

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

October 11, 2022

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis
Melissa Gibbons
Jaymee Miller - Absent
Gina Nappi
Timothy Oakes
Adam Salina - Absent
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti
Matthew Tencza
Student Representatives: Samantha Negrao - Absent
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; Co-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson; Director of Mathematics and Science Kara Watson; Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Principal of Willard School Megan Sirois; Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza; and Principal of Griswold School Jonathan Campbell.

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Add Item to the Agenda:

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to add Item V.4. as a retirement for Mr. Richard Hanbury, teacher of science, here at the high school.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

Add Item to the Agenda:

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to add Item VII.H. to discuss a personnel matter where we will go into Executive Session to discuss.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

Prior to the student presentation, as tonight was Mr. Oakes last meeting, Ms. Dennis thanked him for his 11 years of service to the Berlin Board of Education and wished him well.

Mr. Benigni personally thanked Mr. Oakes for his service to the Board of Education and for all his work concerning policy review/revision over the years.

Ms. Dennis wished Board members Gibbons and Miller luck in the upcoming election. She stated a candidate forum will be held at Berlin High School on October 24, 2022 at 6:00 p.m.

II. STUDENT PRESENTATION – EMMA HART WILLARD SCHOOL

Kindergarten lays the foundation for all future learning. Children’s educational journey starts with building a positive classroom community where students feel welcome, safe, comfortable, and confident to take risks. Structured play, curiosity, creativity, and immersion in literacy and numeracy provide opportunities for children to develop their academic, social-emotional, and problem-solving skills. This evening kindergarten teachers Mrs. Mainetti, Miss Ende, Mrs. Souza and Ms. Hegarty, along with student presenters Hanna Abramek, Khloe Cone, Orion Gaffney, Stella Jarosz, Majd Kharita, Jackson Lopofsky, Callie Olinda, Jiyan Patel, Cammie Siegal, William Stark, Kasey Staten, and Reign Texidor presented how kindergarten teachers and students begin to build the foundational skills for all future learning.

III. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Mr. Saunders reported Upbeat students will travel to Camp Woodstock on Saturday, October 22, 2022, and Sunday, October 23, 2022, to participate in the Leadership Training Weekend; the Berlin High School marching band will have their first competition on October 15, 2022 at Lyman Memorial High School and then again on October 22, 2022 at Southington High School; the Berlin Redcoats remain undefeated as the season progresses; the Berlin High School chorus will be performing at the annual Cabaret and Choral Review on Friday, October 14, 2022; the Berlin High School Unified Theater Club began rehearsals for their show, which will take place in January; tomorrow, freshman, sophomore and junior students will be taking the PSAT testing while seniors participate in workshops for college and post-secondary planning; and over the past month, many college and university representatives have visited Berlin High School in order to provide students with opportunities after high school.

B. Committee Reports

Mr. Oakes reported the Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision met on October 5, 2022 and discussed policy review/revision, which appears later in the agenda for a first reading, and the Finance & Operations Committee met on October 6, 2022 and reviewed the requests for capital funding and the location of graduation ceremonies, which also appears later in the agenda for further discussion.

C. CREC Report

There was no report this evening.

D. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared thank you notes received from Gary, Tracy and Amelia Andruskiewicz and Jen Birrell.

Ms. Sisti reported the Freshman football team is making history, having its first female athlete on the team, and she scored her first touchdown last Thursday.

Ms. Dennis reported on her opportunity to visit all five schools in town on Monday, September 26, 2022. Ms. Dennis reported, over the summer, she submitted a proposal to the National School Boards Association (NSBA) for the national conference in April, and she, along with co-presenters Dr. Sassu and Superintendent Benigni, will present at the national level on the relationship between power decision making and oppression.

IV. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Mark Holmes, 146 Wildermore Road, Berlin, Connecticut, addressed the Board concerning the request to name the Berlin High School basketball court, and he requested the Board vote in favor of naming the basketball court in honor of Coach Mike Veneziano.

Jesse Ede, 72 Worthington Point Road, Berlin, Connecticut, stated he appreciated the student presentation this evening.

V. PERSONNEL

Retirements

1. Assistant Principal – Berlin High School

Superintendent Benigni presented Barbara Ventura’s letter of intent to retire as assistant principal at Berlin High School, effective the end of the 2022-2023 school year.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Ms. Nappi, that the Board accept the retirement of Barbara Ventura, assistant principal at Berlin High School, effective June 30, 2023. 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: 7:0; including President Dennis**

2. Teacher of Technology Education – Berlin High School

Superintendent Benigni presented Mark Wicander’s letter of intent to retire as teacher of technology education at Berlin High School, effective the end of the 2022-2023 school year.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Dr. Sassu, that the Board accept the retirement of Mark Wicander, teacher of technology education at Berlin High School, effective June 30, 2023. Also to thank him for the 25 years of service he has provided to the youth of Berlin and wish him good health and happiness in his retirement years.

**FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis**

3. Teacher of Family & Consumer Science – Berlin High School

Superintendent Benigni presented Pamela Dennis’s letter of intent to retire as teacher of family & consumer science at Berlin High School, effective the end of the 2022-2023 school year.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Ms. Gibbons, that the Board accept the retirement of Pamela Dennis, teacher of family & consumer science at Berlin High School, effective June 30, 2023. Also to thank her for the 48 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: 7:0; including President Dennis**

4. Teacher of Science – Berlin High School

Superintendent Benigni presented Richard Hanbury’s letter of intent to retire as teacher of science at Berlin High School, effective the end of the 2022-2023 school year.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Dr. Sassu, that the Board accept the retirement of Richard Hanbury, teacher of science at Berlin High School, effective June 30, 2023. Also to thank him for the 38 years of service he has provided to the youth of Berlin and wish him good health and happiness in his retirement years.

**FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis**

VI. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes
 - 1. Regular Meeting of September 12, 2022
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending September 30, 2022
- C. Overnight Field Trip Requests – Berlin High School
 - 1. Utah – June 13-18, 2023

Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis requested permission for approximately 21 students to travel to Southern Utah National Parks on June 13-18, 2023, with Grand Classroom, a full-service educational travel provider specializing in curriculum-driven and standards aligned student travel experiences. Students will be immersed in the natural and physical sciences through the examination of the unique natural history of the Southwestern U.S. Students will gain a great appreciation for this natural history through guided activities in ecology, conservation, geology and astronomy.

- 2. YMCA Camp Woodstock, October 22-23, 2022

Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis and Upbeat Director Sheel Patel requested permission for a maximum of 100 students to travel to Woodstock, CT, to participate in the Upbeat Leadership Training

Weekend. Students will participate in activities facilitated by Berlin High School staff and senior members of Upbeat to work on team building and communication skills. Students will develop relationships with their peers and staff members to help build and maintain a sense of community at Berlin High School.

D. Facilities Update

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

Moved by Ms. Gibbons, seconded by Dr. Sassu, that the Board approve the consent agenda as presented.

Mr. Oakes stated he was thrilled to see the overnight field trip request for a group of students to travel to Southern Utah National Parks. Mr. Oakes stated he hopes this continues into future years and also with students traveling to other parts of the country.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Official 2022-2023 District Enrollment Report

Board members were provided with the official October 1, 2022 district enrollment report. 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, 2022, is 2,660 students, an increase of 15 students (0.57%) from the previous year. Superintendent Benigni stated according to projections, enrollment is to level off over the next years. Superintendent Benigni noted kindergarten enrollment at Griswold is high, with average class sizes of 18.60 students, which is not typical at the kindergarten level, and may cause some issues for next year.

B. Approval of Requests for Capital Funding

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported on the status of current projects that involve the use of capital funds. The budget guidelines for the 2023-2024 requests for capital funding were also shared with Board members, along with the items requested. The Finance & Operations Committee met on October 6, 2022 to review the budget requests. Board members were provided with a revised listing of the recommendations of the Finance & Operations Committee. Mr. Cugno stated only anticipated purchases exceeding \$25,000 are eligible for the Town Capital Plan; anticipated purchases less than \$25,000 are budgeted for in the Board of Education's Operating Budget; and Information Technology and furniture items are not eligible for the Town Capital Plan; however, Mr. Cugno stated the Finance & Operations Committee agreed to recommend technology items for the Security Department and also furniture items due to the size of the investment needed to go forward. If these items are not eligible for the Capital Plan, they will become requests for the Board the Education's Operating Budget. Mr. Cugno stated total recommendations, from the Finance & Operations Committee, are \$2,297,150.00.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Dr. Sassu, that the Board approve the requests for capital funding, as presented, for submission to the Town of Berlin.

In response to Dr. Sassu's question, what is the reason for the revised recommendations, Mr. Cugno stated an item was originally included twice.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

C. Policy Review/Revision

1. Second Reading/Adoption

- a. **New** Policy 5129 – Policy to Improve Completion Rates of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
- b. Policy 5132 – Student Dress
- c. Policy 5141 – Wellness
- d. Policy 6141 – Curriculum Development
- e. Policy 6141.9 – Enrollment in an Advanced Course or Program and Challenging Curriculum
- f. Policy 6146.11 – Weighted Grading and Calculation of Grade Point Averages
- g. **New** Policy 6172.1 – Equitable Identification of Gifted and Talented Students
- h. Policy 6172.61 – Credit for Online Courses
- i. Bylaw 9010 – Construction and Posting of Agenda
- j. Bylaw 9035 – Meeting Conduct
- k. Bylaw 9040 – Minutes
- l. Bylaw 9065 – Quorum and Voting Procedures
- m. Bylaw 9085 – Time, Place and Notice of Meetings
- n. Delete Policy 6172.6 – Distance Learning and Virtual/Online Courses

Shipman & Goodwin, LLP, has recommended new policies and revisions to policies and bylaws as noted on the summary sheet provided to Board members. The Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision met on September 12, 2022 to review the recommendations. A first reading of the new policies and revisions took place at the Board of Education meeting on September 12, 2022. The second reading/adoption took place this evening.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Tencza, that the Board adopt the new and revised policies and bylaws (items a.-m.) listed above, and delete Policy 6172.6 (item n.) listed above.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

2. First Reading

- a. Policy 2201 – Retention of Electronic Records and Information
- b. Policy 4118.5 – Employee Use of the District's Computer Systems
- c. Policy 4118.241 – Reports of Suspected Abuse or Neglect of Children or Reports of Sexual Assault of Students by School Employees

- d. **New** Policy 5130.6 – Meal Charging
- e. Policy 5144.2 – Physical Activity, Undirected Play and Student Discipline
- f. Policy 5145.401 – Section 504 and Title II
- g. Policy 5113 – Student Attendance, Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism
- h. Policy 5131.83 – Student Use of the District’s Computer Systems
- i. Policy 5131.81 – Use of Private Technological Devices by Students
- j. Policy 6144.1 – Curricular Exemptions
- k. Policy 6135 – Parent-Teacher Communication
- l. Bylaw 9070 – Removal of Board Officers

Shipman & Goodwin has recommended a new policy and revisions to policies and/or bylaws based on statutory and/or regulatory changes, citation updates, and best practices. The Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision met on October 5, 2022 to review the proposed new policy and recommended revisions. Since this is a first reading, no action is required; the second reading/adoption will take place at the November 28, 2022 Board meeting.

D. Choice Presentation/Report

Superintendent Benigni stated, unfortunately, this year a number of students that have been in the Open Choice Program, for a number of years, exited the program. Typically, a student exits the program when they no longer reside in Hartford. Superintendent Benigni stated one of the big issues across the state this current year is transportation and the hiring of and retaining bus drivers has impacted the Open Choice Program as students have not been able to arrive to school on time or even at all.

Superintendent Benigni stated there is a concern with the number of students in the Open Choice Program, currently in district, as enrollment has dropped to 98 students, which accounts for 3.5 percent of the total population. Typically, the district has over 120 students or between 4.2 and 4.5 percent of Berlin’s total population. Superintendent Benigni stated, as the district falls below the 4 percent reimbursement rate, this current year, the district will be reimbursed at \$6,000 per student. Superintendent Benigni stated six additional seats were offered in kindergarten, six additional seats at Grade 2 and one additional seat at Grade 4 for a sibling this year; however, students have opted not to enter the Berlin public schools.

A video, produced by Media/Technology Specialist Nick Smith, depicting the perspective of Berlin Choice students and parents on how being educated in Berlin is valued and respected by them was shown at tonight’s meeting.

E. Request to Name BHS Basketball Court

In March 2022, Mark Holmes submitted a letter requesting the Board of Education consider naming the Berlin High School basketball court in a posthumous honor of Coach Mike Veneziano, and a petition with the signatures of 100 registered voters, in accordance with Board Policy 1181, a copy which was provided to Board members, to initiate action by the Board of Education to select a subcommittee for the purpose of reviewing the proposal. The subcommittee met on September 26, 2022 to review the request

and prepare a recommendation for the full Board. Ms. Dennis stated it is the unanimous recommendation of the subcommittee to move forward with naming the Berlin High School basketball court in honor of Coach Mike Veneziano.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Ms. Sisti, to accept the recommendation of the subcommittee to name the court in the Gibney Gymnasium in honor of Coach Mike Veneziano.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

In response to Mr. Tencza's question, based on his interpretation of the policy concerning the name being submitted after separation from compensated service for a minimum period of one (1) year, is the Board premature in this action, Superintendent Benigni stated Mike Veneziano was not the coach this past year; he was not on the payroll; the last time he coached was the 2020-2021 school year; and his service terminated prior to this past season.

Student representative Ian Saunders stated he believes the naming of the Berlin High School basketball court will help reunite not only Berlin High School but the entire town with the values they all hold, and based on the information he has been given, naming the basketball court is a very nice thing to do.

F. Graduation Site

Board members were provided with the Berlin High School Administration's proposal to maintain Sage Park as the graduation site for future graduating classes, including a comparison of the costs for Welte Hall vs. Sage Park as there is a cost differential in hosting the ceremony at Sage Park. The Finance & Operations Committee met on October 6, 2022, to review the proposal. Board members entered into a discussion concerning the graduation site for future graduating classes, and Board members shared their individual views. This item will appear on the next Board meeting agenda to allow community members an opportunity to share their thoughts during Audience of Citizens.

G. Approval of Application for CABE Board Recognition Awards

The 2022 application for CABE Board Recognition Awards has been completed and submitted to CABE. To be eligible for the Board of Distinction Award (a level two recognition), a motion must be made at a Board meeting to approve the application.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Oakes, that the Board approve the application for the 2022 CABE Board Recognition Awards.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

H. Executive Session – Personnel

At 8:48 a.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to enter into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter, inviting the Superintendent.

**FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis**

In attendance for Executive Session were Board members Dennis, Gibbons, Nappi, Oakes, Sassu, Sisti and Tencza. In addition, Superintendent Benigni was present.

At 9:12 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:12 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Tencza, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to adjourn.

**FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis**

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education