

# BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

July 12, 2021

## MINUTES

### REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis  
Steven Jenkins  
Jaymee Miller - Absent  
Timothy Oakes - Absent  
Mark Pruzin  
Adam Salina - Absent  
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.  
Tracy Sisti  
Stephen Weber

Also in attendance: Superintendent of Schools Brian J. Benigni; Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk; Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno; Finance Director Ashley Dorsey; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; 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; Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza; and Principal of Willard School Megan Sirois.

#### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

#### **II. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD**

##### A. Committee Reports

Ms. Sisti reported the Community Engagement Committee has met twice since the last Board meeting to discuss contacting the *Berlin Citizen* as to why they are no longer running the Committee's columns; next steps for the Facebook Page; and the Board of Education Website. Mr. Pruzin highlighted changes to the website.

Dr. Sassu reported the Curriculum Committee met prior to tonight's meeting to discuss a textbook, proposed for use in the sixth grade, which will appear later in the agenda for adoption.

##### B. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared thank you notes from Roz Stachon; Jennifer Harris; Nancy Cavaliere; Sue Zibell; Kevin Cormack; and Danielle McCorkel.

#### **III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

Barbara Szparkowski, 15 Fairview Place, Berlin, Connecticut; Karol Steczkowski, 15 Fairview Place, Berlin, Connecticut; Kiersten Ostman, 53 Cindy Lane, Berlin, Connecticut; Adam Bryers, 46 Cobblestone Road, Berlin, Connecticut; Abby Valdesi, 41 Elizabeth Road, Berlin, Connecticut; Pam Valdesi, 41 Elizabeth Road, Berlin, Connecticut; Mary Kathryn LaRose, 26 Woodruff Lane, Berlin, Connecticut; Cathryn Madey, 193 Winesap Road, Berlin, Connecticut; Joe Motta, 69 Eastbrook Terrace, Berlin, Connecticut; Alexis Mollica, 845 Kensington Road, Berlin, Connecticut; Nikki Sambitsky, 947 Chamberlain Highway, Berlin, Connecticut; Gabriella Lecnetti, 35 Cobblestone Road, Berlin, Connecticut; Carter Lavoie, 92 Sims Road, Berlin, Connecticut; Jessica Patraw, 420 Lower Lane, Berlin, Connecticut; and Donna Veach, 1218 Highland Road,

Berlin, Connecticut, addressed the Board requesting the Board stop the mandate of mask wearing and allow mask wearing to be optional for all students.

Ms. Dennis also shared emails she received from Julia Arcila, 192 Hudson Street, Berlin, Connecticut; Sylwia Zoltobrzuch, 23 Galpin Lane, Berlin, Connecticut; Ewa Lazuk, 250 Longview Drive, Berlin, Connecticut; Christine Leal, 38 Tanglewood Court, Berlin, Connecticut; Adam Lozis, 44 York Road, Berlin, Connecticut; Pamela Lavery, 126 Wilks Pond Road, Berlin, Connecticut; and a concerned parent also requesting the Board stop the mandate of mask wearing and allow mask wearing to be optional for all for students.

**IV. CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Approval of Minutes – Regular Meeting of June 14, 2021
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period Ending June 30, 2021
- C. Request for Leave of Absence – Griswold School – Teacher of Grade 1

Meghan Gill, teacher of Grade 1 at Mary E. Griswold School, requested an unpaid leave of absence, for childrearing purposes, to begin immediately following her maternity leave through the conclusion of the 2021-2022 school year.

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

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis**

**V. NEW BUSINESS**

- A. Motion to Return Balance of 2020-2021 FY Budget to the Town’s General Fund

Director of Finance Ashley Dorsey indicated that the unaudited balance of the 2020-2021 fiscal year budget is \$400,000. A motion is in order to return this amount to the Town of Berlin General Fund.

**Moved by Mr. Pruzin, seconded by Mr. Jenkins, that the unaudited balance of the 2020-2021 fiscal year budget, in the amount of \$400,000, be returned to the Town of Berlin General Fund.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis**

- B. Approval of the 2021 Reopening Plan

Superintendent Brian Benigni shared the district’s 2021 Reopening Plan draft, based on current/anticipated CSDE and state health department requirements and guidance, a copy which was provided to Board members. Superintendent Benigni stated the district is required to submit its draft to the State prior to the next Board

meeting. The draft Reopening Plan will be posted on the district's website. The plan will be updated, and the Board will vote on the Reopening Plan at the August Board meeting.

**Moved by Mr. Jenkins, seconded by Mr. Weber, to approve the 2021 Reopening Plan as presented by the Superintendent.**

Dr. Sassu questioned if the motion needs to be edited as it is stated above that the 2021 Reopening Plan before the Board is a draft.

**Moved by Mr. Jenkins, seconded by Mr. Weber, to approve the 2021 draft Reopening Plan as presented.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis**

C. Policy Review/Revision

1. Second Reading/Adoption

- a. Policy 5145.5 – Prohibition of Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment (Students)
- b. Policy 4118.112 – Prohibition of Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment in the Workplace (Personnel)

Shipman & Goodwin LLP, provided updates to district policies regarding sex discrimination and sexual harassment. The revisions were reviewed by the Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision at its meeting on June 10, 2021, and a first reading took place at the June 14, 2021 Board meeting. A second reading/adoption of the revised policies took place.

**Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Pruzin, that the Board adopt revised Policy 5145.5 – Prohibition of Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment (Students) and revised Policy 4118.112 – Prohibition of Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment in the Workplace (Personnel), as presented.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

**MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis**

2. First Reading

- a. New Policy 7551 – Naming of Facility – New Construction
- b. New Policy 1181 – Naming/Renaming of School Buildings, Components of Buildings, and/or School Grounds

At the June 14, 2021 Board meeting, it was decided that the Board would move forward with adopting a policy for the naming of facilities and a first reading would take place at the July Board meeting. The new policies have been reviewed by the Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision at its meeting earlier today. Since this is a first reading, no action is required; the second reading/adoption will take place at the August 23 Board meeting.

c. Policy 5141.4 – Reports of Suspected Abuse and/or Sexual Assault Response Policy and Reporting Procedures

This policy is being updated to reflect the current Safe School Climate Specialists on Page 4. The revised policy has been reviewed by the Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision at its meeting earlier today. Since this is a first reading, no action is required; the second reading/adoption will take place at the August 23 Board meeting.

D. Block Scheduling Update and Information

Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis presented an update on the 90 minute block schedule, which was in place for the 2020-21 school year. Her PowerPoint presentation included schedule considerations; the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 Berlin High School bell schedules; feedback provided from senior check-ins, parent coffee, student and faculty surveys, department leader discussions, discussions with Central Office, classroom observations and anecdotal feedback; and reasons for continuing the block schedule.

E. Equity and Social Justice Committee Report

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk presented an overview of the district's equity work that has taken place from 2018-2021. Her PowerPoint presentation included an overview of the trainings provided to staff; the work of the Equity and Social Justice Advisory Committee to date; highlights of the 2018-2019, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years; social justice structure goals; and projected next steps for the upcoming school year.

The Board entered into a lengthy discussion in response to Ms. Dennis's request for clarity of the former Board President's charge to form a committee to look at social justice and equity and whether this Committee functions as a Committee within the district or as a subcommittee of the Board of Education.

Dr. McGurk shared how Equity and Social Justice Committees work in other districts. She stated, in her read of the minutes, the Board formed an Ad-Hoc Committee to develop the charge for the Committee but never took action to formulate the Committee.

With regard to the structure of the Committee, Superintendent Benigni stated if meetings are held virtually, the public has to have access to them, and if meetings are held in person, the meetings need to be posted and the public invited.

Ms. Dennis stated, at the next Board meeting, the Board will decide the structure and whether the Committee functions within the district or as a subcommittee of the Board of Education.

F. Textbook Adoption

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk presented the textbook, *One for the Murphys*, by Lynda Mullaly Hunt and published by Puffin Books, recommended for adoption, to the members of the Board of Education. This textbook will be used in Grade 6. The textbook has been reviewed and recommended for adoption by the Textbook Selection Committee. The Curriculum Committee reviewed the

recommendation at its meeting on July 12, 2021. The recommended textbook is available for viewing by contacting Dr. McGurk.

**Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Jenkins, to adopt the textbook, *One for the Murphys*, by Lynda Mullaly Hunt and published by Puffin Books.**

**FAVOR: ALL**  
**MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis**

G. Bargaining Unit Negotiations

As the contracts have not yet been ratified, there was no Executive Session this evening.

**VI. ADJOURNMENT**

**At 8:32 p.m., a motion was made by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Pruzin, to adjourn.**

**FAVOR: ALL**  
**MOTION CARRIED: 6:0; including President Dennis**

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education