

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

September 11, 2023

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Julia Dennis
Melissa Gibbons
Jaymee Miller – Absent
Gina Nappi
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti – Absent
Matthew Tencza
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 Human Resources Denise Parsons; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; Supervisor of Special Education – Elementary Michelle Zeuschner; Co-Directors of Curriculum Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson; Principal of Berlin High School Katie Amenta; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Principal of Griswold School Jonathan Campbell; 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 6:05 p.m. in the Board of Education (“the Board”) meeting room at 238 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. A moment of silence was held to mark the anniversary of September 11, 2001.

II. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Mr. Saunders reported, on August 24, 2023, teachers, students and staff began the 2023-2024 academic year and many students are excited to see what this year brings at Berlin High School as they continue to carry on many of the traditions—Senior Sunrise, Homecoming and Spirit Week. Mr. Saunders reported this coming Thursday through Saturday is the Berlin Fair at which Upbeat will provide over 50 hours of community service.

Miss Hashim reported on August 31, 2023, Berlin High School had the joy of being asked to give a tour of the high school to United States Secretary of Education Dr. Miguel Cardona, Governor Ned Lamont, Commissioner of Education Charlene Russell-Tucker, Mayor Mark Kaczynski and Superintendent Brian Benigni to highlight the beginning of classroom learning for the new school year. Miss Hashim extended thanks to Superintendent Benigni, Principal Amenta and Assistant Principals Testroet and Despres for giving students this wonderful opportunity.

B. Committee Reports

There were no Committee reports this evening.

C. CREC Report

There was no report this evening.

D. Correspondence to the Board

Superintendent Benigni shared a thank you noted from Cindy Martin.

III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

None

IV. PERSONNEL

Retirement – Teacher of Grade 4 – Mary E. Griswold School

Graham Seekamp, teacher of Grade 4 at Mary E. Griswold School, has submitted his letter of intent to retire at the end of the 2023-2024 school year.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to accept the retirement of Graham Seekamp, teacher of Grade 4 at Mary E. Griswold School, effective June 30, 2024. Also to thank him for the 26 years of service he has provided to the youth of Berlin and wish him good health and happiness in his retirement years.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Update on Summer Programs

Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian and Supervisor of Special Education Michelle Zeuschner reported on the ESY program offered to students qualifying for these services. Board members were provided with a handout, which provided an overview of the program over the last three years. Ms. Holian stated the program has not changed, although the numbers do fluctuate based on the students recommended for ESY services. Ms. Holian stated staff needs to be identified before the district knows how many students will attend. Ms. Holian stated this past year there were 15 students recommended who indicated they were going to attend and did not. Ms. Holian stated the district has to hire staff knowing that it may have those additional 15 students.

Ms. Holian stated the district has approximately 440 students identified with IEPs; however, only those students, who without this extra instruction would regress, whether academically, socially or emotionally over the summer, are recommended for the ESY Program. Ms. Holian stated this past year two students attended the Preschool BLAST program as students attending in 2022 advanced to the Elementary BLAST program.

In response to Mr. Salina's question, when students do not show for the ESY Program on day one, is there follow up, Ms. Zeuschner responded the district tries to follow up and sometimes hears back and sometimes does not.

In response to Ms. Nappi's question what happens to the funding when students, recommended for the ESY Program, do not attend, Superintendent Benigni stated staffing is based on the number of students potentially eligible for the ESY Program, and if students do not show, they are then utilized in other areas.

In response to Mr. Salina's and Mr. Tencza's questions concerning the teacher cost for 2023 (\$94,967) and 2022 (\$75,027), Superintendent Benigni will provide the Board with a report for 2022 and 2023, by individual teacher (not specifying name), which will reflect where the difference is. Superintendent Benigni stated, although it seems as though the cost for the program does keep going up and the student population is the same, the needs of the student population is what can differ.

B. Summer Curriculum Work Update

Curriculum Directors Laurie Gjerpen and Kara Watson provided a brief overview of the work that was done during the summer of 2023 to update the district curriculum and highlighted some of the projects chosen.

At the elementary level, Ms. Watson stated, with the newer initiatives at the state, work was done with literacy and phonics instruction, and with new resources the district is using in math and science, work was done in those areas as well.

At the elementary and middle school, technology integration did some curriculum work with social media and artificial intelligence.

At the high school level, the Rise Program curriculum was updated to include a new Spanish course and with the block schedule, the science curriculum was redesigned to accommodate students to enroll in more elective courses as some science courses no longer have separate labs.

Ms. Gjerpen stated all of the schools identified teams that needed to do RULER work, which helped them plan for the entire year. The high school redesigned their advisory to the Red Sea Block and time was used to look at the outcomes for Capstone and what needs to change for the year forward.

Ms. Watson stated at the high school there were adjustments in the Technology Education Department, Business Department and the Firefighting and EMS Programs.

C. Application for CABE Board Recognition Awards

The 2023 application for CABE Board Recognition Awards has been received. Board members were provided with a copy. To be eligible for the Board of Distinction Award (a level two recognition), a motion must be made at a Board meeting to approve the application, and the minutes of the meeting must be submitted with the application.

Moved by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, that the Board approve the application for the 2023 CABA Board Recognition Awards.

In response to Ms. Gibbons' question, why does the Board submit this application, Superintendent Benigni stated, in the past, it has always been a recognition to say the Board is adhering to the standards set by Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABA), which represents all Boards of Education. Out of the 169 towns in the State of Connecticut, Superintendent Benigni stated 150 are members of the organization, and to receive an award is a way for CABA to recognize high functioning Boards of Education.

Ms. Dennis stated when the Board does receive an award the *Berlin Citizen* is notified, and it is an opportunity to engage with the community concerning the work the Board is doing.

Superintendent Benigni stated, beyond this award, the district has received numerous recognitions for educational communications.

Ms. Dennis stated she has requested the required criteria be provided much sooner than when it is released in July or August so the Board can work collectively in satisfying any of the criteria.

In response to Ms. Nappi's question, would the Board be able to set its own standards and not be a member of CABA, Superintendent Benigni stated there are two ways to look at it (1) if the Board believes in CABA and believes the standards set are meaningful and designed to show Boards are doing quality work then the Board would want to apply for the recognition and (2) if the Board does not believe these are the right standards, is it relevant to be a member of CABA. Ms. Dennis stated Patrice McCarthy will be attending the next Board meeting at which time Board members will have an opportunity to ask questions.

Dr. Sassu stated there is a way to benefit from looking to a higher standard that is set for all Boards of Education and then personalize it to what is relative for this Board's purposes.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

- D. Selection of Subcommittee to Review Proposal in Accordance with Board Policy 1181 – Naming/Renaming of School Buildings, Components of Buildings and/or School Grounds

Last December, Christine Rose submitted a letter, on behalf of registered voters of the town of Berlin, requesting that the Board of Education consider 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. Petitions with the signatures of 100 registered voters, in accordance with Board Policy 1181, were submitted to initiate action by the Board of Education. At the January 9, 2023 Board meeting, the Board discussed what spaces within the school buildings warrant naming and Board members were asked to email the Board president if they were interested in serving on the subcommittee to review the request. Selection of the subcommittee is the next step.

Ms. Dennis stated, in addition to herself, Superintendent Benigni and Adam Salina will serve on the subcommittee. In addition, one administrator, one teacher, one parent of a student enrolled in the Berlin Public Schools and one resident of the community who is not serving in one of the roles above will serve on the subcommittee.

VI. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes
 - 1. Special Meeting of August 25, 2023 – BOE Retreat
 - 2. Special Meeting of August 28, 2023
 - 3. Regular Meeting of August 28, 2023
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending August 31, 2023

Director of Finance Ashley Dorsey provided a report that has been posted in Schoology.

- C. Facilities Update

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

- D. Overnight Field Trip Request – BHS Upbeat – Camp Jewell - October 14-15, 2023

Berlin High School Principal Katie Amenta and Upbeat Director Sheel Patel requested permission for approximately 60 students to attend the Upbeat October Training Workshop at Camp Jewell, in Colebrook, CT, on October 14-15, 2023. Students will participate in activities facilitated by BHS staff and senior members of Upbeat to work on team-building and communication skills.

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

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Prior to adjournment, Superintendent Benigni informed Board members that at their seat are two complimentary tickets from the Berlin Lions Club for the Berlin Fair.

At 6:53 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Salina, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Dennis

Respectfully submitted,

Kari Sassu, Ph.D., Berlin Board of Education