

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

October 15, 2019

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Richard Aroian
Julia Dennis
Jake Fisher
Jaymee Miller - Absent
Timothy Oakes
Adam Salina - Absent
Kari Sassu, Ph.D. - Absent
Tracy Sisti
Matthew Tencza
Student Representatives: Jenna Smalley
Ryan McGowan

Also in attendance: Superintendent of Schools Brian J. Benigni; Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk; Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Director of Literacy and Social Studies Laurie Gjerpen; Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Principal of Griswold School David Kitzman; and Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Tencza called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. STUDENT PRESENTATION – BERLIN HIGH SCHOOL

At Berlin High School, the Virtual Reality Experience allows teachers and students to reimagine learning. Creativity, out-of-the-box thinking, and new possibilities expand curriculum beyond traditional models. Courses in art, science, social studies, and math departments have incorporated virtual reality in lessons and there are plans to develop this further this year. Tech xPerts have helped set up the equipment tonight and some of the Calculus students walked through how they have used virtual reality recently in their learning. Student presenters were: Ryan Hunt, Matt Uryga and Alex “AJ” Yeung (Calculus students) and Gabby Foster, Marek Grabowski and Marina Vozvyshayeva (Tech xPert students).

III. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Mr. McGowan reported tomorrow freshman, sophomore and junior students will be taking the PSAT and for seniors, not having to take the PSAT, there will be optional post-secondary planning; on October 25 at 7:00 p.m. the annual cabaret performance and fundraiser will be held, which is a major fundraiser for the choral and theater programs; recently, the creative writing and theater classes worked together on poetry performance; and the fall play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will be held on November 8 and 9.

Ms. Smalley reported, on October 21, a college fair will be held with 110 representatives from two-year, four-year and technical schools, along with military representatives; on October 22, Jake Halpern, a Pulitzer winning author, will speak to creative writing and business students; spirit week will

be held October 28 through November 1; the annual color wars are underway; the homecoming football game is November 1; the homecoming dance is November 2; and the following week, Berlin High School is organizing a fundraiser for the Friendship Center and will be collecting hygiene products.

B. Committee Reports

Ms. Dennis requested if any Board member has any ideas they would like to write about in the weekly column now would be a good time to share with the Board.

Superintendent Benigni reported the Board of Education, at this point, received two Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) awards, one for the weekly column and the other for the Superintendent's update that comes out every other month. Superintendent Benigni reported he should know, within the next couple of weeks, if the Board will receive the CABE Exemplary Board Leadership Award.

C. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared thank you notes received from the family of George Synnott; the family of John Carras; and Deb Peate.

IV. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Mike Urranaga, 1075 Orchard Road, Berlin, Connecticut addressed the Board concerning the Mayor's attendance at recent PTO meetings as the belief of many parents was he was in attendance to campaign.

Mr. Tencza commented the intent of the request, by the Mayor, was if it was okay to attend the PTO meetings. The school Board and the administration do not govern the PTOs and what happens at the meetings is outside of their control; however, as a non-partisan Board, politics should be kept out of the school system.

Ms. Sisti commented that, as a PTO President, it was a very difficult situation as the Mayor has every right to come to the meetings and speak about what is happening in the town and school district. Ms. Sisti reported she did speak with other PTO presidents, and they did not want any debate as that is not allowed in the schools. This was a tough call and was not made easily; however, the Mayor, regardless of what side he is on or the opinions of him, is welcome to visit the schools.

V. PERSONNEL

Retirements

1. Catherine M. McGee School – Teacher of STEAM

Superintendent Benigni presented Janice Carpenter's notice of intent to retire as teacher of STEAM at McGee School at the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

Moved by Ms. Dennis, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to accept the retirement of Janice Carpenter, teacher of STEAM at Catherine M. McGee School, effective June 30,

2020. Also to thank her for the 14 years of service she has provided to the youth of Berlin and to wish her good health and happiness in her retirement years.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Tencza

2. Catherine M. McGee School – Teacher of Social Studies

Superintendent Benigni presented Suzanne McCabe’s notice of intent to retire as teacher of social studies at McGee School at the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

Moved by Ms. Dennis, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to accept the retirement of Suzanne McCabe, teacher of social studies at Catherine M. McGee School, effective June 30, 2020. Also to thank her for the twenty-six years of service she has provided to the youth of Berlin and to wish her good health and happiness in her retirement years.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Tencza

3. Berlin High School – Teacher of Mathematics

Superintendent Benigni presented Eileen Thurston’s notice of intent to retire as teacher of mathematics at Berlin High School at the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

Moved by Mr. Aroian, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to accept the retirement of Eileen Thurston, teacher of mathematics at Berlin High School, effective June 30, 2020. Also to thank her for the 20 years of service she has provided to the youth of Berlin and to wish her good health and happiness in her retirement years.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Tencza

VI. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes

1. Regular Meeting of September 9, 2019

2. Special Meeting of September 23, 2019

B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending September 30, 2019

C. Overnight Field Trip Request – Catherine M. McGee School – Washington, DC – June 2-5, 2020

McGee School Principal Salvatore Urso requested permission for Grade 8 students to travel to Washington, DC, on June 2-5, 2020. 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.

Superintendent Benigni noted the McGee School overnight field trip to Washington, DC, in the past, typically occurred during the first week of April.

D. Request for Leave of Absence – Berlin High School – Teacher of Science

Sarah Grillo, teacher of science at Berlin High School, requested an unpaid leave of absence to begin immediately after her maternity leave through January 1, 2020.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Ms. Dennis, to approve the consent agenda as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Tencza

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Facilities Related Updates

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported the BLAST classroom at McGee is progressing well and on track to be completed by the end of October; the wellness room at McGee received new equipment and arrangements have been made for new flooring and pads to be installed; and from the third round of the security grant, Mr. Cugno anticipates the installation of all cameras at Griswold School.

B. Official 2019-2020 District Enrollment Report

Superintendent Benigni highlighted the district enrollment as of October 1, 2019, which was included in the Board's packet of material. School districts are required each year to report their October 1 enrollment figures to the Connecticut State Department of Education. Superintendent Benigni reported enrollment as of October 1, 2019 is 2,735 students, a decrease of 46 students from last year and, included in the enrollment, as of October 1, 2019, are students in the Open Choice Program. Superintendent Benigni noted the average class size, at the elementary schools, is 20 students. Superintendent Benigni reported, looking back at prior years, in 2010, there were 3,123 students enrolled, a decline of 400 students over the past 10 years. Last year, there was a gain of 6 students, which was based on the additional Open Choice Program students. According to the Prowda report, it appears enrollment will level off over the next years, maintaining 2,700 students in the district.

C. Approval of the District Continuous Improvement Plan 2019-2020

Assistant Superintendent Erin McGurk provided a presentation on the progress and actions taken for last year's plan and also presented a draft of the District Continuous Improvement Plan for 2019-2020. Action is needed for approval of the plan, a copy of which was provided to Board members.

Moved by Mr. Aroian, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to approve the District Continuous Improvement Plan 2019-2020 as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Tencza

D. Update on Capital and Budget

Mr. Cugno reported the process for developing the budget for fiscal year 2021 has begun, and he anticipates having a draft budget by the end of November.

Mr. Cugno provided Board members with a handout concerning the Town of Berlin's Capital Policy. There will be a Capital Management Leadership Group, consisting of the Town Manager, Director of Public Works, Finance Director and Board of Education Director of Business Operations. The Committee will include representatives from Public Works, Public Grounds, Public Buildings, Highway, Board of Education, Technology, Police Department, Fire Department, Town Garage, Purchasing and Accounting. Only infrastructure, acquisitions or construction with an estimated cost of \$25,000 or more and a useful life of at least five years will be included in the Capital Plan. Anything not meeting this criteria will be included in the Operating Budget.

Mr. Cugno reported current projects that involve the use of Capital funds include facility updates, lighting systems at McGee and Hubbard Schools; science labs at the high school; television studio at McGee; flooring, carpeting and floor tiles at all the schools; millwork for the office configuration because of the vestibules; renovations to the media center at Hubbard School; upgrades in all the bathrooms at the elementary schools; cameras at Griswold School; emergency notification systems; radio systems the security department has requested; and two new school vans. These requests total \$1.7 million, approximately 11% of what has been requested by all other departments. The entire requests total \$15.8 million.

E. Policy Review/Revision

1. New Policy #0100 – BOE Mission Statement/Purpose – First Reading

At the September 23, 2019 special meeting, the Board of Education Mission Statement/Purpose was revised and should be adopted as policy. Since this is a first reading, no action is required; the second reading/adoption will take place at the November 25 Board meeting.

2. Amendment to Bylaw #9001 – Committees – First Reading

At the September 23, 2019 special meeting, the Board discussed making changes to Bylaw #9001 - Committees. Board members were provided with a copy the Bylaw showing the changes that were

made. Since this is a first reading, no action is required; the second reading/adoption will take place at the November 25 Board meeting.

F. Venues for BOE Meetings – Discussion

Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni led a discussion regarding future Board of Education meetings being held at each school versus the Board of Education meeting room. The discussion focused on the value added compared to the logistical imposition that is created by relocating the meeting. Board members were provided with a chart of anticipated agenda items by month showing meetings currently scheduled to be held in a location other than the Board of Education Meeting Room highlighted in green. Building Principals provided input on the value and any imposition that is created by having the meetings within the schools. The Board will continue holding Board meetings within the schools for this year and will include a night where they tour each school or will hold their workshop meetings at the schools and have a tour beforehand.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

At 7:41 p.m., a motion was made by Ms. Dennis, seconded by Ms. Sisti, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Tencza

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew Tencza, President, Berlin Board of Education