

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

October 10, 2023

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis
Melissa Gibbons
Jaymee Miller - Absent
Gina Nappi
Adam Salina - Absent
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti
Matthew Tencza
Peter Zarabozo – Arrived at 7:13 p.m.
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; Co-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Principal of Griswold School Jonathan Campbell; Principal of Willard School Megan Sirois; Willard School Dean of Students Danielle Salina and Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. in the in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. STUDENT PRESENTATION – EMMA HART WILLARD SCHOOL

Emma Hart Willard School is so proud of all that has been accomplished thus far in regard to its social-emotional approach to learning. Through the RULER approach, Willard School has created staff and student charters to live by; learned to use the Mood Meter as a way to recognize, understand, label, and express emotions; and have started tapping into how to shift emotions, when needed, to help regulate oneself. These vital skills are helping to grow a more emotionally intelligent community of learners and citizens of the world. Student presenters this evening were: Kindergarten - Charlie Adams, Zunaira (Zuzu) Ali, Stella Cobuzzi, Vincent Mollica, and Elena Thomas; Grade 2 - Jackson Gibbons, Siana Humbles, John Pesce, Vivienne Previti and Lily Primich; and Grade 5 - Allie Bowman, Owen Cassidy, Shannon Cavanagh, Will DeLorenzo, Liam Gruhn and Isabella Wade.

A short recess was taken from 7:21 p.m. until 7:23 p.m.

III. SPECIAL PRESENTATION

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education – Patrice McCarthy, Executive Director and General Counsel

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) Executive Director and General Counsel Patrice McCarthy stated she was here tonight to extend a personal invitation to each member of the Board of Education to become more engaged with CABE and discussed a variety of ways Board members can participate and responded to the Board's questions. She stated Board members can participate in the CABE/CAPSS Convention, Summer Leadership Conference and the New Board

Member Leadership Conference. Ms. McCarthy stated, with the start of COVID, CAFE increased the number of webinars offered, which are recorded and can be archived on the CAFE website, and provide additional opportunities for professional development.

Ms. McCarthy stated, when she looks at Berlin's website, she sees the very impressive work the Board is already doing. She stated the Board's core values and the guiding principles are tremendous, and she has placed them in her folder for examples to use when she works with other Boards of Education.

Ms. McCarthy stated CAFE is a nonprofit organization that has existed for over 100 years and aims to customize its services to Boards of Education. She stated any member of CAFE's senior staff would be happy to do a workshop on issues ranging from Freedom of Information, roles and responsibilities and new Board orientation. She stated CAFE has facilitated goal setting and strategic planning sessions for Boards of Education, which is all part of the benefits of membership. She stated CAFE is also an advocate for Boards of Education at the state and federal level, and Boards have an opportunity to advocate with CAFE through communications with its legislators. CAFE sends out action alerts throughout the legislative session, and there is an opportunity for any interested Board member to participate in CAFE's committee that sets the legislative agenda.

In addition, Ms. McCarthy stated CAFE has initiated a monthly Board Chair check-in, which is a great support, and Board Chairs have found the relationships they have made to be very valuable. Also, CAFE's new policy expert implemented a quarterly Policy Chair check-in, which is another opportunity for Boards of Education to have guidance from CAFE's professional staff and also for Policy Chairs to speak with others concerning the challenges they are facing.

IV. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Mr. Saunders reported during the upcoming spirit week, students will participate in a variety of themes, with the homecoming game on Friday, October 20, 2023, and the homecoming dance on Saturday, October 21, 2023; the Berlin High School music and arts department will be presenting the Cabaret and Choral Revue on Friday, October 13, 2023; the Model UN Club will participate in a field trip to New York City on Thursday, October 19, 2023; and this school year, Berlin High School implemented a new digital system called Smart Pass.

Miss Hashim reported Upbeat students will be hosting their annual October weekend at Camp Jewell on October 14 and 15, 2023. She stated this trip is designed to introduce students and staff to the program and will focus on how to work in a collaborate environment. Miss Hashim reported this year's fall play, *Puffs One Act Play for Young Wizards*, will be performed on November 3 and 4, 2023. Miss Hasham provided a September UpBeat update and reported Berlin High School was recently named to the AP School honor roll for 2023.

B. Committee Reports

Ms. Dennis reported the Finance & Operations Committee met on Friday, September 29, 2023, and discussed the 2024-2025 proposed Capital Equipment and Site and Building Requests; 2024-2025 Budget Priorities; HVAC Educational Specifications for Griswold and Hubbard Schools; and Griswold portable classrooms.

Ms. Dennis reported the Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revisions met on Wednesday, October 4, 2023, and discussed policy review/revision and proposed revisions to the Board Member Handbook, both of which appear later in the agenda.

C. CREC Report

There was no CREC report this evening.

D. Correspondence to the Board

There was no correspondence to the Board this evening.

V. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

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

VI. PERSONNEL

Retirements

1. Teacher of Health, Wellness and Physical Education – Catherine M. McGee School

Janice Zagorski, teacher of health, wellness and physical education at Catherine M. McGee School, has submitted her letter of intent to retire at the end of the 2023-2024 school year.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Tencza, that the Board accept the retirement of Janice Zagorski, teacher of health, wellness and physical education at Catherine M. McGee School, effective June 30, 2024 and also to thank her for the 25 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: 7:0; including President Dennis

2. Occupational Therapist – Catherine M. McGee School, Mary E. Griswold School, and Richard D. Hubbard School

Paula Riley-Friedman, occupational therapist at Catherine M. McGee School, Mary E. Griswold School, and Richard D. Hubbard School, has submitted her letter of intent to retire at the end of the 2023-2024 school year.

Moved by Ms. Nappi, seconded by Dr. Sassu, that the Board accept the retirement of Paula Riley-Friedman, occupational therapist at Catherine M. McGee School,

Mary E. Griswold School, and Richard D. Hubbard School, effective June 30, 2024. Also to thank her for the 25 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: 7:0; including President Dennis

3. Teacher of World Language – Berlin High School

Glenn Lewis, teacher of World Language at Berlin High School, has submitted his letter of intent to retire at the end of the 2023-2024 school year.

Moved by Mr. Zaraboza, seconded by Mr. Tencza, that the Board accept the retirement of Glenn Lewis, teacher of World Language at Berlin High School, effective June 30, 2024. Also to thank him for the 27 years of service he has provided to the youth of Berlin and wishing him excellent health, happiness and fulfillment in his retirement years.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Official 2023-2024 District Enrollment Report

Board members were provided with the official October 1, 2023 district enrollment report. School districts are required each year to report their October 1 enrollment figures to the Connecticut State Department of Education. Superintendent Benigni reported enrollment, as of October 1, 2023, is 2,644 students, a decrease of 14 students (-0.53%) from the previous year. Superintendent Benigni stated according to projections, enrollment is to level off. Superintendent Benigni reminded Board members of the new apartment complexes opening and slated to open in the near future and stated they should be taken into account within the projections. Superintendent Benigni stated there is some concern with class sizes approaching above 20 students or close to 20 students in the primary grades, which is not typical to Berlin, and going forward, with next year's budget, the Board may see recommendations to hold positions and then see where enrollment is.

Ms. Sisti noted the difference in enrollment at Griswold School and Willard School and asked if there is any thought to redistricting. Superintendent Benigni stated currently Willard is at capacity as far as classroom space because of the specialized programs. Superintendent Benigni stated the classroom portables are being evaluated further, and preliminary reports say they are in decent shape; however, if the portables are no longer usable the Board will need to make some decisions concerning usage.

B. Choice Report

Superintendent Brian Benigni reported twenty-five (25) seats were offered and sixteen (16) were filled, and it is unlikely the remaining nine (9) seats will be filled. Superintendent Benigni stated when students no longer reside in Hartford, they are no longer eligible for the CHOICE Program; therefore,

the district lost a number of students last year. For the last two years, Superintendent Benigni stated the district has fallen below the four percent of Berlin's student population. Currently, the district is at 3.6 percent, based on the student population this year, which does have an impact on the budget as those funds are used to fund staff and programs. Superintendent Benigni stated the CHOICE Program is going through an overhaul, and transportation continues to be an issue. Superintendent Benigni stated the district usually accepts students in Kindergarten and Grade One, and if a student has a sibling in a different grade, the district accepts the sibling as well, with the hope students transition through the entire CHOICE Program.

C. Approval of Requests for Capital Funding

Director of Finance Ashley Dorsey reported on the status of current projects that involve the use of capital funds. Board members were provided with the capital planning requests for Fiscal Year 2025 and the project priority list for Fiscal Year 2024 for the district. The budget guidelines for the 2024-2025 requests for capital funding were also shared. Ms. Dorsey stated these requests are anticipated expenditures of \$25,000 or more. The Finance & Operations Committee met on September 29 to review the budget requests. Ms. Dorsey stated the four capital planning priorities for Fiscal Year 2025 are (1) renovation and repurpose of five Science classrooms at McGee as they are old, outdated and need to be better aligned with the current curriculum (\$TBD); (2) Hubbard Library and Media Center as this is the last library in the district to be renovated (\$TBD); (3) fire suppression systems for network closets as the existing sprinkler system would destroy network gear (\$210,000); and (4) student transportation vehicles to replace vehicles in the fleet (\$150,000).

Moved by Ms. Gibbons, seconded by Dr. Sassu, that the Board approve the requests for capital funding, as presented, for submission to the town of Berlin.

Ms. Dorsey responded to Board member's questions concerning the building room renumbering system at Berlin High School (\$120,000) and the Campus Security System (\$45,250).

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

D. Policy Review/Revision – First Reading

1. Policy 1011 – Non-Discrimination (Community)
2. Policy 4112.51 – Employment and Student Teacher Checks
3. Policy 4152.6 – Family and Medical Leave
4. Policy 4118.11 – Non-Discrimination (Employees)
5. Policy 5131.911 – Bullying Prevention and Intervention
6. Policy 5145.4 – Non-Discrimination (Students)
7. Policy 5144 – Student Discipline
8. Policy 6146.11 – Weighted Grading and Calculation of Grade Point Averages

Shipman & Goodwin has recommended revisions to policies based on statutory and/or regulatory changes, citation updates, and best practices. The Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision met

on October 4, 2023, to review the proposed revisions. Since this is a first reading, no action is required; the second reading/adooption will take place at the November 27, 2023 Board meeting.

E. Approval of Educational Specifications for HVAC Upgrades

1. Mary E. Griswold School

In November of 2022, the Department of Administrative Services offered grant-funding opportunities for HVAC upgrades for public schools. The Berlin Public Schools applied for funding for the projects scheduled at Griswold and Hubbard Elementary Schools. Unfortunately, Berlin was not selected for grant funding despite the valiant efforts of multiple departments to secure resources. Deficiencies within the applications stated approval of the Board of Education's Educational Specifications exceeded one year. In September 2023, the Department of Administrative Services opened round two of HVAC state funding. To complete the round 2 funding application for HVAC upgrades in public schools, the Board of Education needs to update and resubmit the Educational Specifications for Mary E. Griswold Elementary School for submittal to the Berlin Public Building Commission. Finance Director Ashley Dorsey presented the Educational Specifications (Statement of Need) for design and construction for upgrades to the HVAC system at Mary E. Griswold Elementary School, a copy which was provided to Board members.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Ms. Sisti, to approve the educational specifications for HVAC upgrades at Mary E. Griswold Elementary School, as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

2. Richard D. Hubbard School

To complete the round 2 funding applications for HVAC upgrades in public schools, the Board of Education needs to update and resubmit the Educational Specifications for Richard D. Hubbard Elementary School for submittal to the Berlin Public Building Commission. Finance Director Ashley Dorsey presented the Education Specifications (Statement of Need) for design and construction for upgrades to the HVAC system at Richard D. Hubbard Elementary School, a copy which was provided to Board members.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Ms. Sisti, to approve the educational specifications for HVAC upgrades at Richard D. Hubbard Elementary School, as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

F. Board Goals

The Board of Education reviewed the current goals and objectives for 2023-2024, a copy which was provided to Board members and posted in Schoology.

Superintendent Benigni stated, at some point, he would like to discuss a sustainability plan. He stated, when the district has open positions, there are very few candidates and believes, in the years to come, there will be less teachers and administrators available. Superintendent Benigni suggested a subcommittee or ad-hoc committee to look at sustainability, including how the district will be highly competitive in retaining, recruiting and hiring highly qualified teachers, administrators and educators.

G. Proposed Revisions to the Board Member Handbook

At the Board of Education Retreat on August 25, the Board discussed making revisions to the Board Member Handbook. Board members were asked to review the current handbook and submit their proposed revisions to the Board president. The proposed revisions were presented this evening, a copy which was provided to Board members and posted in Schoology.

VIII. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes – Regular Meeting of September 11, 2023

B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending September 30, 2023

C. Request for Leave of Absence – Teacher of Grade 2 – Mary E. Griswold School

Mallory Calabrese, Teacher of Grade 2 at Mary E. Griswold School, requested an unpaid leave of absence, for childrearing purposes, to begin immediately following her maternity leave through June 30, 2024.

D. Facilities Update

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno provided a Facilities Update, which has been posted in Schoology.

Moved by Ms. Gibbons, seconded by Dr. Sassu, that the Board approve the consent agenda as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

IX. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:38 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Tencza, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education