

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION
February 13, 2023
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis
Melissa Gibbons
Jaymee Miller
Gina Nappi
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
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; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Co-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson; Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis; and Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso.

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m. in the Board of Education (“the Board”) meeting room at 238 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. STUDENT PRESENTATION – BERLIN HIGH SCHOOL

Students Salvatore Calvo, Thomas Lewis, Adam Rice, Nora Ritchie, Ian Saunders and Chelsea Schuler shared with the Board recent work-based learning experiences they have participated in. This presentation ties in to a presentation on career pathways/career connected learning opportunities for Berlin High School students being made by Work-Based Learning Coordinator Millie Hemming, Director of Curriculum Kara Watson, Consultant Steve Rothenberg and Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis later in the meeting.

III. SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Elks Americanism Essay Contest Finalists

Elks President James Searle and Americanism Chairman Mark Pruzin provided information about the Americanism Essay Contest that the New Britain Elks sponsored this past November for students in Grades 6-7. This year, the contest was expanded to include the New Britain school system. Two hundred (200) essays were evaluated for the contest. Two finalists were chosen for Grade 6 – Leah Buchholz and Alexandra Winiarski, and three finalists were chosen for Grade 7 – Clara Byrd, Payton Demko and Alejandro Vega. Each finalist was presented with a Certificate of Achievement and gift card from members of the New Britain Elks.

IV. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Miss Negrao reported the Berlin High School Unified Theater Program's production of *A Night at the Movies* was performed on January 26, 2023 and Upbeat hosted a ski trip to Berkshire East Mountain Resort in Massachusetts on February 12, 2023. Miss Negrao congratulated all seniors involved in senior nights and announced that three students had art work recognized in the Connecticut Region Scholastic Art Awards, ranging from gold key through honorable mention. She reported there was an in-person art gallery show at the Hartford Art School Galleries at the University of Hartford from January 27 through February 3. Miss Negrao noted there has been a lot of conversation concerning the Berlin High School Program of Studies, and the overall feedback has been great.

Mr. Saunders reported performances for the spring musical *The Little Mermaid* will take place March 3 through March 5 in the Berlin High School auditorium; course registration for incoming eighth grade, freshman, sophomore and junior students began today for the 2023-2024 school year; the second quarter for Berlin High School students ended January 20, 2023; and Upbeat will host a teacher supply drive from February 13 through February 17.

B. Committee Reports

Dr. Sassu reported the Curriculum Committee met last week and reviewed the Berlin's Adult Education Program, which appears later in the agenda.

C. CREC Report

There was no report this evening.

D. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared a thank you note received from Pam Dennis. Ms. Dennis shared a thank you note received from Alison Wilson, Griswold Instrumental/Vocal Music Teacher.

V. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Jennifer Jurgen, 561 Percival Avenue, Berlin, Connecticut and Imelda Mongillo, 86 Devonshire Way, Berlin, Connecticut, addressed the Board concerning the Superintendent's Proposed Budget and the elimination of the lead teacher at McGee Middle School. They requested the Board reconsider this cut and look at possible alternatives.

Ms. Mongillo also addressed the Board regarding the reconfigure class space at Berlin High School for the Career Pathways Program.

VI. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes – Regular Meeting of January 9, 2023

B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending January 31, 2023

C. Facilities Update

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

D. Overnight Field Trip Request – BHS Upbeat – Camp Woodstock, Woodstock, CT –
March 10-12, 2023

Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis and Upbeat Director Sheel Patel requested permission for Upbeat students to travel to YMCA Camp Woodstock, in Woodstock, CT, to attend the March Leadership Training on March 10-12, 2023. Students will participate in a workshop to learn about basic communication skills and will work in groups to put together and present lesson plans to Grade 5 classes in the district and present them to Berlin High School Assistant Principal Brian Testroet. By participating in this training, students will develop relationships with their peers and staff members to help build and maintain a sense of community at Berlin High School.

Superintendent Benigni stated there have been issues with rooming and bedding at Camp Woodstock. Prior to the arrival of Berlin students the rooms will be treated for bedbugs, and a letter will go home to parents stating a special mattress cover will be provided, if requested. Superintendent Benigni stated actions are being taken to prevent another occurrence from happening in the future.

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

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Career Pathways

Steve Rothenberg, principal consultant for the Rothenberg Consulting Group, Berlin High School Work-Based Learning Coordinator Millie Hemming, Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis, and Director of Curriculum Kara Watson provided a presentation to the Board concerning the Career Pathways work that is being done at the high school. Ms. Watson began the presentation stating Career Connected Learning (CCL) aligns with Berlin's Mission and Core Values, Beliefs about Learning and the Vision of the Graduate. The team discussed recent progress related to CCL at Berlin High School, why CCL is important, CCL vision and mission, guiding principles and next steps in this work, including maximizing opportunities in the district's CTE area, earning industry recognized credentials and providing industry-based learning experiences. They also shared how they have been communicating with various segments of the Berlin community and discussed future plans. A short video was shown in which students shared their CCL experiences.

B. Adult Education Presentation

Director of Adult Education Rosemary Goodwin and Director of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen presented options for collaborating with the Wallingford district to provide more opportunities for Berlin residents who are interested in the academic and enrichment opportunities of Adult Education, including enrollment, courses offered, childcare and funding.

C. Open Choice Program Participation for 2023-2024

Superintendent Brian Benigni reported on the current number of Open Choice Program students in the Berlin schools and presented a recommendation to the Board regarding the level of participation for the 2023-2024 school year.

Superintendent Benigni provided Board members with a document reflecting, by grade, his recommended number of Open Choice students for 2023-2024. Superintendent Benigni reported the projected maintained seats for 2023-2024 are eighty-eight (88) students. Superintendent Benigni recommended the district accommodate an additional twenty-two (22) students for the 2023-2024 school year and provided the Board with his recommendation for placement of these students within grade kindergarten (14) and first grade (8). Superintendent Benigni stated, if the district fills the additional twenty-two (22) seats, the level of participation will be at 4.1%; however, the likelihood of filling the additional twenty-two (22) seats is not high. If the district does not maintain the 4% level of participation, the amount of funding received from the state drops \$2,000 per student. Superintendent Benigni stated the other factor is maintaining the projected eighty-eight (88) maintained seats for 2023-2024 as many students, throughout the year, have opted out of the Program.

In response to Dr. Sassu's question why are students opting out of the Program, Superintendent Benigni stated students move out of Hartford and transportation issues.

In response to Ms. Sisti's question, would class sizes be impacted, Superintendent Benigni stated Hubbard has the availability to take the majority of the first grade students, and kindergarten classes would increase by one or two students.

In response to Ms. Dennis's question, will classes be added and will there be additional costs, Superintendent Benigni stated not for these additional Open Choice seats.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, to approve the superintendent's recommendation regarding the level of participation in the Open Choice Program for the 2023-2024 school year as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

D. Briefing on Facility Planning

1. Outdoor Classroom at Catherine M. McGee School

2. Certified Nurses Accreditation (CNA) Facility at Berlin High School

Director of Operations Jeff Cugno shared the site plans for the outdoor classroom at McGee Middle School for the BLAST program with Board members, noting the plans have been approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission. Mr. Cugno stated the conceptual estimate is approximately \$70,000, and the project will be fully funded with grant money. Mr. Cugno anticipates this project moving to final development with construction in the spring and summer and completed for the next school year.

Mr. Cugno shared potential classroom and furniture plans with Board members for the CNA Facility at Berlin High School.

With regard to the Outdoor Classroom, in response to the Board's concerns for student safety, this matter was tabled to the Board's next meeting. Ms. Holian stated the funding needs to be spent by June 30, 2023.

E. Review and Anticipated Adoption of the Proposed Board of Education Budget for 2023-2024

The Board of Education has reviewed and discussed the Superintendent's Proposed Budget for 2023-2024. Ms. Dennis stated the Board met prior to tonight's meeting for a Board workshop where the Board discussed the Superintendent's proposed budget. An informational meeting has been scheduled for Wednesday, February 15, to provide an overview of the 2023-2024 adopted budget to the public. The Board of Education and the Board of Finance will hold a joint meeting on March 1 to discuss the adopted budget.

Ms. Dennis stated Superintendent Benigni's proposed Board of Education Budget for 2023-2024 has an overall increase of 4.87%, and the Board, during its workshop, discussed an overall increase of 5.10% and 7.01%, which would include the lead teacher at McGee Middle School.

Mr. Tencza proposed adding \$425,055 (an overall 5.72% increase) to the Superintendent's Proposed Budget. Mr. Tencza stated this amount reflects the difference between the initial budget requests and the Superintendent's proposed requests for certified salaries, non-certified salaries, employee benefits and contracted services.

Moved by Mr. Tencza, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to adopt the Board of Education Operating Budget for 2023-2024 in the amount of \$51,466,273.38.

Ms. Dennis stated, during the Board's workshop, a number of concerns were discussed, including the reduction of the lead teacher, continued cuts, the ability of tax payers to afford or want a tax increase and population growth based on new housing developments.

Ms. Dennis polled Board members regarding their support for the above amount. The majority did not support the amount and proposed the amount be higher. The minority voiced their opinions.

Mr. Tencza stated he believes it is in the best interests of the students to maintain the lead teacher at McGee Middle School and reconfigure class space at Berlin High School for the Career Pathways Program.

Mr. Zarabozo proposed removing the 6.00 FTE cuts and adding \$50,000 to Mr. Tencza's proposed \$425,055 increase.

MOTION FAILED: 1 (Gibbons):8; including President Dennis

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to adopt the Board of Education Operating Budget for 2023-2024 in the amount of \$51,949,019.60.

MOTION CARRIED: 7:2 (Nappi, Gibbons); including President Dennis

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:48 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Tencza, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education