

**BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**September 9, 2019**

**MINUTES**

**REGULAR MEETING**

Attendance: Richard Aroian  
Julia Dennis  
Jake Fisher  
Jaymee Miller  
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 Human Resources Denise Parsons; Supervisor of Special Education – Secondary Cindy Martin; Supervisor of Special Education – Elementary Michelle Zeuschner; 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. Tencza called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. in the Board of Education (“the Board”) meeting room at 238 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

At this time, Mr. Tencza, on behalf of the Board of Education, acknowledged the tragic events involving a Berlin High School staff member and extended condolences to the Carras family. The Board also thanked the Berlin Public Schools’ administration and staff who quickly offered support to the staff and students and the Meriden Public Schools for providing support to the Berlin Public School system.

Mr. Tencza welcomed new student representative Ryan McGowan and returning student representative Jenna Smalley.

**II. STUDENT PRESENTATION – EMMA HART WILLARD SCHOOL**

Strong relationships are paramount to student success. In one of last year’s district book club selections, *Being the Change*, by Sara Ahmed, Ahmed introduces Identity Webs as a way to learn about students and how they define themselves. Here tonight to present their Identity Webs were Willard School’s Grade 5 students: Abby Andros, David Chorzepa, Augusto Rosa DeLeon, Ava Gombotz, Camden Lavoie, Michaela Mordasiewicz, Camden Nardelli and Reagan Zambrello, along with their teachers Mrs. Fritsch, Miss Pesavento, Mrs. Tarver and Mrs. Tibball.

A short recess was taken from 7:17 p.m. until 7:22 p.m.

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

A. Report of Student Representatives

Ms. Smalley reported the school year is off to a good start; registration for Upbeat was last week with almost 300 students signing up, and this evening was Upbeat's first meeting; and last week, in Advisory, students had their summer reading celebration.

Mr. McGowan reported, last Wednesday, Mr. Boyle announced the school musical and fall play performances *Les Miserables* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* respectively. Mr. McGowan reported, this past Saturday, the cross country team did very well with girls placing fifth overall and boys placing sixth overall.

B. Committee Reports

Ms. Dennis reported the Communications Committee met prior to tonight's meeting and discussed the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) Board of Distinction Award, which the Board is on track to receive this year at the CABE conference in November. Throughout the summer, the Committee worked with Superintendent Benigni to make sure certain items were accomplished and achieved. Superintendent Benigni also submitted for two other CABE communication awards. Ms. Dennis encouraged Board members to register for the upcoming CABE conference as it is always a great experience. The Committee also discussed the upcoming September and October columns that will appear in the *Berlin Citizen*, and discussion of the communications policy was tabled for the next meeting.

Mr. Tencza reported the CABE conference is November 15 and 16, and he echoed Ms. Dennis's comments as those Board members who have attended in the past have come back with something new, and it is a good opportunity for the Board to spend time together outside of this formal setting. Mr. Tencza encouraged Board members to participate if their schedules allow.

C. Correspondence to the Board

Mr. Tencza shared with Board members the letter from New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) to Principal Eustis.

**IV. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

Nothing to report.

**V. CONSENT AGENDA**

A. Approval of Minutes – Special Meeting of July 29, 2019

- B. Monthly Budget Report
  - 1. Period ending July 31, 2019
  - 2. Period ending August 31, 2019

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to approve the consent agenda as presented.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

**VI. NEW BUSINESS**

- A. New Staff Orientation 2019

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk reported on the New Staff Orientation Program that took place on August 19-20, 2019. Included in the discussion was a summary of the seminar sessions and feedback from the teachers regarding the orientation and their introduction to the Berlin Public Schools.

- B. Facilities Related Updates – Summer Maintenance/Project Updates – District

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported the security vestibules are substantially completed and operational with punch list items remaining; the football field turf project is completed; the BLAST classroom at McGee is on track to be completed by the end of October; all gym floors have been refinished with the exception of Willard School, which will be completed either during the Christmas or April break; it is anticipated that painting of the entire inside of the McGee gym will be completed during one of the school breaks; the camera and video management system at McGee is completed; the cameras and systems at Willard and Hubbard are substantially completed and operational; the new district wide wireless IT infrastructure is substantially completed and operational; wellness equipment for McGee has been ordered, and the cafeteria tables are all new; and the installation of new telephones at all elementary schools was completed this summer. Mr. Cugno reported he has begun working with facilities, building principals and the Town to put together the Capital Plan for the 2020 – 2021 school year.

Mr. Salina asked Mr. Cugno to comment on where the high school project stands as there was action taken by the Public Building Commission with regard to closeouts and a settlement with Ferguson Electric. Mr. Cugno reported he has not heard formally from the Public Building Commission and hopes to within the next week to learn what the settlement was and what funds remain.

In response to Mr. Salina's question, if, going forward, the Capital Plan talks about or plans to turf the field in the back of the high school, Mr. Cugno responded he has seen that item on one of the lists going forward; however, these plans go out ten years. Mr. Cugno indicated the Capital Leadership Management Committee was formed this year, and the Committee will receive all requests.

Mr. Salina inquired where the project stands as far as funds expended versus what was bonded, what funds are left over and what ability the Board has to utilize those funds. Mr. Cugno responded when

there are funds left over, they can be used for education or athletics for the facility; however that is for the Public Building Commission to discuss.

C. Summer Program Update

Supervisors of Special Education Michelle Zeuschner and Cynthia Martin reported on the ESY program offered to students qualifying for these services. A handout was provided to Board members. Included in the handout was the expanded criteria that must be considered when determining a child's eligibility for the ESY program. Dr. Zeuschner reported the summer program, overall, was very successful. There were new changes with the extended program. The BLAST program started at the middle school this year, which was a big success as students enjoyed being there and enjoyed trying to figure out the middle school, which made the transition to the start of the school year much more comfortable and successful for the students. Dr. Zeuschner reported one hundred twenty-three (123) students were recommended to attend summer school, and a total of one-hundred six (106) students actually attended. Although sixty (60) teachers and paraprofessionals were anticipated, there were fourteen (14) teachers and thirty-four (34) paraprofessionals. Included in the handout was a complete list of the staff. Dr. Zeuschner reported, at the elementary level, BLAST students held a lemonade stand every Thursday afternoon. Students sent out an email to the staff at Willard, and it was nice to see the number of people who attended to see the students. Students also completed vocational jobs around the school.

Ms. Martin reported, at McGee, the high school life skills students worked together with the BLAST students and created a carnival day. They did some cooking together and enjoyed the combination of the two groups together. Ms. Martin reported this year, at the middle school, there were a number of students who struggled with social skills and executive functioning. The school psychologist piloted a program where these students were grouped together, had a daily morning meeting and worked on specific executive functioning goal setting, using a program called Movie Time.

Dr. Zeuschner indicated one of the biggest challenges continues to be the attendance of CHOICE students. Eighteen (18) students were recommended and eleven (11) students attended; however, their attendance was not consistent. There was a lot of trouble with transportation as there was one common pick up and drop off spot in the City for them, which did not work for many of the students.

D. NEASC Report

Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis reviewed the final decennial report prepared by the NEASC visiting team. An electronic copy of the report was sent to Board members. Ms. Eustis's PowerPoint presentation consisted of the purpose of the accreditation visit; standards; Berlin High School statement of core values and beliefs about learning; academic expectations; social and civic expectations; commendations of note; recommendations; and next steps.

E. Discussion on Cyber Security

District Technology Coordinator Craig Szymanski provided Board members with an overview of the measures in place to keep the district secure and to avoid Malware and ransomware.

F. Discussion on Roll Out of Changes to Administrative Regulations Pertaining to Food Allergies

Superintendent Benigni reported it was his intent to communicate the changes to the administrative regulations pertaining to food allergies to parents in July/beginning of August; however as the administration and school nurse looked at the regulations, they brought up some concerns that wheat, milk and eggs could not be in any of the snacks that would be in the classrooms, which eliminated many of the snacks; therefore, it was decided to allow them in the classrooms. The letter went out to parents the night before the start of school. Superintendent Benigni reported he received about five emails to which he responded. The elementary staff had allowable snacks if students did not. Superintendent Benigni stated the first day went well, and he received about five phone calls, not dealing with the snack policy, but with birthday celebrations and the concern of not allowing cupcakes in the schools. Superintendent Benigni believes parents understand the potential harm to students not only from ingestion of the food but the emotional harm to a student that is excluded, and there will need to be time to readjust. Other suggestions for birthday celebrations include activities such as a craft, someone coming into the classroom to read a book and a donation of a game for indoor recess. Superintendent Benigni met with the Willard faculty today to share the regulations and to gather their feedback and will meet with the faculty at Hubbard School and Griswold School in the next few weeks. Superintendent Benigni reported, this past Friday, he made one more update to the regulations to allow snacks containing soy oil and soy lecithin in the classroom.

G. Ratification of Contract – Clerical

**At 8:33 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Ms. Dennis, to enter into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter and to invite the Superintendent and the Director of Human Resources.**

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

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

At 9:09 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

Negotiations with the Nutmeg Independent Public Safety Employees Union – Clerical, were recently completed and a tentative agreement was reached. It is recommended that the Board approve the tentative agreement.

**Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to approve the tentative agreement reached between the Berlin Board of Education and the Nutmeg Independent Public Safety Employees Union – Clerical.**

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

**VII. ADJOURNMENT**

**At 9:10 p.m., a motion was made by Ms. Miller, seconded by Ms. Dennis, to adjourn.**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Kari Sassu, Ph.D., Secretary, Berlin Board of Education