

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

April 27, 2020

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Richard Aroian
Julia Dennis
Mary Ellen Maloney – Arrived at 6:06 p.m.
Jaymee Miller
Timothy Oakes
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti
Matthew Tencza
Student Representatives: Jenna Smalley - Absent
Ryan McGowan – Arrived at 6:11 p.m.

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; Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; 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 virtual meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. A moment of silence was held to recognize Berlin citizens and families suffering during this time with the COVID-19 virus as well as the unfortunate ones that have passed away. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Mr. McGowan reported distance learning has been going well for him. He has more freedom to complete his work, Zoom meetings have been successful, and he is having productive discussions with teachers and classmates. In response to Mr. Aroian's question what is his biggest challenge with distance learning, Mr. McGowan responded not seeing and speaking with people in person.

B. Committee Reports

Mr. Tencza reported the Finance and Operations Committee met last week and reviewed the final budget reductions for the Board's 2020-2021 Operating Budget to reach the 3.2% increase approved by the Town Council; transportation negotiations and the impact on the current budget; end-of-year surplus funds; facilities study; and the Berlin High School hockey program.

C. CREC Report

Ms. Sisti reported the Capital Region Education Council met last Thursday and discussed how districts have come together to support students; getting devices to students that still do not have them; utilizing buses as hot spots in neighborhoods that do not have internet access; issues with Zoom meetings; and legislation.

D. Correspondence to the Board

There was no correspondence this evening.

III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Eric Westman, 4 Edgerly Street, Berlin, Connecticut, inquired as to the transitional programs that exist for incoming sixth graders. Principal Urso stated this morning he met with school counselors and discussed this topic. They discussed having a virtual tour and creating videos. If restrictions are lifted to allow small groups, with social distancing, throughout the summer, there can be opportunities for students to come into the building as well. Principal Eustis reported, she along with Assistant Principals Ventura and Maio, began discussions late last week, and provided restrictions are lifted in August, they discussed opportunities for students to come into the building in addition to what already occurs in August. If necessary, they discussed separating the incoming class into various teams, splitting up the three administrators, pairing the teams with counselors, student ambassadors, Upbeat students and class officers and having small Zoom group meetings in order to talk to students and answer questions.

Principal Souza shared the procedures for incoming Kindergarten students under normal conditions. Principal Souza stated, with the distance learning format, central office has been doing a great job keeping check on perspective kindergarten families and securing vital information needed for registration.

Kathy Albert, 57 Lamentation Drive, Berlin, Connecticut, as a parent of a senior student, requested insight, going forward, for senior events that normally take place during the last weeks of school and graduation. Principal Eustis stated in conversations she has had, students mostly want to preserve prom and graduation. She will be sending a Google survey to senior students this week and setting up focus groups to discuss senior events further. She is also looking for guidance from the Board. There will be a further discussion regarding graduation for 2020 later in the agenda.

Imelda Mongillo, 86 Devonshire Way, Berlin, Connecticut, asked how the Board of Education will ensure enough funds are set aside to replace the potential wear and tear to devices in homes used for distance learning. Superintendent Benigni stated the Finance and Operations Committee discussed putting funds into the two percent account that may be used for technology after July 1. Mr. Tencza stated, with regard to the end of the year surplus, although the Board is in favor of returning funds to the Town, the Board has to set aside enough funds to account for the unexpected. The Board intends to speak with both the Board of Finance and the Town Council.

Ms. Mongillo asked if there are plans, given the distance learning model, for additional instruction at the beginning of the fall semester for students that may have potential learning gaps. Superintendent Benigni stated there have been discussions, and the district recognizes that, in a distance learning format, there may be gaps in learning. There may need to be some review or the curriculum may need to shift at the beginning of the year because the depth and breadth of the material covered may not be the same with the distance learning format. Dr. McGurk stated it is critically important for district leaders to be cautious about the tone and energy set at the beginning of the year as we do not want students to enter a highly pressured, stressful environment. It will be important for students to rebuild connections with the community and regain a sense of getting back into the classroom and routines without overly stressing students trying to catch up or accelerate learning.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes
 - 1. Regular Meeting of March 9, 2020
 - 2. Regular Meeting of March 23, 2020
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending March 31, 2020

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Tencza, to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Aroian

V. NEW BUSINESS

- A. State of the District

Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni reported the closure of school remains until May 20, 2020; CAS-CIAC held a meeting last week, and at this time, the spring season is on hold and will be limited to the month of June with no spring state championship events; at this time the district has distributed over 3,300 meals; over 2,000 technology devices have been distributed; and this week the third phase of distance learning will begin with live instruction at all levels. Superintendent Benigni reported the school calendar remains in place with the last day of school on June 17, 2020 and graduation on June 21, 2020. In the event there is a live graduation, the district will need to look at different locations as Welte Hall is closed. Superintendent Benigni recognized the patience that has been exhibited by students, the community and staff and credited them for allowing the district to move forward.

1. Distance Learning Update

Dr. McGurk shared an overview of recent changes to the district's plan for distance learning as the district begins week six of this model. Dr. McGurk reported distance learning has impacted many of the functions of the school district including registration. Fortunately, starting last year, the Human Resources Department and Business Office began working on an online registration module; however, not all parents have technology access.

Dr. McGurk discussed the changes to the schedules. Dr. McGurk reported each school conducted a parent survey, and the feedback was instrumental in crafting the next phase of the learning plan. Parents wanted more structure and consistency. At the middle school and high school, schedules were created that have specified blocks of time during the day to meet. The high school is essentially following the four day rotation with specified days and times for classes to meet. This allows teachers and students to rely on times they are available to have live instruction without overlapping across periods or causing conflicts for students who have different teachers independently setting up class meeting times. A Wednesday schedule has been created for communication and support, which allows teachers to be available to have one-to-one phone calls or conferences with students and to provide additional support as needed and to allow collaboration time for teachers.

Dr. McGurk reported there have been conversations to allow the devices to stay with students over the summer so students may continue to access online systems for reading and math support. There have been conversations on how students will retrieve their belongings or return items back to school that are still in classrooms and lockers at the high school; and whether classrooms should be broken down to prepare for summer cleaning or if teachers need to leave classrooms set up because school will reconvene for a few weeks until the end of the school year. Dr. McGurk stated she has started to plan ahead.

Dr. McGurk updated the Board on the models that will be used at each level (elementary, middle and high school) for grading during the third trimester or final quarter, which are in alignment with the recommendations from the Connecticut State Department of Education. At the elementary level, teachers have been asked to write narrative comments that reflect growth and progress across the year for each student in their homeroom class. At the middle school level, final grades for trimester three will be three levels: pass with distinction; pass; and the lowest grade will be a distance learning incomplete. The final report cards will show the grades for each of the separate trimesters with a letter grade for trimester 1 and 2. At the high school, the grades that are already in place for the first three quarters stay in place and just quarter four will be impacted. At the high school, there will be three levels: pass with distinction; pass; and fail for students who did not complete work and did not engage in distance learning. In addition, at the high school, each grading level needs to be assigned a numeric value for final grade calculations. Dr. McGurk reviewed the current weighting and the adjustment for this year. The Senior Capstone course continues to be graded as pass/fail and remains a graduation requirement.

Principal Eustis stated, as the grade is calculated into their cumulative average, students can opt for their numerical grade. This is only advantageous if a student's numerical grade is over 93%.

B. Next Generation Accountability Report

Dr. McGurk shared information regarding Berlin's performance as measured by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Accountability Index and responded to the Board's questions. A copy of her presentation was provided to Board members. Dr. McGurk's presentation consisted of the important purposes the accountability system serves; Connecticut Next Generation Accountability System for Districts and Schools; the twelve indicators; Berlin Accountability Index: 2017-2018 to 2018-2019 changes; DRG Comparison; Achievement and graduation rate gaps; accountability index category for each of the elementary schools, McGee School and the Berlin High School; performance index gap for English Language Arts, Math, Science and Graduation; and the efforts to increase the accountability index score at the elementary schools, McGee School and Berlin High School.

C. Status of the Board of Education's Adopted Budget for 2020-2021

Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni reported the Board's Operating Budget for 2020-2021 has a 3.2% increase. The district will retain a 1.00 World Language teacher at the high school, a 1.00 Math Interventionist/Lead Teacher at the middle school, a 1.00 Technology Integration Specialist and Information Technology staff. Superintendent Benigni stated that, in order to maintain these necessary positions and keep the district moving forward, there are significant reductions in equipment and supplies.

D. Non-renewal of Contracts for Non-tenured Staff

Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni recommended the non-renewal of contracts of employment for the following non-tenured staff that were hired for a one-year assignment or as a long-term substitute: Abby Balfore, Christopher Dippolino, Justin Farrell, and Jennifer Sullo.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Ms. Dennis, that the contracts of employment for the following non-tenured teachers not be renewed for the 2020-2021 school year, upon their expiration at the end of the current school year: Abby Balfore, Christopher Dippolino, Justin Farrell, and Jennifer Sullo.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Aroian

E. State Healthy Food Certification Statement for July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021

Section 10-215f of the Connecticut General Statutes requires that all Connecticut public school districts that are eligible to participate in the healthy food certification take action to certify whether all food items sold to students will or will not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published pursuant to Section 10-21e of the Connecticut General Statutes for the period of July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021, and whether to allow food and beverage exemptions.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, that the Berlin Board of Education will participate in the optional Healthy Foods Certification Program, pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, for the 2020-2021 school year, and certify that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards. The Board will exclude from certification food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards, provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. The Board will allow the sale to students of beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the beverages are not

sold from a vending machine or school store. An “event” is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. The “regular school day” is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food/beverage sales.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 9:0; including President Aroian

F. Facilities Related Updates

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported the McGee gym and wellness room painting project is underway with Scholar Painting from Seymour and will be completed before the start of the new school year. The security grant is expected to be completed by the end of the grant period, which is July 30, 2020.

G. Graduation for 2020 and Discussion of Graduation for 2021 and Beyond

The Board had a lengthy discussion regarding graduation for this school year. The Board discussed holding a virtual graduation on June 21 in the event large group restrictions are still in place and having a celebration in July or August. The Board also discussed postponing the live graduation ceremony. Principal Eustis stated a virtual graduation would be a replication of the actual ceremony. Board members shared their thoughts. Superintendent Benigni and Principal Eustis will prepare a survey for parents and students to complete. The Board will discuss the results, continue the discussion and make a decision concerning the 2020 graduation on Monday, May 4, 2020. Principal Eustis will also look to have focus groups with seniors and work with class officers as soon as possible. Discussion of graduation for 2021 and beyond will also be discussed on May 4, 2020.

H. Personnel Item

At 8:07 p.m., a motion was made by Ms. Dennis, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to go into Executive Session and to invite Superintendent Benigni to discuss a personnel matter.

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 8:35 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:35 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