

# **BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**December 11, 2023**

## **MINUTES**

### **REGULAR MEETING**

Attendance: Julia Dennis  
Melissa Gibbons  
Brian DeLude  
Jennifer Jurgen  
Jaymee Miller  
Gina Nappi  
Adam Salina  
Tracy Sisti  
Peter Zarabozo – Arrived at 6:21 p.m.  
Student Representatives: Ian Saunders  
Anousha Hashim

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 Katie Amenta; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Principal of Griswold School Jonathan Campbell; Principal of Willard School Megan Sirois; and Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza.

#### **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. 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. Singers Caroline Benoit, Robin Crisler, Max Ding, Nathaniel Elmani, Glenn Fearn, Addison Guarino, Austin Lauria, Dana Metcalf, Thomas Morisse-Corsetti, Elyse Niemic, Meghan Snyder, and Ryan Tang performed at tonight’s meeting.

#### **III. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD**

A. Report of Student Representatives

Mr. Saunders provided an update for the Upbeat Program, highlighting that students have completed over 2,000 hours of community service. Mr. Saunders reported the spring musical is underway, and this year the Berlin High School Theater Department will perform a rendition of *The Addams Family*; the Semester 1 Capstone Exhibition will take place at Berlin High School on January 10, 2024; and this past week, Berlin High School unveiled its brand new, full size turf football field.

Miss Hashim reported the annual Winter Band/Chorus Pops Concert will be held on Friday, December 15, 2023, and the day before the high school will host a workshop with current eighth grade musicians to highlight the music program. Miss Hashim provided a winter sports season update and wished the best of luck to all teams. Ms. Hashim reported Red Sea Block students have been tasked with designing their

room doors according to their grade level colors and throughout the month of December, the Berlin High School Writing Center will host a book drive.

B. Committee Reports

Ms. Miller reported the Curriculum Committee met prior to tonight's meeting to discuss the District's Continuous Improvement Plan, which appears later in the agenda.

Mr. Salina reported the Finance & Operations Committee met this morning for a preliminary 2024-2025 budget discussion.

C. Committee Assignments for 2023-2024

The Curriculum Committee will consist of Board members Jaymee Miller (Chair), Gina Nappi and Brian DeLude.

The Community Engagement Committee will consist of Board members Tracy Sisti (Chair), Melissa Gibbons and Jennifer Jorgen.

The Finance & Operations Committee will consist of Board members Peter Zarabozo (Chair), Adam Salina and Julia Dennis.

D. CREC Report

There was no CREC Report this evening.

E. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared correspondences received from Susan Cameron and Carol and Tracy Paskiewicz.

**IV. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

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

**V. PERSONNEL – RETIREMENT**

Teacher of Business/Capstone – Berlin High School

Laurie Nelson, teacher of Business/Capstone at Berlin High School, submitted her letter of intent to retire at the end of the 2023-2024 school year.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Gibbons, that the Board accept the retirement of Laurie Nelson, teacher of Business/Capstone at Berlin High School, effective June 30, 2024. Also to thank her for the 29 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: 9:0; including President Dennis**

**VI. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Berlin High School Program of Studies for 2024-2025**

Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson, and Berlin High School Principal Katie Amenta 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 2024-2025. They highlighted the rationale for changes and responded to any questions from Board members. Board members were provided with an overview of the significant changes made to the Berlin High School Program of Studies and a draft copy, which has been posted in Schoology. The changes were reviewed and discussed by the Curriculum Committee at its meeting on November 27, 2023.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Nappi, to approve the new course offerings and revisions to the Berlin High School Program of Studies for 2024-2025, as presented.**

**FAVOR: ALL**  
**MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis**

**B. Approval of the District Continuous Improvement Plan**

Curriculum Directors Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson presented the District Continuous Improvement Plan for 2023-2024 that district administrators collaborated on and responded to questions from Board members. Board members were provided with a copy of their presentation. Ms. Watson provided background for the District Continuous Improvement Plan and Berlin's mission and core values, beliefs about learning and the Vision of the Graduate. Ms. Gjerpen provided the district's goals, desired outcomes, actions and how progress towards the goal will be measured. The District's Continuous Improvement Plan was reviewed and discussed by the Curriculum Committee at its meeting on December 11, 2023.

**Moved by Ms. Gibbons, seconded by Ms. Miller, to approve the District Continuous Improvement Plan for 2023-2024 as presented.**

**FAVOR: ALL**  
**MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis**

At this time, Item VI.D. Discussion Regarding Admission to Public Schools at or Before Age 5 was moved up in the agenda. Hearing no objection, the Item was addressed.

D. Discussion Regarding Admission to Public Schools at or Before Age 5

Board members continued their discussion, from the last Board meeting, concerning new legislation, beginning July 1, 2024, that children must turn five years old on or before September 1 of the school year in order to be enrolled in kindergarten and that a child who is not five years old on or before September 1 of the school year may be admitted to public school upon written request by the child's parent or guardian to the school principal and after an assessment of the child is conducted to ensure that admitting the child is developmentally appropriate. The Board discussed implementation of this new legislation for the 2024-2025 school year and the idea that if a parent chooses to disregard the district's recommendation or assessment, the Board would allow them to enter kindergarten for this current school year only. For the following school year, parents would not be allowed to override the district's recommendation or assessment.

C. Policy Review/Revision – Second Reading/Adoption

1. Policy 4111.1 – Increasing Educator Diversity Plan
2. Policy 4118.241 – Reports of Suspected Abuse or Neglect of Children
3. Policy 5141.21 – Administration of Student Medications in the Schools
4. **New** Policy 5112 – Admission to the Public Schools at or Before Age Five
5. Policy 6146 – High School Graduation Requirements
6. Policy 5129 – Policy to Improve Completion Rates of the FAFSA
7. Policy 5144.2 – Recess and Play-Based Learning
8. Policy 5141.5 – Suicide Prevention and Intervention
9. Policy 6161.8 – Parental Access to Instructional Material
10. Bylaw 9010 – Construction and Posting of Agenda

Shipman & Goodwin recommended a new policy and revisions to policies and a bylaw based on statutory and/or regulatory changes, citation updates, and best practices. The Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision met on November 27, 2023, to review the proposed new policy and recommended revisions. A first reading took place at the November 27, 2023 Board meeting. The second reading/adoption took place this evening.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Jurgen, that the Board adopt new policy #5112 and revised policies #4111.1, 4118.241, 5141.21, 6146, 5129, 5144.2, 5141.5, 6161.8, and revised Bylaw #9010, as presented.**

Mr. Salina commented he presumes the new policy and revisions to policies and a bylaw is because Shipman & Goodwin made these recommendations based on law and changes in education. Superintendent Benigni stated typically there is legislative changes or the current policies do not reflect changes in legislation; therefore, they need to be updated. Superintendent Benigni provided an abridged summary of the revisions.

**FAVOR: 7**

**MOTION CARRIED: 7:1:1; Board member Zarabozo abstaining and  
Board member Gibbons opposed**

E. Status of Berlin Public Schools Reading Waiver

Superintendent Benigni stated he asked Director of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen to provide a status of the Berlin Public Schools Reading Waiver this evening as this past week the district did receive a response from the Department of Education concerning the status of its Application Requesting a Waiver of the Connecticut Approved K-3 Reading Curriculum Models or Programs.

Ms. Gjerpen provided background for the legislation passed in 2022 concerning a reading program for Kindergarten through Grade 3. Ms. Gjerpen provided some history and the timeline, beginning in February of 2023 when the waiver was submitted through December 1, 2023 when the waiver response “limited” was received; the four results: meeting expectations, partially meets, transitional, and limited; listing of area districts receiving feedback as “limited”; and next steps. Ms. Gjerpen stated, out of the eighty-five districts who submitted a waiver, twenty-five are “limited” and seventeen are “meeting expectations.” Ms. Gjerpen stated the district recently received its Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) scores, which is a composite of Grades 3 through 8, and Berlin is ranked fourth out of twenty-six towns in its DRG. Ms. Gjerpen stated she has been working with colleagues in other districts to compare results and look at next steps; she has a meeting planned with Charles Hewes, Deputy Commissioner for Academics and Innovation; the Right to Read Grant is due December 31, 2023, which provides \$93,000 over two years; she is arranging a meeting with local legislators, perhaps in conjunction with Southington; and the district is to have partial implementation in 2024-2025 with full implementation in 2025-2026. Ms. Gjerpen stated a new program implementation would cost at least \$500,000.

**VII. CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Approval of Minutes
  - 1. Regular Meeting of November 27, 2023
  - 2. Special Meeting of November 27, 2023
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending November 30, 2023
- C. Facilities Update

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

- D. Overnight Field Trip Request – McGee School – Washington, DC – May 29-31, 2024

McGee School Principal Salvatore Urso requested permission for Grade 8 students to travel to Washington, DC, on May 29-31, 2024. This annual trip is designed for students to visit sites of

historical, cultural, and civic importance in order to deepen their knowledge of those studied and researched in Grade 8 history.

**Moved by Ms. Gibbons, seconded by Mr. Zarabozo, to approve the consent agenda as presented.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis**

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

**At 8:00 p.m., a motion was made by Ms. Miller, seconded by Mr. Zarabozo, to adjourn.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Dennis**

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education