

# **BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**January 8, 2024**

## **MINUTES**

### **REGULAR MEETING**

Attendance: Julia Dennis  
Melissa Gibbons  
Brian DeLude  
Jennifer Jurgen  
Jaymee Miller - Absent  
Gina Nappi  
Adam Salina – Absent  
Tracy Sisti – Arrived at 7:13 p.m.  
Peter Zarabozo  
Student Representatives: Ian Saunders  
Anousha Hashim

Also in attendance: Superintendent of Schools Brian J. Benigni; Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno; Finance Director Ashley Dorsey; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; Supervisor of Special Education – Elementary Michelle Zeuschner; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Co-Director of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen; Principal of Berlin High School Katie Amenta; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Principal of Griswold School Jonathan Campbell; Principal of Willard School Megan Sirois; Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza; and Athletic Director and K-12 Physical Education Health Coordinator David Francalangia.

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

##### **A. Pledge of Allegiance**

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. in the Board of Education (“the Board”) meeting room at 238 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

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

##### **A. Report of Student Representatives**

Mr. Saunders reported the Semester One Capstone Exhibition will be held on January 10, 2024, and students will complete midterms and semester 1 finals for the full year and half year classes January 16 through January 19, 2024 with the spring/winter semester beginning on January 19, 2024.

Miss Hashim reported the Berlin High School Unified Theater Program will be hosting their performance on January 26, 2024, and on December 16, 2023, the Berlin High School Mock Trial Team attended their second ever competition, which led them to their first victory, placing them in the top 16 teams in the state and carrying them into the preliminary round on February 2, 2024.

##### **B. Committee Reports**

Mr. DeLude reported the Curriculum Committee met prior to tonight’s meeting and reviewed the three textbooks, which appear later in the agenda for adoption.

##### **C. CREC Report**

There was no report this evening.

D Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared correspondence received from the Salinas.

Ms. Dennis reported she, along with Superintendent Benigni and Ms. Sisti, received an email from William Kirschner regarding transportation for students enrolled in the Pre-K program. Ms. Dennis stated, when she responds, she will include the entire Board.

Add Item to the Agenda

**Moved by Mr. Zarabozo, seconded by Ms. Nappi, that we discuss the letter sent to the Board of Finance and Town Council.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

**III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

No members of the Berlin community addressed the Board this evening.

**IV. PERSONNEL**

Retirement – Richard D. Hubbard School – Cook Manager

Superintendent Benigni presented Dawn Kanaple's notice of intent to retire as cook manager at Richard D. Hubbard School, effective January 1, 2024.

**Moved by Mr. Zarabozo, seconded by Ms. Gibbons, that the Board accept the retirement of Dawn Kanaple, cook manager at Richard D. Hubbard School, effective January 1, 2024. Also to thank her for the 40 years of service she has provided to the youth of Berlin and wish her good health and happiness in her retirement years.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

**V. NEW BUSINESS**

A. Request to Name Band Rooms at Berlin High School and Catherine M. McGee School

Christine Rose submitted a letter, on behalf of registered voters of the town of Berlin, requesting that the Board of Education consider naming the Berlin High School band room in honor of Paul J. Karam and the McGee School band room in honor of Ronald A. Campanario. Petitions with the signatures of 100 registered voters, in accordance with Board Policy 1181, a copy which was provided to Board members, were submitted to initiate action by the Board of Education to select a subcommittee for the purpose of reviewing the proposals. A subcommittee was selected and met on December 11, 2023 to review the proposals. Ms. Dennis stated it is the Committee's recommendation that the Board of Education move forward with naming the Berlin High School band room in honor of Paul J. Karam and the McGee School band room in honor of Ronald A. Campanario.

B. Textbooks Recommended for Adoption

Co-Director of Curriculum and Instruction Laurie Gjerpen presented the following textbooks, recommended for adoption, to the members of the Board of Education:

*Child Development: Early Stages Through Adolescence, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition*, by Celia Anita Decker, and published by Goodheart-Willcox Company. This textbook will replace the current textbook being used in Grades 10-12 in the Child Development course.

*Food, Nutrition and Wellness*, by Roberta Larson Duyff and published by McGraw Hill Education. This textbook will replace the current textbook being used in Grades 9-12 in the Foods & Fitness for Healthy Lifestyle course.

*On Baking: A Textbook of Baking and Pastry Fundamentals, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*, by Sarah B. Labensky, Priscilla A. Martel, and Eddy Van Damme and published by Pearson (2020). This is a new textbook to be used in Grades 9-12 in the Baking and Pastry I and II courses.

These textbooks have been reviewed and recommended for adoption by the Textbook Selection Committee. The Curriculum Committee reviewed the recommendations at its meeting earlier today. The recommended textbooks are available for viewing by contacting Laurie Gjerpen or Kara Watson. The textbook recommendation forms have been posted in Schoology.

**Moved by Mr. Zarabozo, seconded by Ms. Nappi, to adopt the textbooks, *Child Development: Early Stages Through Adolescence, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition*, by Celia Anita Decker, and published by Goodheart-Willcox Company; *Food, Nutrition and Wellness*, by Roberta Larson Duyff and published by McGraw Hill Education; *On Baking: A Textbook of Baking and Pastry Fundamentals, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*, by Sarah B. Labensky, Priscilla A. Martel, and Eddy Van Damme and published by Pearson (2020).**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

C. Discussion Regarding Letters Sent to the Town Council and the Board of Finance

Ms. Dennis stated, for the sake of transparency, this item was added to the Agenda to keep the Board informed and to provide an opportunity to ask questions, if necessary. Ms. Dennis stated on August 23, 2023, she received an email from Board of Finance Chair Sal Bordonaro. Ms. Dennis highlighted portions of that correspondence and stated she responded to Mr. Bordonaro on September 5, 2023, including the Board of Education and entire Board of Finance. Ms. Dennis read out loud her response to enter it into the public record. Ms. Dennis stated this item appears on the Town Council's Agenda tomorrow evening.

## **VI. 2024-2025 SUPERINTENDENT'S PROPOSED BUDGET PRESENTATION**

Superintendent Benigni presented his proposed 2024-2025 budget to the Board and responded to the Board's questions regarding his presentation. The presentation was guided by the budget priorities that were identified by the Board and Administrative Council. Board members were provided with a copy of his presentation.

Superintendent Benigni stated the goals for his proposed 2024-2025 budget are to provide quality education; prepare students for multiple options and opportunities; maintain favorable class sizes and course offerings; consistent support of technology; and commitment to a safe learning environment for all students and staff. Superintendent Benigni stated Berlin's mission is to empower students to be enthusiastic, curious learners and kind compassionate leaders in the community and the world, and the core values are purpose, passion and pride. Superintendent Benigni shared Berlin's Beliefs about Learning and the Vision of the Graduate.

Superintendent Benigni's proposed 2024-2025 budget (\$54,105,092) has an overall increase of 6.39% (\$3,250,021.40). Superintendent Benigni stated the major driver in his proposed budget is certified and non-certified staff, which represents 80.41% of the overall increase. Contractual obligations account for 5.15% of the overall increase; transportation and tuition account for 10.93% of the overall increase; and supplies, equipment, all other account for 3.51% of the overall increase. Superintendent Benigni stated the Special Education Budget accounts for 25.5% of the overall budget.

Superintendent Benigni stated 3.5 FTE new staff were added in 2024 which included a certified math teacher, certified special education teacher, IT Technician and an office assistant (\$293,425). Three positions, previously funded by grants, the Certified Reading Specialist, Certified Math Specialist and Family Communication Specialist are moving into the General Fund (\$265,233). Total staffing changes have an increase of \$177,920. The only new staff being proposed is a 1.00 FTE Certified Science Teacher and a 1.00 FTE elementary teacher.

Administrative Salaries: There is an increase of \$117,347.29 or 3.68%, which is driven by an affiliated contract increase of 2.25% or 4.60% with step; non-affiliated administrators are budgeted at 3%; and increased FTE is the re-categorization of the Lead Teacher to the Dean of Students.

Certified Salaries: There is an increase of \$1,292,733.18 or 5.79%, which is driven by 160 teachers on max step for the 2024-2025 school year, and 105 teachers advance a step for the 2024-2025 school year. This increase also includes one math teacher and one BLAST teacher positions added in FY24; one reading and one math specialist positions previously funded through ARP ESSER; an additional science teacher position for FY25; Department Supervisor Library Media and Technology Integration; and anticipated salary lane changes.

Non-Certified Salaries: There is an increase of \$410,441.94 or 5.10%, which is driven by rate increases for affiliated staff are determined by contract and non-affiliated contracts are budgeted at 3%. This increase also includes an increase to the per diem substitute account; increased funding for custodial overtime; increased hours for EL tutors; additional IT Technician added in FY24; one Family Communication Specialist previously funded through ARP ESSER; and additional seasons for the Unified Sports Program.

Employee Benefits: There is an increase of \$497,195.00 or 6.53%, which is driven by a 10% rate increase for medical insurance set by the Town; rate increase for dental insurance is 0%; and the employer percentage for staff groups has been adjusted to meet the contractual obligation for each group. This increase also includes new staff benefits.

Contracted Services: There is an increase of \$241,135.89 or 11.87%, which is driven by contracted services for professional services for PPS; legal services; transportation for athletics; and operational and educational systems. Most professional services increase three to seven percent annually. This increase also includes the Effective School Solutions Program at Berlin High School and professional development.

Utilities: There is an increase of \$27,107.00 or 5.58%, which is driven by the increase for natural gas and water and sewer. Berlin and Cromwell will split the utility costs for the CCTA program at 50%.

Transportation: There is an increase of \$93,625.00 or 2.80%, which is driven by the contractual increase of 3% for the 2024-2025 school year with New Britain Transportation; the cost of fuel is negotiated annually, and the price per gallon for both diesel and gasoline is expected to increase; increase for vehicle repair and maintenance; and Special Education Transportation is budgeted net of Excess Cost.

Tuition: There is a decrease of \$98,978.00 or 3.85%, which includes anticipated 3% increase for all Special Education outplacements for the 2024-2025 school year and Special Education tuition budgeted net of Excess Cost. Also included are unanticipated Special Education placements for the 2024-2025 school year; tuition cost for Career Pathways and Independent study; and adjustment for House Bill 6941 – Go-Ag and Magnet tuitions (conservatively budgeted at 80% of FY24 cost).

Supplies, Textbooks and Materials: There is an increase of \$238,337.74 or 25.23%. To assist with the rising cost of inflation, building principals and department heads were asked to increase their supply budgets for the 2024-2025 school year. These building budgets have not increased in four years and principals and department leaders have redistributed funds from supplies, equipment, and all other expenditures to best fit the needs of their students and programs for the 2024-2025 school year. This increase also includes textbooks and an increase for custodial supplies and materials.

Equipment: There is an increase of \$373,238.40 or 174.94%, which is driven by student and classroom technology approaching end-of-life and in need of replacement. This increase also includes 1:1 Technology and district technology.

All Other Expenditures: There is an increase of \$57,837.86 or 80.44%, which includes the increase for CABA membership and increase for Berlin High School graduation which is budgeted in the student accountability account for FY24 and will need to be fully funded in the General Fund in FY25.

Superintendent Benigni provided the five year FTE Comparisons; the Hartford Open Choice Enrollment and Funding History; the Open Choice anticipated budget for 2024-2025; budget funding history; Berlin's five year adopted budgets compared to area districts; FY24 Budget Percentage Increase for DRG D; the net current expenditure per pupil DRG D and State Comparison; Preview of Student Achievement Report ELA and Math SBA grades 3-8; Preview of Student Achievement Report Next Generation Science Standards – 11<sup>th</sup> Grade; Preview of Student Achievement Report SAT; state funding; federal funding; elementary, middle and high school enrollment projections; five year mill rate

comparisons; Historical Berlin net current expenditure per pupil wealth rankings; and 2022-2023 Recognitions.

At this time Item E. District-wide Non-Instructional Programs/Athletics was moved up in the Agenda. Hearing no objection, this item was addressed.

E. District-wide Non-Instructional Programs/Athletics

Athletic Director and K-12 Physical Education Health Coordinator David Francalangia presented the Berlin Athletics budget and responded to the Board's questions regarding his presentation. Board members were provided with a copy of his presentation.

Goals: Maintain the current athletic programs in order to meet the individual needs and interests of the students; provide a safe and secure environment for students to do their best on and off the field, while making sure students feel supported emotionally and academically; and continue to support the athletic programs, using a priority system with all coaches.

Operation/Instruction Budget: The overall budget for Berlin High School Athletics has an increase of \$42,723. Transportation has a slight increase of \$3,182, and contracted medical services (trainer) has an increase of \$2,000 for the year.

The overall budget for McGee Athletics is \$6,837. Transportation has a slight increase of \$337. Included in the budget is uniform replacement for boys basketball and cross country.

A. Elementary Principals' Budget Presentations

Principals Sirois, Souza and Campbell presented the Elementary Schools budget presentation. Board members were provided with a copy of their presentation.

Operational Budget: The Operational Budget has a slight increase to account for inflation.

Elementary Staffing: A 1.00 FTE classroom teacher to account for enrollment.

B. Secondary Principals' Budget Presentations

Principal Urso presented the McGee Middle School budget. Board members were provided with a copy of his presentation.

Operational Budget: The Operational Budget has an increase of approximately \$75 per pupil as per pupil expenditure at the middle school was disproportional when compared to elementary school funding.

Staffing: There are no new staffing requests for the 2024-2025 school year.

Principal Amenta presented the Berlin High School budget. Board members were provided with a copy of her presentation.

Operational Budget: The Operational Budget has a slight increase to support online subscriptions, replacements and yearly codes for textbooks and increased graduation costs. All other areas are flat with some areas (Business) having a minimal increase.

Staffing: Principal Amenta is requesting a 1.00 FTE math teacher and a 1.00 FTE science teacher to support class sizes and interventions and a part-time clerical position for the front office to support an increase in bookkeeping responsibilities, attendance, substitute assignments and class coverage.

### C. Curriculum & Instruction Budget Presentation

Co-Director of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen presented the Curriculum and Instruction Budget for 2024-2025. Board members were provided with a copy of her presentation. Ms. Gjerpen stated the purpose of the Curriculum and Instruction Budget is to support curriculum additions, revisions and updates; learning and materials related to new state mandates; purchase of materials for new courses; professional learning for all staff in-district and out-of-district; and software subscriptions for teaching and learning. Ms. Gjerpen highlighted the following areas:

Instructional Supplies: Instructional Supplies include ESOL supplies; classroom support materials, summer reading supplies and books.

Other Professional Services: Other Professional Services include elementary author visits and adult education.

Other Certified Salaries: Other Certified Salaries include curriculum writing projects and teachers as leaders of professional learning.

Teaching and Learning Software: Teaching and Learning Software includes instructional software for the district, all curriculum areas and school libraries. There is a large increase because multiple year contracts are expiring previously funded through the ESSER grants.

In-district Professional Development: In-district Professional Development includes literacy professional development related to state legislation, math, CTE Consultant and consultants for other departments.

Out-of-District Professional Development: Out-of District Professional Development includes registration fees for librarians, teacher leaders, department professional development (music, physical education and art), AP training and PowerSchool training.

Staff Travel: Staff Travel includes district staff that travel throughout the day to different buildings within the district and attend professional development.

Non-Instruction Supplies: Non-Instruction Supplies include supplies for meetings.

Administrative Supplies: Administrative Supplies include materials to support professional development learning and curriculum updates, Art Around Town, District Art Show, Kindergarten Orientation and Welcome and Kindergarten Assessment related to state legislation.

Textbooks: Textbooks include textbooks for new courses, updated AP texts and pilot reading texts related to state legislation.

Tuition: Tuition includes independent study and the CNA course.

Dues & Fees: Dues and Fees include professional organizations.

Field Trips: Field Trips include transition field trips, learning about Berlin and elementary science.

#### D. Special Education Budget Presentation

Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian, along with Supervisor of Special Education – Elementary Dr. Michelle Zeuschner, presented the 2024-2025 Special Education Budget and responded to questions from the Board. Board members were provided with a copy of the presentation.

Ms. Holian stated the purpose of the Special Education Budget is to support the learning and social and emotional needs of students with an Individualized Education Plan from 3 to 22 years old. The Special Education Budget consists of certified and non-certified salaries; instructional supplies; contracted services; equipment; tuition and transportation; Central Connecticut Transition Academy; and the extended school year services (summer school).

Ms. Holian stated the Special Education Budget is 25.5% (\$13,801,486) of the General Fund Budget. Ms. Holian stated as of the October 1, 2023 data, 404 students receive services within district; 21 students receive services in out of district facilities; 8 students attend Magnet or Vo-Ag schools; 3 students receive a service plan; and 3 students are in a hospital, detention facility or homebound.

Ms. Holian shared the Special Education Programs for students with unique needs.

Ms. Holian highlighted the following areas:

Contracted Services: Contracted Services include Effective School Solutions services at Berlin High School and McGee Middle School; outside evaluators; interpreter services; field trips; ESY; nursing services; one on one nursing services; hearing impaired services; Compuclaim services; legal fees; assistive technology services; and PMT training.

Supplies: Occupational therapists, physical therapist, speech/language and special education teachers purchase supplies needed to work with their students. This may include books, fidgets, sensory materials, testing materials, rewards and therapy materials.

Equipment: Includes adaptive seating equipment for students with physical and motor needs.

Special Education Tuitions: Currently there are 20 students attending out-of-district placements, which range from \$79,000 to \$299,279 depending upon placement and tuition ranges from \$18,655 to \$72,054. Ms. Holian stated when the Special Education budget was created, it included two unanticipated tuitions; however, they are no longer unanticipated as the district already has students identified to be out-placed this current school year. Ms. Holian stated currently there are five students currently attending Magnet Schools.



Included in the 2024-2025 Special Education Budget is the BLAST teacher, hired December 1, 2023, and two unanticipated tuitions/transportation.

F. Site & Building

Ms. Dorsey stated, in October 2023, she met with all building principals and the Director of Facilities and discussed building maintenance and desired facility projects. She stated the requests are based on various categories like building fixtures, construction or minor renovation, general site maintenance and building equipment. Projects are vetted collaboratively with the Facilities Department and prioritized based on student needs and safety.

Finance Director Ashley Dorsey reviewed the list of Site and Building requests from each of the schools, Central Office and the Security Department, a copy which was provided to Board members. Ms. Dorsey stated these items are not included in the Superintendent's Proposed Budget.

G. Capital Requests

Finance Director Ashley Dorsey provided Board members with a list of the capital requests from each of the schools and Central Office, totaling \$3,436,017.00. Included in the requests is the renovation and repurpose of the five science classrooms at McGee Middle School (\$3,119,697); Library Media Center renovation at Hubbard School (TBD); the fire suppression systems for network closets at Berlin High School (\$166,320); and student transportation vehicles (\$150,000), which are part of the maintenance cycle.

Ms. Dorsey stated, outside of the priority projects, there are other requests, which include building room numbering system at Berlin High School (\$120,000); school ceiling tile replacement at Hubbard School (\$100,000); and auditorium renovation at McGee (TBD).

H. BOE Overall Review

Ms. Dennis stated a Board workshop is scheduled for Monday, January 22, 2024, to discuss the Superintendent's Proposed Budget. Ms. Dennis requested Board members send any questions to her by January 15, 2024, which she will then forward to Superintendent Benigni, so the Board can have responses on January 22, 2024. Ms. Dennis recommended Board members place the Budget Schedule of Meetings on their calendar.

**VII. CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Approval of Minutes – Regular Meeting of December 11, 2023
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending December 31, 2023
- C. Facilities Update

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno provided a written report, which has been posted in the Board's Schoology folder.

**Moved by Ms. Gibbons, seconded by Ms. Nappi, to approve the consent agenda as presented.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

**At 8:03 p.m., a motion was made by Ms. Gibbons, seconded by Mr. Zarabozo, to adjourn.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education