

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

August 22, 2022

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis
Melissa Gibbons
Jaymee Miller – Arrived at 7:08 p.m.
Gina Nappi
Timothy Oakes
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D. – Arrived at 6:51 p.m. via phone; departed at 8:20 p.m.
Tracy Sisti - Absent
Matthew Tencza

Also in attendance: Superintendent of Schools Brian J. Benigni; Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno; Finance Director Ashley Dorsey; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; Director of Literacy and Social Studies Laurie Gjerpen; Director of Mathematics and Science Kara Watson; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Assistant Principal of McGee Middle School Tim Chiaverini; Lead Teacher at McGee Middle School Abby Froeb; 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 6:02 p.m. in the Board of Education (“the Board”) meeting room at 238 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. A Moment of Silence was held for two individuals in the Berlin community who recently passed away, Willard Head Custodian, Tony Celella, and Berlin High School student, Chase Anderson.

II. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Committee Reports

Mr. Oakes reported the Finance & Operations Committee met on Friday, August 19, 2022, and discussed the cafeteria pricing; end-of-year financial report; summer maintenance report; and the facilities report.

B. Correspondence to the Board

There was no correspondence 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. Special Meeting of July 18, 2022 – 5:30 p.m.
 2. Special Meeting of July 18, 2022 – 6:00 p.m.

- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending July 31, 2022
- C. Facilities Update

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno provided Board members with a Facilities Update.

- D. Request for Leave of Absence – Paraprofessional – Willard School

Monica Lagana, paraprofessional at Emma Hart Willard School, requested an unpaid leave of absence, for the birth of a child and childrearing purposes, for the 2022-2023 school year.

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

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis

V. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Superintendent’s Report: District’s Readiness for the Opening of School

Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni reported the district is ready for the opening of school on August 25, 2022. Superintendent Benigni stated the last certified teaching position was filled on Sunday; however, there are currently eight paraprofessional positions the district has not been able to fill. Superintendent Benigni acknowledged the outstanding job Mr. Cugno has done monitoring the custodians and putting head custodians in place. Superintendent Benigni stated the high school hosted the State Department of Education Commissioners Back-to-School meeting, and the compliments were numerous on how nice the high school looked and how clean it is kept. Superintendent Benigni stated the buildings overall, across the district, look great. Superintendent Benigni stated the YMCA Daycare Project at Hubbard Elementary School is expected to reach substantial completion by next week, and the YMCA Daycare Project at McGee Middle School is expected to reach substantial completion within the next two weeks.

- B. Staffing Update

Superintendent Benigni presented the staffing update during his report on the district’s readiness for the opening of school. Superintendent Benigni stated the convocation was held today, and it was wonderful to see all the staff.

- C. Final Financial Report – 2021-2022 Fiscal Year

Director of Finance Ashley Dorsey provided a final report for the 2021-2022 fiscal year. Ms. Dorsey stated the General Fund bore the burden of inflation, discrepancies in the supply chain and unexpected increases in utilities. Ms. Dorsey stated she issued a budget freeze in the third quarter, suspending nonessential spending in all departments and buildings. Desired projects and purchases had to be put on hold.

Ms. Dorsey stated benefit expenditures were less due to the unemployment credit carried over from the previous fiscal year as well as savings in the pension account; savings were seen in the Transportation Account due to no longer needing a Type 3 lift bus, a reduced rate for bus monitors and a reduction in the number of student days; savings were seen in the Tuition Account as the district received more Excess Cost Funds than anticipated; and savings were reallocated to the Certified Salaries Account to offset the negative balance the district carried throughout most of the year.

Ms. Dorsey stated funds were used from Contracted Services to prepay software systems cut from the current year's budget and money was also transferred to the Equipment Account to purchase technology for the computer labs in the middle and high schools, furniture for the middle school and custodial equipment.

Ms. Dorsey stated savings were also transferred to All Other Expenditures to resurface the gym floors in all the school buildings, clean the ductwork in the Griswold gymnasium and for minor updates to facilities throughout the district.

Ms. Dorsey stated the General Fund closed with an uncommitted balance of \$2,401.69 for final adjustments.

D. School Lunch Pricing

The district will receive \$257,041.12 in School Meals Assistance Revenue for Transition (SMART) Funds from the Connecticut Department of Education to continue provisions of school meals at no cost to students for as long as possible in the 2022-23 school year. Superintendent Benigni stated, at this time, the district anticipates the SMART funding will be exhausted by the end of the calendar year, December 31, 2022. Upon the return of students from Winter Break on Tuesday, January 3, 2023, school meals will transition back to paid programming for the remainder of the school year, and students will have to qualify for free and reduced lunch as they have in the past. A motion is needed to maintain the current pricing for meals for the 2022-23 school year.

Finance Director Ashley Dorsey provided Board members with the historical cafeteria breakfast pricing and lunch pricing for school years 2017-2018 through 2022-2023 at the high school, middle school and elementary schools, noting the prices have remained the same. Ms. Dorsey also provided the SMART funding for the breakfast category and lunch category. Ms. Dorsey stated the district is seeing a trend in the free and reduced population with 23.1% of the student population receiving free and reduced funding, a 6% increase from the 2018-2019 school year. Ms. Dorsey stated the duration of the SMART funding is estimated to be 71 days. Superintendent Benigni stated, in the event the SMART funding is exhausted, prior to the start of Winter Break, the district will fund lunches for students up until the Winter Break. Superintendent Benigni stated the Cafeteria Account will be used, if needed, for that short time period to fund the lunches.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to maintain the current pricing for meals for the 2022-23 school year as follows: Breakfast – BHS and McGee – \$2.00

and elementary schools – \$1.55; Lunch – BHS – \$3.40, McGee – \$3.10, elementary schools – \$2.80, and adult lunches – \$4.50.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis

E. Vision of the Graduate Presentation

For the past few years, the district has been creating a guiding document to be used through grades PreK-12. Directors of Curriculum Kara Watson and Laurie Gjerpen provided a slideshow presentation, which included the history of the vision of the graduate development, beginning in the fall of 2018 when NEASC visited the Berlin High School; steps completed thus far to bring the district work into tighter alignment for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years; example of continuum; next steps to bring the district work into tighter alignment for the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years; and selected recommendations from the NEASC visit. They also shared the Mission, Core Values and Beliefs about Learning. The development of these documents was, in part, in response to recommendations from the NEASC visit at the Berlin High School.

In response to Superintendent Benigni's request, Ms. Gjerpen discussed the revised McGee report card, which will align with the Vision of the Graduate and identified values.

In response to Mr. Salina's question will this guiding document be submitted to NEASC, Ms. Gjerpen stated yes, the document, as it is now, will be sent to NEASC, and they constantly revisit and follow up with different pieces.

F. Superintendent's Evaluation and Contract

At 6:36 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, to go into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter, inviting the Superintendent with the Board.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis

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

At 6:51 p.m. Ms. Sassu joined executive session via telephone.

At 7:08 p.m. Ms. Miller joined executive session in person.

At 8:20 p.m. Ms. Sassu departed executive session.

At 8:26 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:26 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

Respectfully submitted,
Julia Dennis, President, Berlin Board of Education