

**BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**February 24, 2020**  
**MINUTES**  
**REGULAR MEETING**

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

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; Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Principal of Griswold School David Kitman; Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza; and Principal of Willard School Megan Sirois.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Aroian called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m. in the Board of Education (“the Board”) meeting room at 238 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**II. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

Nothing to report.

**III. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Presentation of the Bonnie B. Carney Communications Award of Excellence**

Becky Tyrrell, from CABE’s Board of Directors, presented the Bonnie B. Carney Communications Award of Excellence to the Board for the monthly video reports and the Superintendent’s Update (newsletter). The Board’s winning entries were showcased at the CABE/CAPSS Convention in November.

**B. Open Choice Program Participation**

Superintendent Brian J. Benigni reported on the current number of Open Choice Program (CHOICE) students in the Berlin schools and presented a recommendation to the Board regarding the level of participation for the 2020-2021 school year.

Prior to Superintendent Benigni’s report, Assistant Superintendent Erin McGurk shared a focus group video in which students shared their favorite class; favorite part of attending Berlin schools; an experience they will always remember; most challenging aspect of being a CHOICE student; advice they would give a new student entering the Berlin district; and their plans for the future.

Superintendent Benigni provided Board members with a document reflecting, by grade, his recommended number of CHOICE students for 2020-2021. Superintendent Benigni reported the district currently has one hundred sixteen (116) CHOICE students, and the projected maintained seats for 2020-2021 are one hundred nine (109). Superintendent Benigni recommended the district accommodate an additional seventeen (17) students for the 2020-2021 school year, and he provided the Board with a breakdown of his recommendation for placement of these students within grade kindergarten (9); grade 1 (5); grade 3 (1); grade 7 at McGee (1); and Grade 8 at McGee (1). Superintendent Benigni indicated the grade 3 student is a sibling of an applicant for a kindergarten seat; the grade 7 student is a sibling of an applicant for a grade 1 seat; and the grade 8 student is a sibling of a current CHOICE student in the district.

**Moved by Mr. Tencza, seconded by Mr. Salina, to approve the superintendent's recommendation regarding the level of participation in the Open Choice Program for the 2020-2021 school year as presented.**

In response to Mr. Salina's question why he is recommending five (5) seats at the grade 1 level, Superintendent Benigni responded the numbers allow, and the district is also able to choose which elementary school the student attends.

Dr. Sassu commented she hopes the community recognizes they, as well as Berlin students, are enriched by the CHOICE students' presence. She believes the points the students politely made in the focus group video should be given more attention as they are fair ones in enriching the understanding of diversity in the schools and the community.

Ms. Dennis indicated that, while campaigning in 2018 and listening to citizens, people were concerned with the issues that come up with CHOICE students. In response to Ms. Dennis's question will there be issues that the district's resources will not be able to address by offering these seventeen (17) additional seats, Superintendent Benigni responded no because the seats being offered are at the kindergarten and grade 1 level.

Ms. Sisti commented, in her opinion, this is a difficult motion as the public is uninformed and parents have shared personal experience their children have had that were not always positive.

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

#### C. Discussion of Berlin High School Renovation Project Close Out and Next Steps

Mr. Salina reported he has spoken with the Town Manager concerning the hiring of a third party firm that is independent from anyone who has done work on the high school, the Public Building Commission and Board of Education to investigate the ductwork and report their findings and recommendations. A follow-up conference with the Town Manager, representatives from the Public Building Commission, Board of Education, Board of Finance and Mayor Mark Kaczynski will take place in the next day or two.

Mr. Tencza encouraged the Board to move as soon as possible on the hiring of the third party firm to complete the investigation of the ductwork. Mr. Salina anticipates having someone selected and a report in progress by the next Board meeting.

D. Personnel Item

**At 7:06 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Tencza, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to enter into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter and to invite Superintendent Benigni.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

In attendance for Executive Session were Board members Aroian, Dennis, Maloney, Miller, Oakes, Salina, Sassu, Sisti and Tencza. In addition, Superintendent Benigni was present.

At 7:41 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

**IV. BOARD WORKSHOP**

Review Board Goals and Core Values

The Board reviewed the Board Goals and Core Values noted in the Board of Education Handbook for possible incorporation with the core values adopted in Policy 0100 – Mission Statement/Purpose. With regard to Board Goals, each committee will establish an objective/short term goal it wants to accomplish by the end of the school year. At the next workshop, the Board will review the Core Values currently stated in the Board Handbook to see if they want to make any changes or still be guided by the principles as stated. Mr. Aroian will reach out to neighboring districts to see if they can add any additional insight.

**V. ADJOURNMENT**

**At 7:57 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to adjourn.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Dennis, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education