

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

August 25, 2021

MINUTES

SPECIAL MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis
Steven Jenkins
Jaymee Miller
Timothy Oakes
Mark Pruzin
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti - Absent
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 Human Resources Denise Parsons; Director of Mathematics and Science Kara Watson; Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis; Principal of Assistant Principal of Berlin High School Barbara Ventura; Assistant Vice Principal of Berlin High School Katie Amenta; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Assistant Principal of McGee Middle School Tim Chiaverini; Lead Teacher Interventionist of McGee Middle School Karen Despres; 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 6:04 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. A moment of silence was held for Robert Scapellati who recently passed away.

Prior to the start of the meeting, Ms. Dennis commented on the events of Monday's meeting, stating what happened was not acceptable. She stated the business Board members do as a Board of Education is to support the students in Berlin, it is not political, and although people can disagree, it can be done respectfully. She stated as tonight's meeting continues, all need to abide by the mask mandate, Executive Order 13A. Ms. Dennis stated residents speaking during Audience of Citizens will be limited to two minutes, and after the Board hears three people share on one same topic, the Board has the authority to move on.

Ms. Dennis publically acknowledged all faculty and staff for the extra work that was done to make the last school year a success despite all the obstacles and challenges. Ms. Dennis stated faculty and staff completed their third day today, and tomorrow is the first day of school. She stated the Board's goal is to keep schools safe and provide students with the best possible education.

With regards to residents emailing concerns to be read during Audience of Citizen, Ms. Dennis stated that has been pulled as residents can attend the meetings and address the Board as long as they abide by the mandates.

With regards to questions raised regarding Critical Race Theory, Ms. Dennis clarified there is no Critical Race Theory in the curriculum nor has there ever been. Residents can access the district's curriculum on the Berlin Public Schools website.

In terms of the Equity and Social Justice Committee, Ms. Dennis stated this is an agenda item this evening. She stated this Committee is an Advisory Committee, and there have been no changes to the curriculum.

Ms. Dennis stated, at the last Board meeting, the textbook, *One for the Murphys*, was adopted. This textbook has nothing to do with the Equity and Social Justice Committee. It is actually about a child in foster care.

With regards to the Executive Orders, Ms. Dennis stated, as a Board of Education, the Board is obligated to follow the law. Ms. Dennis shared the oath Board members take and stated all other elective officials in town also take a very similar oath to faithfully abide by the laws. Ms. Dennis stated on August 9, the town manager sent out correspondence requiring masks in town buildings.

II. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Committee Reports

Mr. Oakes reported the Finance & Operations Committee met last Thursday to discuss project funding as it relates to the ESSER funds and other federal grant monies and the Berlin Transition Academy.

Mr. Oakes reported the Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision met Monday to discuss new policies as a result of the federal monies the district has received.

B. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared a thank you note received from the Salazar Family.

Ms. Dennis stated she received emails from 12 teachers over the past few days, following Monday's meeting, thanking the Board for prioritizing school safety.

III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Ms. Joanne Angelico-Stetson, 188 Stony Mill Lane, Berlin Connecticut; Sarah Patel, 65 Sbona Road, Berlin, Connecticut; Christopher Barlow, 15 Overhill Drive, Berlin, Connecticut; Evelisa Mayette, 178 Lower Lane, Berlin, Connecticut; Peter Zaraboza on behalf of his wife Kristen, 158 Ellwood Road, Berlin, Connecticut; Jesse Ede, 72 Worthington Point Road, Berlin, Connecticut; and Rachel Rochette, 61 Ellsworth Boulevard, Berlin, Connecticut addressed the Board concerning the Equity and Social Justice Committee. Ms. Rochette also acknowledged her support of the mask mandate in the schools.

Mary Kathryn Larose, 26 Woodruff Lane, Kensington, Connecticut; Tracy Motta, 6 Eastbrook Terrace, Berlin, Connecticut; and Jessica Patraw, 20 Lower Lane, Berlin, Connecticut addressed the Board concerning the mask mandate in the schools.

Jonathan Sweet, 516 Wethersfield Road, Berlin, Connecticut acknowledged his support for the Board of Education and thanked the Board for prioritizing student's safety.

Sam Lomaglio, 78 Hickory Road, Berlin, Connecticut highlighted the work done together with the Berlin Board of Education and Berlin Board of Finance.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes**
 - 1. Regular Meeting of July 12, 2021

2. Special Meeting of July 27, 2021

B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending July 31, 2021

Moved by Mr. Pruzin, seconded by Ms. Miller, to approve the consent agenda as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Superintendent's Report: District's Readiness for the Opening of School

Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni stated the district is ready to open school tomorrow. Last week, the new teacher orientation and administrator retreat was held. The convocation was held Monday. The elementary welcome and freshman welcome have occurred. Superintendent Benigni stated some of the summer projects were not in a position to be completed due to a lack of supplies and manpower from outside contractors. Superintendent Benigni stated although various projects still linger that typically would be done during the summer, as far as the readiness of staff, PPE and schedules, the district is in a great position to open school tomorrow.

Mr. Jenkins recognized the dedicated work of the Berlin Public Works Department as he was witness to their work and efforts at Willard School.

B. Facilities Related Updates

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported on the facilities' projects planned, funded and going forward. Mr. Cugno stated all projects were funded with monies that have been set aside. Mr. Cugno stated the McGee auditorium received new equipment, including for Project Adventure; bids for the lighting upgrades in the McGee Middle School Library/Media Center have been received; the paving of the sidewalks, stairs, loading dock and playground area at Willard School is to be completed by the start of school; the McGee roof top units, which were funded last year, are planned to be completed next summer; monies have been set aside for the classroom storage units at Hubbard School, which are in the design stage; the mental health suite at McGee is in the design stage and is anticipated to be funded by the ESSER grant; and the new band room at Griswold School, also in the design stage, is anticipated to be completed this fall.

Mr. Cugno stated the YMCA daycare is moving forward; the lease for the Transition Academy is complete and renovations are moving forward; and the renovations to the Board of Education meeting room and foyer are complete.

With regard to the Berlin High School, the Town Council approved engaging Gilbane Construction to help with the close out documents.

C. Staffing Update

Superintendent Benigni provided a staffing update. Superintendent Benigni stated the district is fortunate to have 34 new employees, 18 which are new teachers in the district, 10 new paraprofessionals and 2 new part-time

clericals. Superintendent Benigni stated some of the funding for new staff falls under the ESSER grant or one of the grants for staffing, and recognized these grants have a two year window.

D. Final Financial Report – 2020-2021 Fiscal Year

Director of Finance Ashley Dorsey provided a final report on the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Before she began her report, she clarified that the McGee gymnasium was renovated not the auditorium. Ms. Dorsey stated fiscal year 2021 was not without its challenges. The beginning of the school year required many unbudgeted expenses, and fortunately, the district had CHOICE funds to purchase PPE, supplies and equipment to prioritize the health and safety of staff and students. Ms. Dorsey stated the district received multiple grant funds, allowing the district to maintain continuity and safety through extra staffing, technology purchases and other supplies. The pandemic also allowed for substantial savings in athletics, substitutes and transportation, which provided funding for building improvement projects, the lighting renovation at McGee, repaving of Willard, storage units for Hubbard and the repaving of the front entrance and the roof top units at McGee. Ms. Dorsey stated additional savings, relating to Special Education transportation, allowed the district to return \$400,000 to the town. The district ended the year with a balance of \$408,311.05, which includes the \$400,000 returned to the town and \$8,311.05 for final adjustments.

E. Policy Review/Revision

1. First Reading

a. New Policy 3324.1 – Code of Conduct Governing Procurements Under a Federal Award

Federal law requires non-Federal entities, including school districts, that receive Federal funds to develop and implement a written code of conduct covering conflicts of interest and governing the actions of its employees engaged in the selection, award and/or administration of Federally funded contracts. This means that, in all applicable cases, property and/or services purchased with Federal awards, including Connecticut School Nutrition Program funds, must be purchased in accordance with a written code of conduct. Federal law also requires that the school district's code of conduct provide for disciplinary actions to be taken for violating the standards set forth in its code of conduct. This policy complies with 2 C.F.R. § 200.318 and outlines proper practices for procuring property and services under a Federal award with fairness and integrity.

b. Revised Policy 3323 – Purchasing

Shipman & Goodwin LLP recommended revisions to the Purchasing Policy to include language regarding the procurement of property and services under a Federal award and Appendix A – Procurement Standards for the Acquisition of Property or Services Under a Federal Award. Posting legal notices, inviting sealed bids/proposals on the Board's website, was also added to this policy.

These policies have been reviewed by the Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision at its meeting on August 23, 2021. Since this is a first reading, no action is required; the second reading/adoption will take place at the September 13 Board meeting.

2. Second Reading/Adoption

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. The new policies were reviewed by the Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision at its meeting on July 12. A first reading took place at the July 12 Board meeting. The second reading/adoption of the new policies took place.

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

This policy was updated to reflect the current Safe School Climate Specialists on Page 4. The revised policy was reviewed by the Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision at its meeting on July 12. A first reading took place at the July 12 Board meeting. The second reading/adoption of the revised policy took place.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Pruzin, that the Board adopt new Policy 7551 – Naming of Facility – New Construction; new Policy 1181 – Naming/Renaming of School Buildings, Components of Buildings, and/or School Grounds; and revised Policy 5141.4 – Reports of Suspected Abuse and/or Sexual Assault Response Policy and Reporting Procedures as presented.

Mr. Oakes stated, for clarity, the Purchasing Policy and the Code of Conduct Governing Procurements Under a Federal Award Policy were first readings and that is why they are not included in this motion. Those policies will be discussed in September.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

- F. Approval of the 2021-2022 Reopening/Mitigation Plan

Superintendent Brian Benigni shared the updated 2021-2022 Reopening/Mitigation Plan with the Board for approval, a copy which was provided to Board members. Superintendent Benigni stated the need to update the Reopening/Mitigation Plan will change as the numbers change. Superintendent Benigni stated this Plan documents what is necessary and allows parents to see what schools will look like for the opening of school tomorrow. Superintendent Benigni stated the Plan is posted on the school’s website, and a letter was sent home to parents containing a link to the Plan. Superintendent Benigni responded to the Board’s questions concerning mask breaks, how principals will enforce mask breaks class by class and outside classrooms. Principal Souza elaborated on mask breaks at the elementary level.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, to approve the 2021-2022 Reopening/Mitigation Plan as presented.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

- G. Equity and Social Justice Committee – Structure, Function and Next Steps

Ms. Dennis stated at the July 12 Board meeting, it was decided that, at the next Board meeting, the Board would decide the structure of the Equity and Social Justice Committee and whether the Committee functions within the district or as a subcommittee of the Board of Education. Ms. Dennis stated there were several questions brought

up in regards to the structure, function and next steps, and after consulting with Shipman & Goodwin, the Board was made aware and advised that any committee that involves community members is actually a committee of the Board. Ms. Dennis stated, moving forward, the Equity and Social Justice Committee will follow the same structure of any Board subcommittee. Ms. Dennis requested Superintendent Benigni look at the Committee's structure, effectiveness, the positives and negatives that have come out of the meetings, and determine a way to ensure transparency and report back to the Board at its next meeting.

In response to Ms. Dennis's question has the curriculum changed as a result of the Committee, Superintendent Benigni stated there have been no curriculum changes noted; however, it does not mean teachers are not talking about the curriculum. Any changes or updates to the curriculum are always posted in Atlas, which the district has used for the last 16 years, and there is a link on the website that is open to the public.

At 7:25 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes , seconded by Mr. Pruzin, to enter into Executive Session to discuss personnel matters, inviting the Superintendent with us.

**FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis**

In attendance for Executive Session were Board members Dennis, Jenkins, Miller, Oakes, Pruzin, Salina, Sassu, and Weber. Also in attendance was Superintendent Benigni.

At 7:50 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

- H. Ratification of Contracts
 - 1. Food Service Employees

Negotiations with the United Public Service Employees Union (UPSEU), Local 424 – Unit 40 – Food Service Employees, were recently completed and a tentative agreement was reached for the period of July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2024. It is recommended that the Board approve the tentative agreement.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by, Ms. Miller, to approve the tentative agreement reached between the Berlin Board of Education and UPSEU, Local 424 – Unit 40 – Food Service Employees, for the period of July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2024.

**FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis**

- 2. Food Service Supervisors

Negotiations with the United Public Service Employees Union (UPSEU), Local 424 – Unit 57 – Food Service Supervisors, were recently completed and a tentative agreement was reached for the period of July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2024. It is recommended that the Board approve the tentative agreement.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, to approve the tentative agreement reached between the Berlin Board of Education and UPSEU, Local 424 – Unit 57 – Food Service Supervisors, for the period of July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2024.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

3. Paraprofessionals

Negotiations with Local 1303-276 of Council 4, AFSCME, AFL-CIO - Paraprofessionals, were recently completed and a tentative agreement was reached for the period of July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2024. It is recommended that the Board approve the tentative agreement.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, to approve the tentative agreement reached between the Berlin Board of Education and Local 1303-276 of Council 4, AFSCME, AFL-CIO – Paraprofessionals, for the period of July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2024.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

4. Administrators

Negotiations with the Association of Berlin Administrators were recently completed and a tentative agreement was reached for the period of July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2025. It is recommended that the Board approve the tentative agreement.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, to approve the tentative agreement reached between the Berlin Board of Education and the Association of Berlin Administrators, for the period of July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2025.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

VI. ADJOURNMENT

At 7:53 p.m., a motion was made by Ms. Miller, seconded by Mr. Jenkins, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Dennis, President, Berlin Board of Education