

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

February 12, 2024

MINUTES

REGULAR 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

Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. in the Berlin High School Auditorium at 139 Patterson Way, Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. STUDENT PRESENTATION – BERLIN HIGH SCHOOL

Peer leaders/students provided a presentation on the Unified program at Berlin High School. Presenters this evening were Olivia Watson/Patrick Serafin, Samantha Hartan/Aliya Eishehofer, Brennan Smith/Gabe Matta, Jessica Vale da Serra/Taylor Wilcox, Macie Krawciw/Caitlyn Jerard, Elyse Niemiec/Julia Blair, Adrianna Varricchio/Dora Accarpi, Mya Lamoureux/Leah Prendergast, and Katie Zibell/Mark Lanteri. This presentation celebrated the growing Unified program at Berlin High School, which has evolved from Unified Sports to an entire Unified curriculum, along with the partnerships created between peer leaders and students that create a culture of empathy, inclusion, and acceptance.

III. SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Elks Americanism Essay Contest Finalists

Americanism Chairman Mark Pruzin, Exhaulted Ruler Suzanne Topliff and Leading Knight Pat Buden provided information about the Americanism Essay Contest that the New Britain Elks sponsored this past November for students in Grades 6-7, in the Berlin and New Britain school systems. Recognized this evening were Grade 6 finalists Andrew Alger and Luke Redditt and Grade 7 finalists Brianna Giannone and Audrey Jurczyk. Each finalist was presented with a Certificate of Achievement and monetary gift from members of the New Britain Elks.

In addition, Americanism Chairman Mark Pruzin, on behalf of the New Britain Elks, recognized Principal Urso and Superintendent Benigni for their continued support and dedication for the Americanism Essay Contest.

IV. REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Board Members

Ms. Dennis reported on the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) Board of Directors meeting, which was held on February 7, 2024.

Mr. DeLude encouraged Berlin citizens to attend the Berlin High School musical *The Addams Family, A New Musical*.

B. Report of Student Representatives

Mr. Saunders reported, two weeks ago, the Berlin High School Mock Trial Team competed in the semifinalist round at the New Britain Courthouse and advanced on to states in early March; the girls and boys indoor track team has advanced to states; and Alliana Wicik, a senior student and National Honor Society member was recently awarded an academic scholarship, from the organization, for her academic and extracurricular excellence over the past four years at Berlin High School.

Miss Hashim reported, last Wednesday, the Math Team at Berlin High School hosted their first competition as part of the Capital Area Math League, which is composed of 24 schools across the state. At the end of the season, the top 50% of teams will advance to compete in the New England Math meet. Miss Hashim reported senior, Madelyn Lazzara, recently won the Connecticut Regional Scholastic Art Awards Gold Key Award.

C. Committee Reports

Mr. Zarabozo reported the Finance & Operations Committee met on Friday, February 9, 2024, and discussed the proposed 2024-2025 budget. The Committee put together a summary and letter to answer questions received from the Board of Finance, a copy which went out to all Board members.

Ms. Miller reported the Curriculum Committee met prior to tonight's meeting and discussed the Student Achievement Report, which appears later in the agenda.

Ms. Gibbons reported the Community Engagement Committee met on February 5, 2024 and discussed reports from individual Board members at each Board meeting, continued use of Facebook and articles submitted to the *Berlin Citizen*.

D. CREC Report

There was no report this evening.

E. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni reported the Board won the Bonnie B. Carney Award of Excellence for Educational Communications. Superintendent Benigni shared a thank you note received from Laurie Pieciewicz.

V. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Imelda Mongillo, 86 Devonshire Way, Berlin, Connecticut, addressed the Board regarding the Board's Proposed Board of Education Budget for 2024-2025, which appears later in the agenda for adoption.

VI. PERSONNEL

Retirement – Finance Assistant – Central Office

Wendy Weed, Finance Assistant at Central Office, has submitted her letter of intent to retire effective June 30, 2024.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Nappi, that the Board accept the retirement of Wendy Weed, Finance Assistant at Central Office, effective June 30, 2024. Also to thank her for the 14 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: 8:0; including President Dennis

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Student Achievement Report

Curriculum Directors Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson, along with Secondary Department Supervisors Liz Atwood-Daly, Jeff Cronk, Ross Hanson, and Adam Leonard, shared a number of measures of student achievement. The presentation, a copy which was provided to Board members, included the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) for Grades 3-8; Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) results for students in Grades 5, 8 and 11; the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) results; and Advanced Placement (AP) Program results. The information shared will help to explain trends in the student performance data, the impact on planning for continuous improvement, related professional development, and curriculum to be reviewed. The Curriculum Committee met earlier today to review the report.

Co-Directors of Curriculum Gjerpen and Watson began the presentation with the Smarter Balanced Results for 2023. They reviewed the results of the Smarter Balanced Growth model; Connecticut Statewide Data Trends for school years 2018-2019, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 for students with high needs and students without high needs; percentage of students achieving levels 1 – 4 by Grade for English Language Arts and Mathematics 2023; 2023 English Language Arts and Mathematics by Grade and Performance Level; 2023 subgroup performance for English Language Arts and Mathematics; Literacy and Numeracy Subgroups; and the DRG comparison 2023 for English Language Arts and Mathematics. Ongoing work and next steps for the elementary and middle schools include providing professional development for multiple departments related to the teaching of reading, writing and math, including ongoing work with math and literacy coaches; ongoing examination and revision of units of instruction and expectations in literacy and math, including vertical articulation across grade levels; review and revise protocols for test preparation; strengthening use of formative assessment data to provide targeted support and enrichment opportunities for students; collaboration with the Pupil Personnel Services Department to align and extend instruction; utilize the Data Warehouse to monitor student progress and tighten up protocols for reviewing data; and implementing the new Multi-Tiered Systems of Success (MTSS) Process that was developed during the 2022-2023 school year.

With regard to the NGSS results for 2023, Department Supervisor Adam Leonard reviewed the Connecticut Statewide Data Trends for school years 2018-2019, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 for students with high needs and students without high needs; percentage of students achieving levels 1 – 4 by Grade; 2023 Science by grade and performance level; DRG NGSS all grades comparison 2023; 2023 subgroup performance percentage meeting or exceeding achievement level. Ongoing work and next steps for the elementary, middle and high schools include professional development opportunities; review and revision of units and assessments; and review and revise protocols for test preparation.

With regard to the 2023 SAT school day results, Department Supervisors Jeff Cronk and Ross Hanson reviewed the SAT Scores & Subscores; the new SAT test for reading and writing and mathematics; state-wide data for students with high needs and students without high needs; Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (EBRW) and mathematics results; EBRW and mathematics state comparisons; 2023 SAT EBRW and mathematics by performance level; the DRG comparison for EBRW and mathematics; 2023 results by subgroup EBRW and mathematics grade 11; and Ongoing Work and Next Steps.

With regard to the AP Program, Secondary Department Supervisor Liz Atwood-Daly reviewed the AP courses offered at Berlin High School; AP performance; percentage of AP exams scoring 3 or higher; number of AP exams scoring 3 or higher; additional college credit-bearing courses at Berlin High School 2022-2023; UCONN ECE course offerings and participation data; number of enrollments in college credit-bearing courses at Berlin High School; graduation rates; post secondary plans for the class of 2023; post-secondary school persistence data; and additional student achievement highlights.

Included within the Student Achievement Report, provided to Board members, were appendices containing additional student performance data.

B. Open Choice Program Participation for 2024-2025

Superintendent Benigni provided Board members with a document reflecting, by grade, his recommended number of Open Choice students for 2024-2025. Superintendent Benigni recommended the district accommodate an additional fifteen (15) students for the 2024-2025 school year and provided the Board with his recommendation for placement of 14 students within grade kindergarten and one student within grade 10. Superintendent Benigni stated the grade 10 student is a sibling of one of the kindergarten students. The 14 kindergarten students would be disbursed amongst the schools, depending on class sizes, and no additional teachers would be added. Superintendent Benigni stated, although the seats are being offered, it does not mean they have been accepted.

Moved by Mr. Zarabozo, seconded by Mr. Salina, to approve the superintendent's recommendation regarding the level of participation in the Open Choice Program for the 2024-2025 school year as presented; 14 kindergarten seats and one Grade 10 seat.

In response to Mr. Salina's question how many seats did the district offer last year, Superintendent Benigni stated he will provide the exact data; however, he believes 21 seats were offered with 13 accepted. Superintendent Benigni stated seats are not being filled, which is unique to the Open Choice Program. Also, if a student no longer resides in Hartford, they are no longer eligible for the Open Choice Program, which is another reason why numbers have gone down.

In response to Ms. Nappi's question, how many seats is the district allowed to offer, Superintendent Benigni stated, there is no limitation. The issue now is even if seats are offered, the district is not receiving responses.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

C. Naming of Berlin High School & McGee Band Rooms

Ms. Dennis stated, at the January 8 Board meeting, she informed the Board that the ad-hoc subcommittee recommended the Board 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. If the Board is in agreement, with the subcommittee's recommendation, a motion is in order.

Moved by Ms. Nappi, seconded by Mr. Salina, to authorize 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.

Mr. Salina and Superintendent Benigni shared the impact these two gentlemen have had on students, the Berlin community as well as themselves.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Dennis

D. Review and Anticipated Adoption of the Proposed Board of Education Budget for 2024-2025

The Board of Education has reviewed and discussed the Superintendent's Proposed Budget for 2024-2025. The Finance & Operations Committee met on February 9 to discuss the proposed budget. An informational meeting was held earlier this evening to provide an overview of the 2024-2025 proposed budget to the public and receive feedback. The Board of Education and the Board of Finance will hold a joint meeting on March 6 to discuss the adopted budget.

Moved by Mr. Zarabozo, seconded by Mr. DeLude, to adopt the Board of Education Operating Budget for 2024-2025 in the amount of \$54,105,092.

Ms. Gibbons thanked all the individuals that took part in answering all the Board's questions. She stated, although all requests have a purpose, she believes the amount requested is high.

FAVOR: 6

OPPOSED: 2

**MOTION CARRIED: 6:2; including President Dennis;
Board members Gibbons and Nappi opposed**

E. Joint Meeting with Town Council and Board of Finance

The Board held a discussion concerning Mayor Kaczynski's request, following the January 9, 2024 Town Council meeting, that the Board President and Superintendent Benigni attend the next Town Council meeting to respond to questions concerning the budget. Ms. Dennis stated she felt it was important that all Board members be included and proposed that the Town Council should attend the joint meeting already scheduled to take place between the Board of Finance and the Board of Education on March 6.

F. Pre-K Transportation Discussion

This past June, the Board discussed the feasibility of providing pre-K transportation for all students as a follow up to a parent's request. At the June 12 Board meeting, Superintendent Benigni stated the district is legally mandated to provide transportation for students eligible for the pre-K program and is not required to provide transportation for community model representatives enrolled in the pre-K program. He stated there would be considerable costs to transport community role models and provided Board members with this information.

At the August 28 Board meeting, Finance Director Ashley Dorsey provided an approximation of the additional cost to transport role model students. Based on the 2023-2024 enrollment, 21 students are enrolled in the program. The projection is for next year, using 2024-2025 rates and assuming 21 students will need transportation to and from home and school. Students can be transported on buses or vans. Although students can be legally transported by bus, she stated it is not recommended as students are too small. In addition to the daily cost of the bus, an aide will also need to be on each bus with students. The district will need three additional buses, one bus per school district for route efficiency, each at a daily rate of \$351.71, for 181 student days, for a total of \$190,989.39. In addition, the district would need a minimum of three aides, each at their daily rate, for a minimum of four hours, for 181 school days for a total of \$65,138.28. The total estimated cost for bus transportation is \$256,127.67, a .05% impact on the overall budget for next year, without any other contractual increases. The other option, and parents' preference, is van transportation. Because of a student's size, all students would need to be in a five-point harness. The district would need to purchase ten additional vans for pre-school transportation as only two five-point harnesses fit in one van. The estimated startup cost is \$430,000. With regard to driving costs, the district would need ten drivers, at their hourly rate, for a minimum of four hours, for 181 student days, which totals approximately \$326,243.40. The total estimated cost to transport students in vans is \$756,243.40, a 1.5% impact on the overall budget for next year, without any other contractual increases. A copy of the presentation provided at the August 28 Board meeting has been posted in Schoology. The Board considered the information presented and, based on that information, no action was taken.

At the request of a parent, providing Pre-K transportation to all students was discussed again this evening since the Board composition changed after this issue was discussed at the August 28 meeting, and after consideration, based upon the information provided, no action was taken.

VIII. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes
 - 1. Regular Meeting of January 8, 2024
 - 2. Special Meeting of January 5, 2024
 - 3. Special Meeting of January 10, 2024

- 4. Special Meeting of January 22, 2024
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending January 31, 2024
- C. Facilities Update

Director of Operations Jeffrey Cugno provided a report that has been posted in Schoology.

- D. Overnight Field Trip Request – BHS Upbeat March Leadership Training, Groton, CT – March 22-24, 2024

Berlin High School Principal Katie Amenta and Upbeat Director Sheel Patel requested permission for Upbeat students to travel to Project Oceanology, in Groton, CT, to attend the March Leadership Training on March 22-24, 2024. Students will participate in a workshop to learn about basic communication skills. By participating in this training, students will develop relationships with their peers and staff members to help build and maintain a sense of community at Berlin High School.

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

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

IX. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:56 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Salina, seconded by Mr. Zarabozo, to adjourn.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Gibbons, Berlin Board of Education