

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION
January 9, 2023
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis
Melissa Gibbons
Jaymee Miller
Gina Nappi
Adam Salina – Absent
Kari Sassu, Ph.D. – Arrived at 6:08 p.m.
Tracy Sisti
Matthew Tencza
Peter Zarabozo
Student Representatives: Samantha Negrao
Ian Saunders

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; Supervisor of Special Education – Secondary Cindy Martin; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Co-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and 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; Lead Teacher of McGee Middle School Abby Rogers; Principal of Willard School Megan Sirois; Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza; Principal of Griswold School Jonathan Campbell; and Athletic Director and K-12 Physical Education Health Coordinator David Francalangia.

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 6:04 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. Report of Student Representatives

Miss Negrao reported the Capstone Exhibition will be held on January 17, 2023 with half of the senior class presenting their Senior Capstones. Miss Negrao provided Board members with a winter sports update.

Mr. Saunders reported on January 26, 2023, in the evening, the Unified Theater will perform *A Night at the Movies*; on January 6, 2023, the Rho Kappa National Social Studies Honor Society closed their applications to junior and seniors; and on January 16, 2023, the school district will honor Martin Luther King, Jr.’s legacy of non-violent protests to advocate for the civil rights of black Americans.

B. Committee Reports

Ms. Sisti reported the Community Engagement Committee met prior to tonight’s meeting and discussed social media and the possibility of reaching out to *The Citizen* once again.

C. CREC Report

There was no CREC report this evening.

D. Correspondence to the Board

There was no correspondence to the Board this evening.

III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

No members of the Berlin community addressed the Board this evening.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes
 - 1. Regular Meeting of December 12, 2022
 - 2. Special Meeting of December 12, 2022
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending December 31, 2022
- C. Facilities Update

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno provided a written report, which has been posted in Schoology.

D. Overnight Field Trip Request – McGee School – Washington, DC – May 3-5, 2023

McGee School Principal Salvatore Urso requested permission for Grade 8 students to travel to Washington, DC, on May 3-5, 2023. This annual trip is designed for students to visit sites of historical, cultural, and civic importance in order to deepen their knowledge of those studied and researched in Grade 8 history.

Moved by Ms. Gibbons, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to approve the consent agenda as presented.

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

V. NEW BUSINESS

Request to Name Band Rooms at Berlin High School and Catherine M. McGee School

Christine Rose submitted a letter, on behalf of registered voters of the Town of Berlin, requesting that the Board of Education consider naming the Berlin High School band room in honor of Paul J. Karam and the McGee School band room in honor of Ronald A. Campanario. Petitions with the signatures of 100 registered voters, in accordance with Board Policy 1181, which were provided to Board members, have been submitted to initiate action by the Board of Education to select a subcommittee for the purpose of reviewing the proposals.

Board members discussed what spaces within the school buildings warrant naming.

Ms. Dennis stated the request has been submitted, and the Board will follow the policy. She will select a subcommittee for the purpose of reviewing the proposal. She asked Board members to email her if they are interested in serving on the subcommittee.

VI. 2023-2024 SUPERINTENDENT'S PROPOSED BUDGET PRESENTATION

Superintendent Benigni presented his proposed 2023-2024 budget to the Board and responded to the Board's questions regarding his presentation. The presentation was guided by the budget priorities that were identified by the Board and Administrative Council. Board members were provided with a copy of his presentation.

Superintendent Benigni stated his proposed 2023-2024 budget was created with an awareness of current economic hardships that many are facing given the increased costs of all consumables, and the administration has made a conscious effort to look for cost-saving measures and to minimize increases and not request new staff.

Superintendent Benigni stated the goals for his proposed 2023-2024 budget are to provide quality education; prepare students for multiple options and opportunities; maintain favorable class sizes and course offerings; consistent support of technology; and commitment to a safe learning environment for all students and staff. Superintendent Benigni stated Berlin's mission is to empower students to be enthusiastic, curious learners and kind compassionate leaders in the community and the world, and the core values are purpose, passion and pride. Superintendent Benigni shared Berlin's Beliefs about Learning and the Vision of the Graduate.

Superintendent Benigni's proposed 2023-2024 budget (\$51,466,273) has an overall increase of \$2,383,677.38 (4.87%). Superintendent Benigni stated the major driver in his proposed budget is certified and non-certified staff, which represents 70% of the overall increase. Contractual obligations account for 3.43% of the 4.87% increase to the proposed budget. The decrease in both state and federal grants, rising health insurance costs, inflation, large tuition increases and state/federal requirements are all contributing to the overall increase in contractual obligations.

Superintendent Benigni stated total staffing changes have a decrease of \$264,302. The only new staff being proposed is a 1.00 FTE elementary placement at Griswold School to maintain favorable class sizes. Two positions, previously funded by grants, the district-wide Family Communications Specialist and McGee Reading Teacher, are moving into the General Fund. The proposed budget has 6.00 FTE staff reductions.

Superintendent Benigni stated new for fiscal year 2024 is the cost to reconfigure class space at the Berlin High School for the Career Pathways Program (\$100,000); one elementary teaching position at Griswold Elementary School (\$76,908) to maintain favorable class sizes for young learners; and mandated training (\$34,500) as paraprofessionals will be required to participate in an additional 18 hours of professional development in fiscal year 2024. Also two positions (\$149,869) and Effective School Solutions at McGee (\$110,000), previously funded by ESSER Grants, were moved back into the General Fund, as grant funds will expire in June of fiscal year 2023.

In terms of Administrative Salaries, there is an increase of \$76,277.67 or 2.73%, which is driven by affiliated contract increase of 2.25% or 4.60% with step; five administrators are eligible for step increases; and non-affiliated administrators are budgeted at 3%.

In terms of Certified Salaries, there is an increase of \$738,415.48 or 3.35%, which is driven by 154 teachers on max step for the 2023-2024 school year; 110 teachers advance a step for the 2023-2024 school year; 6 teachers are eligible for a salary lane change; and a 50/50 cost sharing at Central Connecticut Transition Academy (CCTA) with Cromwell.

In terms of Non-Certified Salaries, there is an increase of \$318,321.83 or 4.06%, which is driven by the Family Communications Specialist (previously funded in ESSER Grant); mandated two days of training for paraprofessionals; non-affiliated contracts budgeted at 3%; an increase to per diem substitute account; and increased funding for custodial overtime.

In terms of Employee Benefits, there is an increase of \$534,359.73 or 7.65%, which is driven by a 10% rate increase for medical insurance set by the Town; the employer percentage for staff groups has been adjusted to meet the contractual obligation for each group; and pension account adjustment.

In terms of Contracted Services, there is an increase of \$248,902.67 or 12.83%, which is driven by the full cost to fund Effective School Solutions at McGee Middle School, previously funded with ESSER Grant funds and includes all operational and educational systems, which increase three to seven percent annually.

In terms of Utilities, there is an increase of \$87,545 or 20.93%, which is driven by the cost of utilities in the previous and current fiscal year having increased significantly; however, the district continues to monitor industry trends and adjust the usage for appropriately budgeting for the 2023-2024 school year. Berlin and Cromwell will split the utility costs for the CCTA program at 50%.

In terms of Transportation, there is an increase of \$33,595 or 1.01%. The contractual increase for the 2023-2024 school year is 3% with New Britain Transportation; the cost of fuel is negotiated annually, and the price per gallon for both diesel and gasoline is expected to increase; the number of technical schools the district transports to is less than the current fiscal year; and the district intends to use a portion of the Excess Cost funds to offset Special Education transportation.

In terms of Tuition, there is an increase of \$192,255 or 8.08%, which includes unanticipated Special Education placements for the 2023-2024 school year; tuition cost for Career Pathways and Independent study; anticipated 3% increase for all Special Education outplacements; and accounts for students aging out of the Magnet School Tuition Program.

In terms of Supplies, Textbooks and Materials, there is an increase of \$18,245 or 1.88%. With the exception of supplies needed for the Career Pathways program, all school buildings and departments are taking a 0% increase to their budgets, and principals and department leaders have redistributed funds from supplies, equipment, and all other expenditures to best fit the needs of their students and programs for the 2023-2024 school year. With the rising cost of inflation, a 0% increase is a cut to all building and department budgets.

In terms of Equipment, there is an increase of \$25,520 or 11.80%. With the exception of supplies needed for the Career Pathways program, all school buildings and departments are taking a 0% increase to their budgets. With the rising cost of inflation, a 0% increase is a cut to all building and department budgets.

In terms of All Other Expenditures, there is an increase of \$101,240 or 113.18%, which reflects the estimated cost to reconfigure classroom space at Berlin High School for the Career Pathways Program, and offering the CNA course, onsite and during the school day, will increase access for students.

Superintendent Benigni provided the five year FTE Comparisons; the Hartford Open Choice Enrollment; the Open Choice anticipated budget for 2023-2024; budget funding history; Berlin's five year adopted budgets compared to area districts; the net current expenditure per pupil; Berlin and State per pupil expenditure; federal funding; state funding; elementary, middle and high school enrollment projections; and 2022-2023 Recognitions.

Superintendent Benigni stated a school district's budget reflects the commitment of the community to invest in the future of the children, and the erosion of funding for education challenges the sustainability of Berlin as a competitive school district with rich educational and co-curricular opportunities for students.

A. Elementary Principals' Budget Presentations

Principals Sirois, Souza and Campbell presented the Elementary Schools budget presentation and responded to the Board's questions regarding their presentation. Board members were provided with a copy of their presentation.

Operational Budget: The Operational Budget has a 0% increase.

Elementary Staffing: A 1.00 FTE classroom teacher to keep primary class sizes around 20 students.

B. Secondary Principals' Budget Presentations

Principal Urso presented the McGee Middle School budget and responded to the Board's questions regarding his presentation. Board members were provided with a copy of his presentation.

Operational Budget: The Operational Budget has a 0% increase; however, increased labor, materials and shipping rates will result in decreased funding of instructional supplies.

Staffing: There are no new staffing requests for the 2023-2024 school year.

Principal Eustis presented the Berlin High School budget and responded to the Board's questions regarding her presentation. Board members were provided with a copy of her presentation.

Operational Budget: The Operational Budget has a 16.9% (\$45,868) increase to support the Career Pathways Program; textbooks; and graduation costs. All other areas are flat or have a 0% increase.

Staffing: There are no new staffing requests.

C. Curriculum & Instruction Budget Presentation

Co-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson presented the Curriculum and Instruction Budget for 2023-2024 and responded to questions from the Board regarding their presentation. Board members were provided with a copy of their presentation. Ms. Gjerpen stated the purpose of the Curriculum and Instruction Budget (\$462,557) is to support curriculum additions, revisions and updates; learning and materials related to new state mandates; purchase of materials for new courses; professional learning for all staff in district and out of district; and software subscriptions for teaching and learning. Ms. Gjerpen and Ms. Watson highlighted the following areas:

Instructional Supplies: Co-Directors Gjerpen and Watson are requesting \$50,000 for a new elementary classroom, ESOL supplies and classroom reading support materials related to state legislation.

Other Certified Salaries: Co-Directors Gjerpen and Watson are requesting \$75,000 to support curriculum writing projects and teachers as leaders of professional learning.

Teaching and Learning Software: Co-Directors Gjerpen and Watson are requesting \$78,955 for instructional software for the district, all curriculum areas and school libraries

In-district Professional Development: Co-Directors Gjerpen and Watson are requesting \$83,500, for professional development presenter fees, in-house professional development presentations and literacy professional development related to state legislation.

Out of District Professional Development: Co-Directors Gjerpen and Watson are requesting \$26,800 for registration fees for librarians, teacher leaders, department professional development (music, physical education and art) and AP training.

Staff Travel: Co-Directors Gjerpen and Watson are requesting \$4,500 for district staff who travel throughout the day to different buildings within the district and attend professional development.

Non-Instruction Supplies: Co-Directors Gjerpen and Watson are requesting \$4,500 to purchase supplies for meetings.

Administrative Supplies: Co-Directors Gjerpen and Watson are requesting \$20,000 for materials to support professional development learning and curriculum updates.

Textbooks: Co-Directors Gjerpen and Watson are requesting \$59,932 for textbooks for new courses, updated AP texts and reading texts related to state law.

Tuition: Co-Directors Gjerpen and Watson are requesting \$35,320 for independent study and the CNA course.

Other Professional Services: Co-Directors Gjerpen and Watson are requesting \$7,500 for author visits at the three elementary schools.

Dues & Fees: Co-Directors Gjerpen and Watson are requesting \$5,000 for professional organizations.

Field Trips: Co-Directors Gjerpen and Watson are requesting \$12,050 for transition field trips, learning about Berlin and elementary science.

D. Special Education Budget Presentation

Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian, along with Supervisor of Special Education – Secondary Cindy Martin and Supervisor of Special Education – Elementary Dr. Michelle Zeuschner, presented the 2023-2024 Special Education Budget and responded to questions from the Board concerning their presentation. Board members were provided with a copy of the presentation.

Ms. Holian stated the purpose of the Special Education Budget is to support the learning and social and emotional needs of students with an Individualized Education Plan from 3 to 22 years old. The Special Education Budget consists of certified and non-certified salaries; instructional supplies; contracted services; equipment; tuition and transportation; Central Connecticut Transition Academy; and the extended school year services (summer school).

Ms. Holian stated the Special Education Budget is approximately 26.8% (\$13,717,458.28) of the General Fund Budget. Ms. Holian stated as of the October 1, 2022 data, 408 students receive services within district; 25 students receive services in out of district facilities; 5 students attend Magnet or Vo-Ag schools; 2 students receive a service plan; and 4 students are in a hospital, detention facility or homebound.

Ms. Holian highlighted the following areas:

Contracted Services (\$772,900): Contracted services include Effective School Solutions services at Berlin High School and McGee Middle School; outside evaluators; interpreter services; field trips; ESY; nursing services; one on one nursing services; hearing impaired services; Compuclaim services; legal fees; assistive technology services; and PMT training.

Supplies (\$67,000): Occupational therapists, physical therapist, speech/language and special education teachers purchase supplies needed to work with their students. This may include books, fidgets, sensory materials, testing materials, rewards and therapy materials.

Equipment (\$6,000): Includes seating equipment for students with physical and motor needs.

Special Education Tuitions (\$77,000 to \$280,000): Currently there are 25 students attending out of district placements, which range from \$77,000 to \$280,000 depending upon placement. Ms. Holian stated the breakdown for total tuition and transportation is \$2,193,234 and \$1,320,250 respectively. Ms. Holian stated when the Special Education budget was created, it included two unanticipated tuitions; however, currently there is one anticipated tuition, which may cost \$156,000.

Central Connecticut Transition Academy: The CCTA consists of certified and non-certified salaries (\$357,941.50); work study (\$18,000); utilities (\$31,650); transportation (\$19,000); program operations (\$5,400); and rent (\$0). The district's cost share is estimated at \$215,995.75.

Included in the Special Education Budget is Effective School Solutions at McGee Middle School and two anticipated tuitions. Although requested, stipends for the BLAST and Rise Teachers and ten paraprofessionals are not included in the proposed 2023-2024 budget.

E. District-wide Non-Instructional Programs/Athletics

Athletic Director and K-12 Physical Education Health Coordinator David Francalangia presented the Berlin Athletics budget and responded to the Board's questions regarding his presentation. Board members were provided with a copy of his presentation.

Goals: Maintain the current athletic programs in order to meet the individual needs and interests of the students; provide a safe and secure environment for students to do their best on and off the field, while making sure students feel supported emotionally and academically; and continue to support the athletic programs, using a priority system with all coaches.

Operation/Instruction Budget: The overall budget for Berlin High School Athletics has an overall increase of \$4,440 (1.14%). Transportation has a slight increase of \$3,090, and contracted medical services (trainer) have an increase of \$10,100 for the year.

The overall budget for McGee Athletics has a slight increase in transportation, with an overall increase of \$435.68.

F. Site & Building

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno provided Board members with a list of Site and Building requests from each of the schools, Central Office and the Security Department totaling \$441,150. Mr. Cugno stated, unfortunately, none of the requests are included in Superintendent's proposed 2023-2024 budget.

G. Capital Requests

Mr. Cugno provided Board members with a list of the capital requests from each of the schools, Central Office and the Security Department, totaling \$1,624,000, which has been reviewed by the Finance and Operations Committee and submitted to the Capital Plan Committee. Mr. Cugno stated, at the present time, the preliminary proposal from the Finance Department for the Town includes \$1,230,000 for educational improvements. Included in the preliminary proposal are camera upgrades across the district (\$195,000); paving of parking lots at Willard (\$300,000); handicapped accessible door openers at three entrances at Berlin High School (\$36,000); resurface of the basketball and tennis courts at Berlin High School (\$65,000); replacement of playground equipment at Willard (\$175,000); and three vans for the Transportation Department (\$110,000).

H. BOE Overall Review

Ms. Dennis requested Board members send any questions regarding tonight's presentations to her prior to Monday, January 16, 2023. She stated she has requested the joint meeting with the Board of Education and Board of Finance be moved up one week, and that as of tonight's meeting, she has not

received a response. She requested Board members let her know if they have a problem with this change.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:30 p.m., a motion was made by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education