

# **BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**November 27, 2023**

## **MINUTES**

## **ANNUAL MEETING**

Attendance: Julia Dennis  
Melissa Gibbons  
Brian DeLude  
Jennifer Jurgen  
Jaymee Miller  
Gina Nappi  
Adam Salina  
Tracy Sisti  
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; Co-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson; and Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso.

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

Pledge of Allegiance

Superintendent Brian Benigni called the meeting to order at 7:22 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Superintendent Benigni congratulated re-elected Board member Gina Nappi and welcomed newly-elected Board members Brian DeLude and Jennifer Jurgen.

### **II. SPECIAL PRESENTATION**

Certificate of Appreciation Award to Former Board Members Matthew Tencza and Dr. Kari Sassu

Superintendent Benigni thanked former Board members Matthew Tencza and Dr. Kari Sassu for their service to the Board of Education.

### **III. REORGANIZATION**

A. Annual Election of Officers

The election of officers shall be conducted in accordance with State Statute 10-218. Elections shall be in open session. Board of Education past practice has been that elections are carried out using signed ballots. Also, according to Policy 9050, officers shall be elected from the Board, "...by majority vote of those Board members present and voting."

1. President: Superintendent Benigni presided over the election of President. Ms. Sisti nominated Ms. Dennis. Ms. Miller seconded the nomination.

Superintendent Benigni collected the signed ballots and announced that Ms. Dennis was unanimously affirmed, 9:0.

2. Secretary: Mr. Salina nominated Ms. Sisti. Ms. Nappi seconded the nomination.

President Dennis collected the signed ballots and announced that Ms. Sisti was unanimously affirmed, 9:0.

At this time, Superintendent Benigni and President Dennis presented Dr. Kari Sassu with a Certificate of Appreciation for her time and dedication, serving on the Board of Education.

Superintendent Benigni stated, under VI. New Business, Item A needs to be removed from the agenda as the Curriculum Committee was not able to address the District Continuous Improvement Plan 2023-2024 at its meeting on November 27, 2023. In its place, Principal Urso will present the McGee After School Academy Presentation.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Gibbons, that we table Topic A, Approval of the District Continuance Improvement Plan 2023-2024, and in its place that we add the McGee After School Academy Presentation.**

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

- B. MOTION for Annual Schedule of Regular Meetings

Board members were provided with a memo regarding proposed Board of Education meeting dates, in accordance with Policy 9085.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Nappi, to approve the Annual Schedule of Regular Meetings, in accordance with Policy 9085, as presented.**

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

- C. MOTION for Fiscal Management

Approval of designees for the purpose of signing checks for the General Fund and Grants, Berlin High School Enterprise Fund, Berlin Public Schools Activity Fund, Cafeteria Fund, and the Board of Education Programs is necessary, in accordance with Policy 9046.

1. **Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, that Kevin Delaney and the Board of Education president be designated signers of the General Fund and Grants.**

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

2. Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, that Karen Despres and Sondra Crispino be designated signers of the Berlin High School Enterprise Fund.

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

3. Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, that each principal and Sondra Crispino be designated signers of the Berlin Public Schools Activity Fund.

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

4. Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, that Brian Benigni and Sondra Crispino be designated signers of the Cafeteria Fund.

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

5. Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, that Ashley Dorsey and Sondra Crispino be designated signers of the BOE Programs.

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

- D. Appointment of Board Legal Counsel for 2023-2024

In accordance with Board Policy 9055, the legal counsel to represent the Board of Education for the next year, 2023-2024, should be selected at this time.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, that the law firm of Shipman & Goodwin of Hartford be appointed to continue as the Board of Education counsel for the 2023-2024 year and that they should be so informed.**

In response to Mr. Salina's question are you comfortable with continuing with Shipman & Goodwin, Superintendent Benigni stated, Shipman & Goodwin are very responsive, provide great service and is totally comfortable with continuing with them as the legal counsel to represent the Board of Education.

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

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

- A. Report of Student Representatives

Mr. Saunders reported on November 9, 2023 Berlin High School hosted the annual Veterans Day Celebration; the Berlin High School Redcoat football team has officially moved forward to the playoffs

with their next game on November 28, 2023 in Rockville; and this year the sophomore class won the annual Powder Puff football tournament with all proceeds supporting Berlin Helping Berlin.

Miss Hashim reported on November 16, 2023 the Berlin High School chapter of the National Honor Society hosted their Fall Induction Ceremony for members of the Class of 2024; the annual Upbeat Christmas Tree sales began on November 25, 2023 and will continue through December 17, 2023 at the Berlin VFW; and this year, Advisory was rebranded as Red Sea Block, which takes place every Monday.

**B. Committee Reports**

Ms. Miller reported the Curriculum Committee met prior to tonight's meeting and discussed the textbooks, recommended for adoption, and the 2024-2025 Berlin High School Program of Studies.

Ms. Sisti reported the Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision met prior to tonight's meeting and discussed Policy Review/Revision, which appears later in the agenda for a first reading.

**C. CREC Report**

There was no CREC report this evening.

**D. Correspondence to the Board**

There was no correspondence to the Board this evening.

Ms. Dennis reported she attended the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education/Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CABE/CAPSS) Convention on November 17, 2023. Ms. Dennis reported the Board did earn the CABE Board of Distinction Award, and on Wednesday, December 6, 2023, CABE will hold its New Board Member Orientation/Leadership Conference.

**V. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

William Kirschner, 219 Lamentation Drive, Berlin, Connecticut, addressed the Board regarding the district providing transportation for students enrolled in the Pre-K program. Mr. Kirschner requested the Board maximize existing resources to reduce the burden on preschool parents, guardians and caregivers who are likely making extra round trips during normal working hours, transporting their children to the preschool program. He requested, rather than considering the use of full-size buses or adding extra vans and drivers, the Board consider utilizing the already empty seats on each of the half dozen vans transporting eligible classmates. He requested the Board consider offering a seat lottery, of any equitable format, to reduce the burden to taxpayers.

Dr. Kari Sassu, 69 Walden Court, Berlin, Connecticut, thanked the Board for their kind words offered. Dr. Sassu congratulated newly-elected Board members Jennifer Jurgen and Brian DeLude and re-elected Board member Gina Nappi. Dr. Sassu stated it has been a pleasure and an honor to serve the Berlin community for the last eight years.

**VI. NEW BUSINESS**

- A. McGee Middle School – Board of Education Information Session –November 27, 2023 – Efforts and Action Steps to Improved Student Performance/Achievement

McGee Middle School Principal Salvatore Urso presented to the Board efforts and action steps to improve student performance and achievement in some of the state-wide assessments and responded to questions from the Board concerning his presentation, a copy which was provided to Board members. Included in his presentation were factors that impact achievement; universal strategies to support the Common Core State Standards; new programming for the 2023-2024 Extended Day – After School Academy; and representation of targeted students for the Extended Day After School Academy.

- B. Policy Review/Revision

1. Second Reading/Adoption

- a. Policy 1011 – Non-Discrimination (Community)
- b. Policy 4112.51 – Employment and Student Teacher Checks
- c. Policy 4152.6 – Family and Medical Leave
- d. Policy 4118.11 – Non-Discrimination (Employees)
- e. Policy 5131.911 – Bullying Prevention and Intervention
- f. Policy 5145.4 – Non-Discrimination (Students)
- g. Policy 5113 – Student Attendance, Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism
- h. Policy 5144 – Student Discipline
- i. Policy 6146.11 – Weighted Grading and Calculation of Grade Point Averages

Shipman & Goodwin 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. A first reading took place at the October 10, 2023 Board meeting. The second reading took place this evening.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, to adopt the revised policies (items a.-i.) listed above, as presented.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

2. First Reading

- a. Policy 4111.1 – Increasing Educator Diversity Plan
- b. Policy 4118.241 – Reports of Suspected Abuse or Neglect of Children
- c. Policy 5141.21 – Administration of Student Medications in the Schools
- d. **New** Policy 5112 – Admission to the Public Schools at or Before Age Five
- e. Policy 6146 – High School Graduation Requirements
- f. Policy 5129 – Policy to Improve Completion Rates of the FAFSA
- g. Policy 5144.2 – Recess and Play-Based Learning
- h. Policy 5141.5 – Suicide Prevention and Intervention
- i. Policy 6161.8 – Parental Access to Instructional Material
- j. Bylaw 9010 – Construction and Posting of Agenda

Shipman & Goodwin has recommended a new policy and 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 November 27, 2023, to review the proposed new policy and recommended revisions. Superintendent Benigni highlighted the revisions to Policy 5141.21, Administration of Student Medications in the Schools, and new Policy 5112, Admission to the Public Schools at or Before Age Five. Superintendent Benigni stated this is new legislation, and beginning July 1, 2024, a child who is not five years old on or before September 1 of the school year may be admitted to public school upon written request by the child's parent or guardian to the school principal and after the principal and an appropriate certified staff member conduct an assessment of the child to ensure that admitting the child is developmentally appropriate. Board members entered into a lengthy discussion concerning the Board's policy for parents enrolling their child in kindergarten for the 2024-2025 school year and the assessment. Since this is a first reading, no action is required; the second reading/adoption will take place at the December 11, 2023 Board meeting.

C. Approval of Educational Specifications for the Design and Construction of Upgraded Science Laboratory Classrooms at Catherine M. McGee Middle School

In October of 2023, the Board of Education requested the Town Council include the renovation of these laboratory classrooms as a capital project for FY 2025. Due to the preliminary cost estimate provided to the Board by a professional estimating firm, the Town's Capital Planning Committee recommended that the Town consider bond financing for the project. In that light and pursuant to ordinance, the Board desires to approve and submit the Educational Specifications for the Design and Construction of Upgraded Science Laboratory Classrooms (Project), which Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno presented this evening, a copy which was provided to Board members, for review by the Town Council, and asked that the information be referred to Berlin's Public Building Commission, which acts as the standing School Building Committee for the Town. The Project shall include the planning, design, programming, budgeting, construction and commissioning for the upgrades and renovations to the existing laboratory classrooms.

**Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, to approve the Educational Specifications for the Design and Construction of Upgraded Science Laboratory Classrooms at Catherine M. McGee Middle School, dated November 1, 2023, and to submit such to the Berlin Town Council for review and action.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

D. Adoption of Textbooks

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

*Pobre Anna bailó tango*, by Patricia Verano, Veronica Moscoso, and Blaine Ray and published by TPRS Books. This textbook will be used to supplement the text, *Avancemos Level 3*, in the Grade 11 Spanish 4 course.

*Environmental Economics and Natural Resource Management*, by David Anderson and published by Routledge (2019). This is a new textbook to be used in Grades 11-12 in the SCSU EC The Business of Science course.

*Business and Environmental Sustainability: Foundations, Challenges and Corporate Functions*, by Sigrun Wagner and published by Routledge (2020). This is a new textbook to be used in Grades 11-12 in the SCSU EC The Business of Science course.

*Editing Humanity: The CRISPR Revolution and the New Era of Genome Editing*, by Kevin Davies and published by Simon and Schuster (2020). This is a new textbook to be used in Grades 11-12 in the SCSU EC The Business of Science course.

*Building Backwards to Biotech: The Power of Entrepreneurship to Drive Cutting-Edge Science to Market*, by Stephanie Wisner and published by New Degree Press (2022). This is a new textbook to be used in Grades 11-12 in the SCSU EC The Business of Science course.

*Illustrative Mathematics*, by various authors from IM and published by Kendall Hunt. This is a replacement textbook to be used in Grades K-5 mathematics.

These textbooks have been reviewed and recommended for adoption by the Textbook Selection Committee. The Curriculum Committee reviewed the recommendations at its meeting on November 27, 2023. 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. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, to adopt the textbooks, *Pobre Anna bailó tango*, by Patricia Verano, Veronica Moscoso, and Blaine Ray and published by TPRS Books; *Environmental Economics and Natural Resource Management*, by David Anderson and published by Routledge (2019); *Business and Environmental Sustainability: Foundations, Challenges and Corporate Functions*, by Sigrun Wagner and published by Routledge (2020); *Editing Humanity: The CRISPR Revolution and the New Era of Genome Editing*, by Kevin Davies and published by Simon and Schuster (2020); *Building Backwards to Biotech: The Power of Entrepreneurship to Drive Cutting-Edge Science to Market*, by Stephanie Wisner and published by New Degree Press (2022); and *Illustrative Mathematics*, by various authors from IM and published by Kendall Hunt.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

## **VII. CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Approval of Minutes – Regular Meeting of October 10, 2023
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending October 31, 2023

C. Facilities Update

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno provided a written report, which has been posted in Schoology.

D. Request for Leave of Absence – Emma Hart Willard School – Teacher of Grade 5

Kristin Hart, Teacher of Grade 5 at Emma Hart Willard School, requested an unpaid leave of absence, for childrearing purposes, to begin immediately following her maternity leave through the end of the 2023-2024 school year.

E. Overnight Field Trip Request – BHS – Washington, DC – April 14-17, 2024

Berlin High School Principal Katie Amenta requested permission for approximately eight AP Government students, along with a chaperone, to travel to Washington, DC, to participate in the Close Up Program on April 14-17, 2024. This program provides an opportunity for students to learn more about how the national government works and students will develop debating and research skills.

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

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

**At 8:57 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, to adjourn.**

**FAVOR: ALL**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education