

# BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

December 12, 2022

## MINUTES

### REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis  
Melissa Gibbons  
Jaymee Miller – Absent  
Gina Nappi  
Adam Salina  
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.  
Tracy Sisti  
Matthew Tencza  
Peter Zarabozo – Absent  
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 – 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 Principal of Berlin High School Katie Amenta; 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 6:05 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 STUDENT PRESENTATION – BERLIN HIGH SCHOOL MADRIGAL SINGERS**

The Berlin High School Madrigal Singers perform under the direction of Tyler Boyle, Berlin High School music teacher. They have earned both silver and gold awards at music festival competitions and perform in period costumes. The group is chosen by audition and features many of the most talented young vocalists from Berlin High School. Student singers Ruth Brown, Giselle Cooper, Robin Crisler, Max Ding, Nathaniel Elmani, Meredith Gendreau, Addison Guarino, Thomas Morisse-Corsetti, Laura Munch, Achilles Nicikowski, Brynn Nogiec, Sara Rogan, Meghan Snyder, and David Wadstrup performed at tonight’s meeting.

#### **III. PERSONNEL – ANTICIPATED APPOINTMENT BHS ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL**

Superintendent Benigni recommended that the Board of Education appoint Brian Testroet as Assistant Principal of Berlin High School, effective February 1, 2023.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, that the Board of Education appoint Brian Testroet to the position of Assistant Principal of Berlin High School, with the effective date of February 1, 2023.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

**IV. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD**

A. Report of Student Representatives

Mr. Saunders, along with Miss Negrao, thanked the Madrigal Singers for their performance tonight and congratulated new Berlin High School Assistant Principal Brian Testroet. Mr. Saunders reported the National Honor Society hosted Pajama Day on Friday, December 9, 2022, with donations going to the Connecticut Children's Medical Center; the Winter Band/Chorus Pops Concert will be held on Friday, December 16, 2022; and the hockey team will host holiday skate night at the Newington Arena on Saturday, December 17, 2022. Mr. Saunders recognized the unified basketball team and wished them a great season. Mr. Saunders reported on the Class M football championship game and congratulated the team for an excellent season and recognized the band and cheerleaders for their hard work.

Miss Negrao reported the Upbeat annual Christmas tree sales are officially cancelled this year; first chapter Friday was held on Friday, December 9, 2022, at the elementary schools; McGee drop in was held on Friday, December 9, 2022; the Griswold Parents Club is hosting a gingerbread decorating night on Wednesday, December 14, 2022; and the Lions/Upbeat blood drive will be held at Griswold School on Saturday, December 17, 2022. Miss Negrao reported the science department hosted a field trip to New York City on Thursday, December 8, 2022.

B. Committee Reports

Mr. Tencza reported the Finance & Operations Committee met this morning and discussed the Central Connecticut Transition Academy per pupil expenditures and the 2023-2024 Budget.

Dr. Sassu reported the Curriculum Committee met this afternoon and Co-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson, along with Secondary Department Supervisors, presented the Student Achievement Report.

C. Committee Assignments for 2022-2023

The Community Engagement Committee will consist of Board members Tracy Sisti (Chair), Gina Nappi and Peter Zarabozo. Superintendent Brian Benigni will serve as the administrative liaison.

The Finance & Operations Committee will consist of Board members Matthew Tencza (Chair), Julia Dennis and Adam Salina. Jeffrey Cugno and Ashley Dorsey will serve as the administrative liaisons.

The Curriculum Committee will consist of Board members Kari Sassu (Chair), Melissa Gibbons and Jaymee Miller. Co-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson will serve as the administrative liaisons.

The Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision will consist of Committee Chairs Tracy Sisti, Matthew Tencza and Kari Sassu. Superintendent Brian Benigni will serve as the administrative liaison.

D. CREC Report

There was no report this evening.

E. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared a thank you note from Timothy Oakes.

**V. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

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

**VI. CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Approval of Minutes – Regular Meeting of November 28, 2022
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending November 30, 2022
- C. Facilities Update

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

D. Request to Extend Leave of Absence – Teacher of Science – McGee School

Andrea Gallo, teacher of science at McGee School, is currently on a 12-week leave of absence, for childrearing purposes, which will end in mid-January. She requested to extend her leave of absence through January 2023.

**Moved by Ms. Gibbons, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to approve the consent agenda as presented.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

**VII. NEW BUSINESS**

At this time Item VII.D. was moved up in the agenda. Hearing no objection, this item was addressed.

D. Effective School Solutions Presentation/Report

Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian and Effective School Solutions (ESS) staff members Kate Spring, Marrison McInerney, Lindsey Guimond and Bethany Stuck shared information regarding the ESS programs located at Berlin High School and McGee Middle School and responded to the Board's questions concerning their presentation. Board members were provided with a packet of information regarding the program, which included the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 report cards that provided data from last year and this year concerning school attendance, discipline, behavior and academics. ESS has been a part of the high school community since the fall of 2016 and a part of the middle school community since last school year. Ms. McInerney shared an overview of the services, supports and opportunities provided to students and parents at the middle school to support the mental health of students. The McGee program is funded through a grant which will be ending this June. Ms. Holian stated the district did apply for a mental health grant to help fund this program; however, she is

not sure if the district will receive the grant or when the district will hear back. The cost for the program at the middle school is \$110,000.

Dr. Sassu commented the cost of not addressing the mental health needs of young people is far greater than investing in this resource within our local school system.

Former student Nick Costardo, along with his mother, shared their positive experiences with the ESS program at the high school, Lindsey Guimond and Bethany Stuck shared testimonials from other parents and students and a video of a parent interview was also shared.

A. Berlin High School Program of Studies for 2023-2024

Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis presented to the Board of Education, for its consideration and approval, new course offerings and changes to the Berlin High School Program of Studies for 2023-2024. She highlighted the rationale for changes and respond to any questions from Board members. An overview of significant changes made to the Berlin High School Program of Studies and a draft copy of the Berlin High School Program of Studies was provided to Board members and has been posted in Schoology. The changes were reviewed and discussed by the Curriculum Committee at its meeting on November 28, 2022.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to approve the new course offerings and revisions to the Berlin High School Program of Studies for 2023-2024, as presented.**

In response to Mr. Salina's question, "Does the change in the number of credits available for the science courses negatively impact any student?", Principal Eustis responded no.

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

B. Student Achievement Report

Curriculum Directors Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson, along with Secondary Department Supervisors Jeff Cronk, Ross Hanson, Adam Leonard and Laurie Piecewicz, shared a number of measures of student achievement and responded to the Board's questions. The presentation, a copy which was provided to Board members, included the results of the accountability assessments, including Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) scores for students in Grades 3-8; Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) results for students in Grades 5, 8 and 11; the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) School Day results; and the Advanced Placement (AP) Program. The information shared will help to explain trends in the student performance data, the impact on planning for continuous improvement, related to professional development, and curriculum to be reviewed. The Curriculum Committee met earlier today to review the report.

Co-Directors of Curriculum Gjerpen and Watson began the presentation with the Smarter Balanced Results for 2022. They reviewed the results of the state level data analyses; Connecticut Statewide Data Trends for school years 2018-2019 and 2021-2022 for students with high needs and students without high needs; percentage of students achieving levels 1-4 by Grade; 2022 subgroup performance; and the

DRG comparison for English Language Arts and Mathematics. Ongoing work and next steps for the elementary and middle schools include providing professional development for multiple departments related to the teaching of reading, writing and math; ongoing examination and revision of units of instruction and expectations in literacy and math, including articulation among grades; review and revise protocols for test preparation; strengthening use of formative assessment data to provide targeted support and enrichment opportunities for students; collaboration with the Pupil Personnel Services Department to align and extend instruction; and utilizing the Data Warehouse to monitor student progress.

With regard to the NGSS results for 2022, Co-Director of Curriculum Watson and Department Supervisor Adam Leonard reviewed the Connecticut Statewide Data Trends for school years 2018-2019 and 2021-2022 for students with high needs and students without high needs; the percentage of students achieving levels 1 – 4 by Grade; 2022 subgroup performance; and the DRG comparison. Ongoing work and next steps for the elementary, middle and high schools include professional development opportunities; review and revision of units and assessments; and review and revise protocols for test preparation.

With regard to the 2022 SAT school day results, Department Supervisors Laurie Piecewicz, Jeff Cronk and Ross Hanson reviewed the SAT Scores & Subscores; Connecticut Statewide Data; the 2022 results by subgroup for Grade 11 Evidenced-Based Reading and Writing and Mathematics; the DRG comparison; and Ongoing Work and Next Steps.

With regard to the AP Program, Principal Eustis and School Counseling Supervisor, AP Coordinator, UCONN/ECE Site Representative Patty Pires reviewed the AP courses offered at Berlin High School; AP performance; percentage of AP exams scoring 3 or higher; additional college credit-bearing courses at Berlin High School; UCONN ECE course offerings and participation data; number of enrollments in college credit-bearing courses at Berlin High School; graduation rates; post secondary plans for the class of 2022; post-secondary school persistence data; and additional student achievement highlights.

#### C. Update on Administrative Regulations Pertaining to Substitutes

Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons stated Berlin's pool of available substitute teachers has consistently shrunk over the last six years (from 84 in 2018 to the current 34). Those 34 also include substitute paraprofessionals who do not hold the bachelor's degree required to serve as a substitute teacher. Ms. Parsons stated the district does not have enough substitutes to cover teacher absences; therefore, the district is implementing the following changes in an effort to increase its pool of available substitutes: increasing the daily rate from \$107.50 for non-certified substitutes and \$112 for certified substitutes to \$125 and utilizing the State Department of Education's annual waiver program that allows districts to hire substitutes without a bachelor's degree - as long as proper paperwork is obtained through the Department of Education. Ms. Parsons stated increasing the daily rate above neighboring districts may incentivize current substitutes to remain in Berlin and also attract substitutes from other districts. Utilizing the Department of Education's waiver program will broaden the district's substitute pool. Ms. Parsons stated the district plans to implement a marketing campaign to advertise substitute teaching opportunities to local colleges (CCSU, St. Joseph's, University of Hartford, etc.) specifically geared towards students pursuing education degrees and is hopeful that making these changes will assist in expanding the current pool of available substitutes.

E. Central Connecticut Transition Academy Expenditures – Discussion

The Central Connecticut Transition Academy (CCTA) is a program run by the Berlin and Cromwell Public Schools. The program serves students between the ages of 18-22. Director of Finance Ashley Dorsey and Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian presented information on the per pupil expenditure in regard to the CCTA and the benefits of offering this program in the Berlin community.

Ms. Holian provided a brief overview of the CCTA program. She stated the CCTA program works with students between the ages 18-22 who have completed four years of high school and require a transition program with age appropriate peers before moving on to further schooling or employment; includes practical academics, vocational skills instruction, vocational internships, social and community activities and daily living skills; furthers the student's education with academics, vocational and community experiences and life skills training while having the opportunity to learn in an environment of peers; and provides an environment within the student's Least Restriction Environment in the community.

Ms. Dorsey provided Board members with a copy of her presentation. Ms. Dorsey explained what per pupil expenditure is and how it is calculated. She stated financial data for her report comes from the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2022 and enrollment data from the official enrollment date submitted on October 1, 2021 to the State of Connecticut for the same fiscal year. She stated the total district per pupil expenditure is \$20,891; total in-district per pupil expenditure (does not include any out-placement) is \$20,065; and the total per pupil expenditure for the CCTA is \$21,096.

Ms. Dorsey stated the per pupil expenditures for the CCTA align with the district's and the other school's costs and additionally, it is significantly less than out-of-district expenditures.

Ms. Dorsey stated in 2022, the district had ninety-six (96) out-of-district students (24 special education out-placement students; 68 magnet students; and 4 Vo-Ag students). She noted sixty-eight (68) students attended magnet schools; however, only fifty-two (52) were tuition students. The high cost of special education tuition is the primary driver in the out-of-district per pupil expenditure, which is more than half the cost of in-district students.

Ms. Dorsey stated in August of 2021, the district partnered with Cromwell. Total expenses for the CCTA in fiscal year 2022 were \$298,237. Included in Ms. Dorsey's presentation was a table which provided the cost breakdown by category. Most program costs are split equally, and the district invoices Cromwell quarterly for those eligible expenses; however facility improvements use a pro-rata calculation based on enrollment. The resident district pays administrative salaries and 1:1 paraprofessional costs. Transportation costs are district-level functions and reported with district level expenditures.

With regard to enrollment, Ms. Dorsey stated for fiscal year 2022, twenty (20) students attended the program, with fourteen (14) Berlin resident students; four (4) Cromwell students; and two (2) Hartford Open Choice students, and for fiscal year 2023, twenty-six (26) students attend the program with fifteen (15) Berlin resident students; ten (10) Cromwell students; and one (1) Hartford Open Choice student. Ms. Dorsey stated Berlin students still exceed 50% enrollment and when costs are shared, it benefits the town significantly to be in this partnership,

Ms. Dorsey stated the Board of Education has the responsibility to educate this group of students until the age of 22. Before creating the program in-house, the district out-placed students to the Farmington Valley Transition Academy (FVTA). The current cost for a full year of tuition at FVTA is \$54,313. For fiscal year 2022, the district had fourteen (14) resident students enrolled at the CCTA, and without this program, the district's tuition liability would have been \$760,382 or \$462,145 more than the program's prior year expenditures.

- F. Policy Review/Revision – Second Reading/Adoption
1. Policy 1181 – Naming/Renaming of School Buildings, Components of Buildings, and/or School Grounds
  2. **New** Policy 4118.2 – Exertional Heat Illness Awareness for Intramural and Interscholastic Athletic Events
  3. **New** Policy 4118.31 – Emergency Action Plan for Interscholastic and Intramural Athletic Events
  4. Policy 5141.21 – Administration of Student Medications in the Schools
  5. Policy 5141.25 – Food Allergies, Glycogen Storage Disease and/or Diabetes
  6. Policy 6146 – High School Graduation Requirements

Shipman & Goodwin has recommended two new policies and revisions to policies based on statutory and/or regulatory changes, citation updates and best practices. Revisions to the High School Graduation Requirements policy are being recommended to align with changes that are being made to the Berlin High School Program of Studies for 2023-2024. The Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision met on November 22, 2022, to review the proposed new policies and recommended revisions. A first reading took place at the Board of Education meeting on November 28, 2022. The second reading/adoption took place this evening.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, that the Board adopt the new and revised policies #1181, 4118.2, 4118.31, 5141.21, 5141.25 and 6146, as presented.**

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

## **VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

**At 9:17 p.m., a motion was made by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to adjourn.**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education