Fund, Berlin Public Schools Activity Fund, Cafeteria Fund, and the BOE Programs is necessary. Sondra Crispino is replacing Doreen Guy as a designated signer due to Doreen’s retirement.

- 1. Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Salina, that Katie Amenta and Sondra Crispino be designated signers of the Berlin High School Enterprise Fund.**

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

2. **Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Salina, that each principal and Sondra Crispino be designated signers of the Berlin Public Schools Activity Fund.**

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

3. **Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Salina, that Brian Benigni and Sondra Crispino be designated signers of the Cafeteria Fund.**

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

4. **Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Salina, that Ashley Dorsey and Sondra Crispino be designated signers of the BOE Programs.**

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

- E. Policy Review/Revision – Second Reading/Adoption – Policy 3323 – Purchasing

The Town Council approved increasing the bid threshold from \$10,000 to \$25,000 for the purchase of goods and services requiring the competitive bidding process. Superintendent Benigni proposed that the Board's purchasing policy be revised to reflect the same increase. The Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision met on March 6, 2023, to review the recommended revisions. A first reading took place at the March 13, 2023 Board meeting. The second reading/adoption took place.

Moved by Mr. Tencza, seconded by Ms. Nappi, that the Board adopt revised Policy 3323 – Purchasing, as presented.

FAVOR: 7 OPPOSED: 1
MOTION CARRIED: 7:1; Board member Zarabozo voting against

Mr. Zarabozo stated this was a Charter revision question back in November, which failed at Referendum, and the Town went on to pass the bid threshold from \$10,000 to \$25,000. Mr. Zarabozo stated it is a matter of principle.

- F. Proposed 2024-2025 School Calendar and Establishment of BHS Graduation Date for 2025

At the March 13, 2023 Board meeting, members were provided with the proposed school calendar for 2024-2025. The Board wanted to allow the district to survey parents and staff, concerning the preferred starting date, in order to make a decision based on the data received from the survey. The proposed calendar reflects the data received from the survey. Superintendent Benigni reported 81% of parents and 88.7% of staff were in favor of starting and ending the school year later and 19% of parents and 11.3% of staff were in favor of starting and ending the school year earlier. The survey results are posted in Schoology.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Ms. Nappi, to adopt the 2024-2025 Berlin Public Schools Calendar as proposed and set the 2025 Berlin High School graduation date for Friday, June 13, 2025.

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

G. Proposed Revision to the 2022-2023 School Calendar

Superintendent Benigni recommended that the 2022-2023 School Calendar be revised to reduce the number of student days from 181 to 180, making Friday, June 9, 2023, the last day of school for students, which will be an early dismissal day. Teachers will participate in professional development on Monday, June 12, 2023.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Ms. Nappi, to revise the 2022-2023 School Calendar to reduce the number of student days from 181 to 180, making Friday, June 9, 2023, the last day of school for students.

Dr. Sassu stated the Curriculum Committee discussed the proposed revision at its meeting this evening, and the school year culminates with the graduation for seniors on Friday, June 9, 2023.

Mr. Tencza stated the Board has this conversation every year and recommended the number of student days in the school year be 180. This will be discussed when school calendars are proposed. Superintendent Benigni will provide the Board with the data on the repeated motions to revise the school calendar, reducing the number of student days.

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

H. Discussion on Request to Send Gun Safety Letter to Parents/Guardians

At the March 13, 2023 Board meeting, Ruth Lerro addressed the Board regarding gun safety and requested that the school district send a letter to all parents and guardians of Berlin students reminding them to make sure their firearms are secured and stored safely out of reach of children. She provided a sample letter. At tonight's meeting, Ruth Lerro repeated her request, and Brenda Dzwil addressed the Board regarding gun safety. Board members had an extended discussion concerning sending a letter to parents and guardians, in the district, regarding gun safety; referring the gun safety issue to the Community Engagement Committee to create an article to be submitted to the *Berlin Citizen*; and expanding gun safety to younger students through the D.A.R.E. Program.

Moved by Mr. Tencza, seconded by Mr. Salina, to amend the agenda, adding H.1. and H.2. H.1. being to add a motion to approve the Superintendent to send a letter to the homes of our students relative to gun safety and second, which would be H.2.

to refer the gun safety issue to the Community Engagement Committee to create an article to be submitted to the *Berlin Citizen*.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

H.1. Letter to Parents and Guardians Regarding Gun Safety

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to approve the Superintendent sending a letter to parents regarding gun safety in the household.

In response to Ms. Dennis's question, would the letter, going to parents, also appear in the *Berlin Citizen*, Mr. Tencza stated the letter may be part of the article that appears in the *Berlin Citizen*; however, the Community Engagement Committee is only addressing the *Berlin Citizen* component, and Superintendent Benigni will address the letter going to parents and guardians.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

H.2. Referral of Gun Safety Issue to the Community Engagement Committee to Create an Article to be Submitted to the *Berlin Citizen*

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to refer the gun safety issue to the Community Engagement Committee for discussion with regard to a potential article for the *Berlin Citizen*.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

I. Contract Ratification – Berlin Association of Head Custodians

At 7:37 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to move into Executive Session for purposes of contract ratification, inviting the Superintendent of Schools and Denise Parson.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

In attendance for Executive Session were Board members Dennis, Gibbons, Miller, Nappi, Salina, Sassu, Tencza and Zarabozo. In addition Superintendent Benigni and Ms. Parsons were present.

At 7:49 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

Negotiations with the Berlin Association of Head Custodians were recently completed and a tentative agreement was reached for the period of July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2026. It is recommended that the Board approve the tentative agreement.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to approve the tentative agreement between the Berlin Board of Education and the Berlin Association of Head Custodians for the period of July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2026.

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

IX. ADJOURNMENT

At 7:50 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,

Kari Sassu, Ph.D., Berlin Board of Education