

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

February 12, 2024

MINUTES

SPECIAL MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis
Melissa Gibbons
Brian DeLude
Jennifer Jurgen
Jaymee Miller
Gina Nappi
Adam Salina
Tracy Sisti – Absent
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-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson; Principal of Berlin High School Katie Amenta; Assistant Principals of Berlin High School Karen Despres and Brian Testroet; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Assistant Principal of McGee Middle School Tim Chiaverini; Principal of Willard School Megan Sirois; and Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 5:56 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut.

II. 2024-2025 BUDGET OVERVIEW TO THE PUBLIC

The Board held an informational meeting for the public to receive input on the Superintendent's Proposed Operating Budget for 2024-2025.

Superintendent Benigni and Ms. Dennis provided a slideshow of the Superintendent's Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025. 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. Ms. Dennis 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. Ms. Dennis 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 staffing contractual obligations represent 4.21% of the overall 6.39% increase; contracted services, transportation and utilities represents .71% of the overall 6.39% increase; supplies, equipment, all other expenditure represent 1.31% of the overall 6.39% increase; AND new staff represents .35% of the overall 6.39% increase.

Ms. Dennis 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.

Superintendent Benigni shared a comparison of Superintendents' request for DRG D.

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 – Vo-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 CABE 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 and Ms. Dennis provided the five year FTE Comparisons; Open Choice Enrollment and Funding History; 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; 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 – 11th Grade; Preview of Student Achievement Report SAT; state funding; federal funding; and elementary, middle and high school enrollment projections

III. ADJOURNMENT

At 6:32 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Miller, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Gibbons, Berlin Board of Education