

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

March 11, 2024

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

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

Also in attendance: Superintendent of Schools Brian J. Benigni; Finance Director Ashley Dorsey; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Co-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson; Assistant Principal of Berlin High School Brian Testroet; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Principal of Griswold School Jonathan Campbell; Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza; and Interim Principal of Willard School Tim Chiaverini.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Dennis called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. in the Board of Education (“the Board”) meeting room at 238 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. STUDENT PRESENTATION – MARY E. GRISWOLD SCHOOL

The Griswold First Grade Team showcased the first year implementation of the RULER approach to social and emotional learning with students. Teachers Sarah Britton, Kaylie Corjulo, Megan Lorch and Daniella Sznaj showcased how feeling words and self-regulation strategies are being taught, the class charter, and morning meeting routines. Grade 1 student presenters were Piper Abrahamson, Abigail Cichocki, Sloan Harvey, Mary Michael, Charlotte Schmitt, Jackson Secor, Stella Sullivan and Nathan Travinski.

III. SPECIAL RECOGNITION

A. Community Work Partner – Jeff Michaud, Complete Sheet Metal

The Board, CCTA Teacher Vicki Muggleston and student Justin Charron recognized Jeff Michaud, of Complete Sheet Metal (CSM), for going above and beyond as a community work partner. In the fall of 2023, a long-time staff member gave Vicki the contact information for Jeff Michaud at CSM. The CCTA is always in need of job sites and usually receives the best connections through staff, and this time was no different. Vicki met with Jeff to explain the purpose of the CCTA - to assist special education students with vocational, postsecondary education or any activity of daily living. He seemed excited to help out and give back to his community, so he offered to host one of Berlin’s students. Almost immediately, student, Justin, was made to feel like a valued team member at CSM. Justin has been given increasingly more difficult tasks, as he has shown his commitment to the job. Jeff personally oversees Justin’s experience and strives to make it as authentic as possible. Jeff is

not content to give *just* a work experience to Justin and has gone above and beyond in making him part of the CSM family. Justin has full CSM gear, including sweatshirt and work boots from Mickey Finn's. For Justin's birthday in November, Jeff managed to pull off the ultimate experience for Justin - a trip to see WWE live in Waterbury. Not only did Jeff purchase tickets, he and his team made it a group trip so they could provide Justin with transportation. Recently, Justin was invited to and attended Jeff's surprise birthday party. These experiences are the organic benefits of working with amazing people. We cannot replicate them or explain them to students - they are only to be experienced by the lucky few. CCTA cannot thank Jeff and his team enough for being open to this experience and investing fully in someone else's life. Jeff's dedication has inspired Vicki to push the boundaries of what CCTA can offer to Justin. Their next project together combines state agency, public school and community member support in order to provide Justin with a paid internship at CSM over the summer. This valuable experience would not be possible for Justin without Jeff's dedication and compassion. Jeff is truly changing a life.

B. Board Member Appreciation

The month of March is Connecticut Board of Education Member Appreciation month. Superintendent Brian Benigni thanked Board members for their time and effort they devote to Board business during the course of the year.

A short recess was taken from 6:31 p.m. until 6:41 p.m.

IV. REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Board Members

Board members Sisti, Nappi and DeLude reported on their attendance at the Berlin High School musical production, *The Addams Family, A New Musical*.

Ms. Jurgen reported on her attendance at the Central Connecticut Adult-Youth Workshop held on March 1 and 2, 2024.

Ms. Gibbons reported on her attendance at the Willard Wonderland Dance on Friday, February 23, 2024, which she also hosted.

Ms. Dennis reported on her attendance at the Central Connecticut Adult-Youth Workshop and the Berlin High School musical production, *The Addams Family, A New Musical*.

B. Report of Student Representatives

Miss Hashim reported, on February 21, 2024, Berlin High School students and the Upbeat Program helped current eighth grade students navigate Berlin High School, learn about classes offered and provided them with a chance to learn what to expect this coming fall; the Berlin High School Performing Arts Department's production of the comical rendition of *The Addams Family, A New Musical* was performed this past week; the dedicated students of the Certified Nursing Assistant class were awarded their certifications at their graduation ceremony in early February; and public speaker Michael, Chief the Poet, Peterson will visit Berlin High School students to discuss the power behind words and the impact they have on March 20, 2024.

Mr. Saunders reported on the Central Connecticut Adult-Youth Workshop, which was held March 1 and 2, 2024; members of the Medical Club and students interested in careers in the medical field visited the Yale Campus for the HOSA Spring State Leadership Conference on March 1, 2024; and this past week Berlin High School students learned about assigning words to their feelings with the RULER approach. Mr. Saunders provided Board members with highlights from the Berlin High School wrestling season.

C. Committee Reports

Mr. Zarabozo reported the Finance & Operations Committee met last week with the Board of Finance to present the Board's Operating Budget. The Committee also met to discuss the implementation of the Increasing Educator Diversity Plan and any financial implications it may have.

Mr. DeLude reported the Curriculum Committee met prior to tonight's meeting and discussed the proposed revised 2024-2025 adopted school calendar; the proposed 2025-2026 school calendar; and the Increasing Educator Diversity Plan.

Ms. Sisti reported the Community Engagement Committee met on March 6, 2024 and discussed the Board's social media presence.

D. CREC Report

There was no CREC report this evening.

E. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared a thank you note from Maureen Mullins.

Ms. Dennis reported Board members received an email from a member of the community regarding an item on tonight's agenda.

V. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Alexis Guarino, 31 Bernard Road, Berlin, Connecticut, addressed the Board in support of the facility therapy dog for Griswold School.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Facility Therapy Dog Presentation

Jonathan Campbell and Linda Holian highlighted the benefits of a facility therapy dog and the positive social and emotional impact for students and staff and responded to the Board's questions. In attendance was Maureen Mellett, Lead Trainer at Blue Path Service Dogs (Blue Path) and Jasper, a therapy dog. Currently, there is a therapy dog that visits on a weekly basis, which allows for a limited number of students to work with the therapy dog. A full-time facility therapy dog would allow all students and staff to benefit on a consistent basis, which helps to promote a sense of purpose, ignite passion, and foster a sense of pride. Mr. Campbell's presentation included the history of access to therapy dogs at Griswold School, beginning in 2018 through the present; benefits of animal assisted interventions; testimonials; vision and reasoning for the therapy dog; and considerations.

Ms. Mellett provided an overview of the Blue Path organization, training and on-going support for partner schools. She stated the one-time fee to take ownership of a facility therapy dog from Blue Path is approximately \$10,000, and throughout the life of the therapy dog, Blue Path provides support for the program at no charge. Ms. Mellett did state veterinary care and grooming are not covered by Blue Path.

Superintendent Benigni stated this item will come before the Board for approval, along with the outlined policy from Shipman and Goodwin, LLP, at a later date.

B. Adopted 2024-2025 Board of Education Budget Update

Ms. Dennis stated the joint Board of Education/Board of Finance meeting was held on March 6, 2024 with the Town Council in attendance. Ms. Dennis thanked Board members and administrators for attending. Superintendent Benigni stated the Board of Education Budget is at a hold at 6.39%. Superintendent Benigni thanked the Board for attending the meeting with the Board of Finance and Town Council. Superintendent Benigni stated he appreciated the listing of all the positive aspects of the school district prior to the start of that meeting.

Ms. Dennis stated the Board will host a town hall style meeting on April 29, 2024.

C. Proposed School Calendar 2025-2026 and Establishment of BHS Graduation Date for 2026

Board members were provided with the proposed school calendar for 2025-2026, which was posted in Schoology. Public Act 19-195 allows Boards of Education to establish a firm graduation date for students in Grade 12 for that school year, which, at the time of establishment, provides for at least 180 days of school. In accordance with the Public Act, Superintendent Benigni recommended that the Board set the date of the 2026 Berlin High School graduation for Friday, June 12, 2026. Included in the proposed school calendar for 2025-2026 are three additional shortened days for professional learning.

Moved by Ms. Gibbons, seconded by Mr. DeLude, to adopt the 2025-2026 Berlin Public Schools Calendar as proposed and set the 2026 Berlin High School graduation date for Friday, June 12, 2026.

After a lengthy discussion concerning the additional shortened days for professional learning, their placement on the calendar and the imposition placed on families, the Board unanimously tabled this item to the next Board meeting.

D. Revisions to the Adopted 2024-2025 School Calendar

As a follow-up to the discussion held during the prior agenda item, this item was also tabled to the next Board meeting.

E. Policy Review/Revision – First Reading

1. Policy 2201 – Retention and Disposition of Records and Information
2. Policy 3323 – Purchasing
3. Policy 4118.5 – Employee Use of the District's Computer Systems and Electronic Communications

4. Policy 5144 – Student Discipline
5. Policy 5131.83 – Student Use of the District’s Computer Systems and Internet Safety
6. Policy 5131.81 – Use of Private Technology Devices by Students
7. Policy 6141.9 – Enrollment in an Advanced Course or Program and Challenging Curriculum
8. Policy 6172.1 – Policy for the Equitable Identification of Gifted and Talented Students

Shipman & Goodwin, LLP has recommended revisions to the policies listed above to ensure legal compliance and consistency among policies. The Ad-Hoc Committee for Policy Review/Revision met on March 11, 2024 to review the recommended revisions. Since this was a first reading, no action was required; the second reading/adoption will take place at the April 22, 2024 Board meeting.

F. Approval of the Increasing Educator Diversity Plan

Board members were provided with the Increasing Educator Diversity Plan, which has been posted in Schoology. Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons presented the Increasing Educator Diversity Plan and responded to the Board’s questions, which requires formal approval by the Board, prior to submitting it to the State Department of Education on or before March 15. Ms. Parsons’ presentation included the Vision; Theory of Action; Team Members; and Action Plans for recruitment, hiring and selection and retention of diverse staff.

Moved by Mr. Zarabozo, seconded by Ms. Jurgen, to approve the Increasing Educator Diversity Plan as presented and authorize the Superintendent to submit the plan to the Department of Education on or before March 15, 2024, as required by statute. Also to authorize the Superintendent to make any necessary plan revisions after the formal review by the Department of Education.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

VII. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes
 1. Special Meeting of February 12, 2024
 2. Regular Meeting of February 12, 2024
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending February 29, 2024
- C. Facilities Update

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

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

With regard to the Facilities Update, in response to Ms. Gibbons' question what is the reasoning for a new location for the Athletic Department Office, Superintendent Benigni stated, it is to grant more space for the Athletic Director.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:20 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Zarabozo, seconded by Ms. Gibbons, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Sisti, Secretary, Berlin Board of Education