

**BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**March 9, 2020**

**MINUTES**

**REGULAR MEETING**

Attendance: Richard Aroian  
Julia Dennis  
Mary Ellen Maloney – Arrived at 7:20 p.m.  
Jaymee Miller – Absent  
Timothy Oakes  
Adam Salina  
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.  
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 Griswold School David Kitzman; 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 6:04 p.m. in the Mary E. Griswold Gymnasium at 133 Heather Lane, Berlin, CT. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**II. STUDENT PRESENTATION – MARY E. GRISWOLD SCHOOL**

Teachers Lisa Wasylean, Michelle Wade and Lisa Turgeon, along with their students Grace Alger, Carter Lavoie, Adrian Grabek and Elaina Markowski, presented how Flipgrid technology is used in the classroom to communicate, teach science, create book trailers, and progress to student-led parent conferences. Board members participated in using Flipgrid and recorded their responses to the question, when you were a student how you would have liked Flipgrid and why.

**III. SPECIAL RECOGNITION**

Board Member Appreciation

The month of March is Connecticut Board of Education Member Appreciation month. Superintendent Brian Benigni thanked Board members for the time and effort they devote to Board business during the course of the year.

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

A. Report of Student Representatives

Mr. McGowan reported on the performances of *Les Miserables* this past weekend and noted the cast received Flipgrid communications from Griswold students thanking the cast for the preview of the play on Wednesday; the student council blood drive was held today; the Upbeat peer leadership weekend at Camp Woodstock will be held this weekend; all juniors will take the SAT test on March 25, 2020; the

unified theater production *Day in the Parks* will be held on March 20, 2020; and the unified friends prom will be held on April 3, 2020.

Miss Smalley provided winter sports highlights for boys swimming and diving; girls basketball; girls indoor track; wrestling; cheerleading; and ice hockey. Miss Smalley reported the National Honor Society will host Pajama Day to support Go-Baby-Go on March 19, 2020; and the Mr. BHS Contest, to benefit the All Night Graduation Party, will be held on March 29, 2020.

#### B. Committee Reports

Dr. Sassu reported the Curriculum Committee met prior to tonight's meeting and discussed the proposed 2021-2022 school calendar, which will be discussed further tonight; potential changes for grading practices; a curriculum issue with regard to mathematics in grades 6 through 12; and the outcomes and vision for Berlin Learners. The Committee briefly discussed its short-term goal for 2019-2020.

Ms. Dennis reported the Community Engagement Committee met on February 19, 2020 and March 2, 2020, with another meeting scheduled March 17, 2020. The Committee analyzed what was done last budget season to effectively communicate with the community and developed a plan to build upon and improve last season's efforts, which includes topics and dates to submit columns for the *Berlin Citizen* and social media. The Committee has set its short-term goal for 2019-2020 and will hold its first meet and greet on Sunday, April 26, 2020, from 11:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. at Arby's.

Mr. Tencza reported the Finance and Operations Committee met last Wednesday and discussed the results of the joint Board of Education/Board of Finance meeting. In anticipation of a reduction, the Committee asked Superintendent Benigni to begin putting together a list of items he believes would need to be addressed, based on a reduction of \$400,000 to as much as \$700,000. The Committee discussed updating the 2013 study of all school buildings. The Committee's short-term goal for this year, in addition to the budget process, is to put together a long-term improvement and renovation plan for all five school buildings. Going forward, the Committee will meet on Wednesdays, prior to the Board meetings.

#### C. CREC Report

There was no report this evening.

#### D. Correspondence to the Board

There was no correspondence to the Board this evening.

### **V. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

Mr. Jon Peyton, 39 Towne Drive, Berlin, Connecticut addressed the Board concerning his children having to cross Robbins Road in order to get to Towne Drive from the bus today. Mr. Peyton requested the drop off of his children continue with them being dropped off on the right side of the road. Mr. Peyton also commented on the anticipated cuts to the Board's budget.

Mr. Cugno responded Robbins Road is deemed a non-walking road, and he, along with Superintendent Benigni will respond to Mr. Peyton tomorrow.

Mr. John Richards, 239 Hawthorne Drive, Berlin, Connecticut, requested that, when the Board gets to new business in the agenda, that Item C – Budget Update be moved up as he will be attending the Board of Finance workshop at 7:00 p.m. this evening and would like to take, not only Mr. Peyton's comments, any comments from the Board to the workshop. Mr. Richards indicated the intention tonight, at the workshop, is to draw the Finance Director's five year plan in front of the Board of Finance to use as a barometer. Mr. Richards indicated capital, within the proposed budget, is \$895,000, or about one-seventh of what is actually needed. Mr. Richards believes there is no point in having a five year plan if it is not going to be used as a springboard for a ten year capital plan. In the event the five year plan receives strong support, Mr. Richards will inform the Board of Education so the Board can participate in discussions.

## **VI. PERSONNEL**

Retirement – Berlin High School – Teacher of Social Studies

Superintendent Benigni presented John Line's letter of intent to retire as teacher of social studies at Berlin High School at the end of this school year.

**Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, to accept the retirement of John Line, teacher of social studies at Berlin High School, effective June 30, 2020. Also to thank him for the 25 years of service he has provided to the youth of Berlin and to wish him good health and happiness in his retirement years.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

## **VII. CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Approval of Minutes
  - 1. Regular Meeting of February 10, 2020
  - 2. Regular Meeting of February 24, 2020
  - 3. Special Meeting of February 10, 2020
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending February 29, 2020

**Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to approve the consent agenda as presented.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

## **VIII. NEW BUSINESS**

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

C. Budget Update

Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni reported he is awaiting the Board of Finance's cut to the Operating Budget and has looked at potential cuts. The Operating Budget has a 5.36%, \$2.4 million, increase as compared to the 2019-2020 Operating Budget.

Mr. Aroian indicated he was very pleased with the joint Board of Finance/Board of Education meeting the other evening and would appreciate having a Board member attend the Board of Finance workshops to answer questions and be part of the conversation.

A. Facilities Related Updates

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported bids for the McGee gym painting project were received. Painting will begin two days after classes end, and with remaining funds, other necessary work in the gym will be completed. The BLAST classroom has been completed to scope, on time, within budget and looks tremendous, all appliances are installed and additional necessary furniture has been ordered.

B. Proposed School Calendar 2021-2022

Mr. Aroian reported, after a discussion with Dr. McGurk at the Curriculum Committee meeting, prior to approval, the Committee requested answers to a few more questions. The proposed school calendar will go back to the Curriculum Committee subcommittee and, most likely, come before the Board within the month for adoption.

D. Graduation for 2021 and Beyond (Discussion of Survey Results)

The Board continued their discussion to move graduation from a Sunday afternoon to a Friday evening, beginning with the 2021 graduation. The Board reviewed the graduation survey results conducted in early February and discussed sending a survey to students as well. Student representatives and junior students in attendance provided their opinions on the change. The Board discussed moving the graduation to a Saturday and in the event, Friday evening is not available for the 2021 graduation, Saturday will be considered. This item will appear on the next agenda for further discussion and adoption.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT**

Prior to adjournment, Mr. Tencza asked Superintendent Benigni to speak to the Board concerning what is coming from the state relative to the coronavirus and how the district will prepare. Superintendent Benigni reported that, prior to this meeting, he participated in a phone call with elected officials, superintendents, the State Health Department Director, Commissioner of Education and the State Preschool Director. The discussion focused on Westchester County where there are more cases. They are predicting Connecticut will be in a similar position and is just early in the process. Superintendent Benigni reported some of the measures put in place this week are the cleaning of the classrooms, and although all schools are green schools, bleach is now allowed back into the schools as a cleaning agent. All flat surfaces are wiped down every Friday in every classroom and cafeteria with a disinfectant, and starting Thursday, bleach will be used as a cleaning agent. The recommendation is that any meeting,

with over 100 individuals participating, should not take place unless it is academic and needs to take place. This will impact sporting events as well as the Upbeat peer weekend. Dr. McGurk has been working with Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson to put plans in place in the event school is shut down. With the upcoming April vacation, Superintendent Benigni indicated the district cannot restrict individuals from traveling but can advise they do not travel. In the event school is shut down for a two week period or less, the district is not expected to have distance learning; those days would need to be made up during April vacation or at the end of the school year, and according to state statute, would need to conclude by July 1. If school is closed for a prolong time, the district would need to institute some type of distance learning. Superintendent Benigni indicated he has sent one letter to parents, a copy which has been provided to Board members, and he anticipates sending another letter this Friday to provide an update on the cleaning process and the comments of the Governor and Commissioner of Education.

Mr. Tencza reported the comments made by the hockey parents at the February 10, 2020 meeting are now within the Finance and Operations Committee and will appear on the Committee's agenda in the next two meetings.

Mr. Aroian reported Berlin students will display their artwork at the New Britain Museum of American Art April 29, 2020 through May 4, 2020.

**At 7:21 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, to adjourn.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Aroian**

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Dennis, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education