

**BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**February 15, 2023**  
**MINUTES**  
**SPECIAL MEETING**

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

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; Co-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Assistant Principal of McGee Middle School Tim Chiaverini; 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. Sisti called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m. in the auditorium at Catherine M. McGee Middle School, 899 Norton Road, Berlin, CT. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**II. 2023-2024 BUDGET OVERVIEW TO THE PUBLIC**

The Board held an informational meeting for the public to receive input on the Board of Education's Adopted Operating Budget for 2023-2024. Ms. Sisti stated the Board, on Monday evening, decided to increase the Superintendent's Proposed Budget as the Board of Education felt it was important to maintain the current programs and staffing to meet the needs of all students.

Superintendent Benigni provided a slideshow of the Board of Education's Adopted Budget for Fiscal Year 2023-2024. 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; consistently support technology; and commitment to a safe learning environment for all students and staff. Superintendent Benigni shared Berlin's Mission and Core Values; Beliefs about Learning; and the Vision of the Graduate.

Superintendent Benigni stated contractual obligations represent 75% of the overall adopted budget. The remaining 25% are areas that could not be reduced: contracted services, transportation, utilities, tuition, supplies, equipment and others. Superintendent Benigni stated a 4.24% increase is needed to maintain the current programs and staffing and any number below a 4.24% increase would mean cuts to staff and programs for next year.

Superintendent Benigni stated total staffing changes has an increase of \$226,777. The only new staff being proposed is a 1.00 FTE elementary placement 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 positions originally eliminated in the Superintendent's Proposed Budget have been placed back into the Board of Education's Adopted Budget.

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 an 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 a 3% increase.

In terms of Certified Salaries, there is an increase of \$1,030,793.48 or 4.68%, which is driven by 155 teachers on max step for the 2023-2024 school year; 112 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 \$431,839.83 or 5.51%, which is driven by the Family Communications Specialist (previously funded with ESSER Grant funds); 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 \$619,320.73 or 8.72%, 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 \$249,791.89 or 12.87%, which is driven by the full cost to fund Effective School Solutions at McGee Middle School, previously funded with ESSER Grant funds; includes all operational and educational systems, which increase three

to seven percent annually; legal fees; copier leases; athletic training; and other operational expenses.

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. Superintendent Benigni stated Special Education tuition is budgeted net of Excess Cost.

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%. Public Act 22-118 mandates the availability of free menstrual products in schools. 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.

Included in Superintendent Benigni's presentation was 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; net current

expenditure per pupil; Berlin and State per pupil expenditure; federal funding; state funding; and elementary, middle and high school enrollment projections.

Superintendent Benigni ended his presentation by stating a school district's budget reflects the commitment of the community to invest in the future of our 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 our students.

Board members shared their opinions and reasoning for voting for or against the Board of Education's Adopted Operating Budget for 2023-2024.

### **III. ADJOURNMENT**

**At 6:29 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to adjourn.**

**FAVOR: ALL  
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including Secretary Sisti**

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education