

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION

April 15, 2019

MINUTES

SPECIAL MEETING

Attendance: Richard Aroian
Julia Dennis (arrived 7:04)
Jake Fisher
Jaymee Miller (Absent)
Timothy Oakes (arrived 8:15)
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti
Matthew Tencza
Student Representatives: Alexander Halkias – Absent
Jenna Smalley – Absent

Also in attendance: Superintendent of Schools, Brian J. Benigni; Assistant Superintendent of School, Erin McGurk; Director of Pupil Personnel Services, Linda Holian

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Tencza called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. in the Board of Education Meeting Room, Arthur B. Powers Municipal Complex, 238 Kensington Road. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Mr. Tencza requested that an item be added to the agenda: Audience of Citizens.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Salina, to add the Audience of Citizens to the Special Agenda.

**FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Tencza**

II. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

John Richards, 239 Hawthorne Drive, requested clarification on the \$400,000 earmarked for school security that was moved back and forth between the Board of Education budget and the town budget/ Department 61. He inquired about the Board of Education operational budget, and whether the Board of Education had received a breakdown of the \$400,000 from the Town Manager. Mr. Tencza responded that the money was a “lump sum” to be provided to the Board of Education for the purposes of school security. Mr. Tencza also noted that the Town Manager had informed the Superintendent that the \$400,000 was being reduced to \$300,000. Mr. Richards recounted that \$575,000 was included in the proposed budget by the Board of Education for the purposes of both personnel and equipment (e.g., cameras, recording devices, etc.) to improve school security. He posed the question, “if this money is outside of the Board of Education operational budget, how do you value it as a Board?” He asked what would might the Board have done with that money, were it to have be included in the budget. Mr. Tencza reflected that the Board is extremely disappointed that the capital budget was \$0; the town’s budget presentation did not include \$2.7 million of capital, building and site funds.

Sam Lamaglio, 78 Hickory Hill Road, acknowledged the relationship that the Board of Finance and the Board of Education as one characterized by honesty. He noted that there are considerable problems with funding on the town side, not just respect the funding the Board of Education budget. He further stated

that there are false statements being made with regard to what the Board of Education will do, including individuals outside of the BoE providing assurances that teachers jobs will not be cut, even with the Board of Education budget being reduced.

John O'Brien, 12 Vineyard Drive, expressed concerns about his grandchildren going through the school system and the quality of education being reduced given the current budget. He reflected that the school system was a great one for his children, but he worries about the forthcoming changes. Mr. O'Brien encouraged the Board of Education to stand their ground and to communicate with the senior citizens in our town.

III. DISCUSSION RE: REDUCTION OF BUDGET

Mr. Tencza recounted the series of events related to the budget process, starting with the initial presentation of the proposed budget by the Superintendent of Schools. The Board of Education then adopted the proposed budget, which addressed the need to maintain existing programming and without any unnecessary additions; the included additions were: a school counselor at the high school, due to the unreasonably large caseloads of the current school counselors, some stipends being reinstated, and paraprofessionals being ordered back into the budget as a result of a lost arbitration. Following the adoption of the proposed budget by Board of Education, it was passed to the Board of Finance. The Board of Finance reduced the Board of Education budget by \$1.3 million, at which point, the Board of Education again reviewed the proposed budget, and revised it to include the following reductions: \$300,000 reduction to contracted services (Effective School Solutions program at the high school); \$400,000 reduction to tuition and transportation; \$500,000 reduction to certified salaries; and \$100,000 reduction to the general Operating Budget, relative to supplies. The Town Council subsequently reduced the Board of Education budget by an additional \$400,000, leaving the Board of Education to implement further reductions. Discussion ensued and suggestions for reductions included: elimination of middle school sports (estimated savings: \$100,000), elimination of freshman sports (estimated savings: \$50,000), reduction of JV sports (estimated savings: \$8,300), elimination of clubs and activities funded by stipends (estimated savings: \$50,000), reduction or elimination of co-curricular activities K-12, reduction of an administrator (estimated savings: \$125,000). Benefit savings were approximated at \$75,000. Additional possibilities included eliminating specials at the elementary school, exploratories at the middle school, and electives at the high school.

Superintendent Benigni and the Board discussed the impact these reductions will have on curricular offerings, programs, services, and opportunities for students. Ideas for generating additional funds were presented, including instituting parking fees at Berlin High School, and a "pay to participate" fee associated with extracurricular activities including sports and clubs. The possibility of charging for preschool for those children who serve as peer models was also discussed as was the possibility of redistricting to allow for grade levels to be banded within different schools; these latter two suggestions will be reserved for future budget discussions and could not be implemented for the 2019-2020 school year.

In an effort to accommodate the \$1.7 million reduction to the Board of Education budget, the Board agreed that the following reductions would be implemented: \$500,000 in certified staff salaries/ benefits, \$400,000 in tuition/ transportation, \$300,000 in contracted services (Effective School Solutions), \$100,000 supplies/ textbooks/ materials, \$100,000 McGee sports, \$50,000 freshman sports, \$50,000 stipend reductions, \$125,000 administration, and \$75,000 in benefit savings.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:40 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Salina, seconded by Ms. Dennis, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Tencza

Respectfully submitted,

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