

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION
January 23, 2019
MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING

| | | |
|-------------|--|----------------------|
| Attendance: | Richard Aroian | |
| | Julia Dennis | |
| | Jake Fisher | Absent |
| | Jaymee Miller | Absent |
| | Timothy Oakes | |
| | Adam Salina | |
| | Kari Sassu, Ph.D. | Arrived at 6:09 p.m. |
| | Tracy Sisti | |
| | Matthew Tencza | |
| | Student Representatives: Alexander Halkias | Absent |
| | Jenna Smalley | Absent |

Also in attendance: Superintendent of Schools Brian J. Benigni; Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk; Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; Supervisor of Special Education – Elementary Michelle Zeuschner; Supervisor of Special Education – Secondary Cindy Martin; and Director of Athletics Jeff Mauri.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Tencza 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. 2019-2020 PROPOSED BUDGET PRESENTATION

A. Special Education Budget

Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian, along with Supervisor of Special Education – Secondary Cindy Martin and Supervisor of Special Education – Elementary Michelle Zeuschner, presented the 2019-2020 Special Education Budget and responded to questions from the Board concerning their presentation. Board members were provided with a copy of the presentation. Ms. Holian indicated their goal was to provide Board members with an overview of special education, expenses and funding sources. They shared data from October 1, 2018 and also current numbers, as of today, as Special Education is constantly changing. Resources used were from the New England School Development Counsel, Connecticut State Department of Education and Effective School Solutions. Ms. Holian reported the Special Education Budget is a large part of the local budget and that holds true for the State of Connecticut. Although overall, enrollment has gone down state and district wide, special education numbers continue to increase, and students with disabilities require more resources to meet their individual needs, which increases costs.

Ms. Holian reported the number of Connecticut students in kindergarten through Grade 12 with disabilities eligible for special education and related services has increased by nearly 6,000 from the 2008-2009 and 2015-2016 school years although the overall population has dropped by more than 32,500. Data included on the Connecticut State Department of Education’s website indicates that the prevalence for special education students in Connecticut schools has increased from 11.6% to 13.4% over the last seven years. (Connecticut State Department of Education – May 2016)

Historical Perspective on Education in Berlin: Ms. Holian shared the special education trend report for Berlin over the last nine years, which included the total general education expenditures (excluding fringe benefits); the total special education expenditures (excluding fringe benefits); and the total general and special education expenditures (excluding fringe benefits) trend line.

Special Education Drivers 2019-2020: The Budget drivers, for the \$11,353,449 2019-2020 special education budget, include Administrative Salaries: \$436,964; Certified Salaries: \$3,736,487; Non-Certified Salaries: \$2,247,058; employee benefits: \$855,403; Contracted Services: \$574,807; Transportation: \$1,219,939; Tuition: \$2,119,307; Supplies, Textbook and Materials: \$53,960; Equipment: \$2,424; Summer School: \$100,000; and all other expenditures: \$7,100.

Federal Funding in Berlin: Three years ago, the district began participating in the Medicaid Program. Currently, the Medicaid Program funds one full time Occupational Therapist and provides professional development for related service providers as occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech and language pathologists and social workers require continuing education units to keep their licenses.

Currently, 4.6 certified staff and 10 FTE paraprofessional positions are partially funded through the IDEA Part B, Section 611 grant. One FTE paraprofessional is funded through the IDEA 619 grant.

State Funding in Berlin: The Excess Cost grant is Connecticut's method for paying extraordinary special education costs. The Excess Cost grant reimburses districts when expenditures for educating a special education student are 4.5 times greater than the district's spending per pupil. Berlin's per pupil expenditure is \$16,457 x 4.5 or \$74,057. This grant reimburses districts when expenditures for state agency placements are greater than a district's spending per pupil. Included in the presentation was the total outside special education placement expenditures trend line for years 2010-2011 through 2018-2019. Nine students who are currently in out-of-district placements will graduate or reach the age of 21 over the next five years. Tuitions range from \$52,601 to \$220,040, which does not include transportation costs. Ms. Holian provided Board members with a handout containing the out-of-district tuition for Berlin students, which reflected placements eligible for excess cost grant reimbursement.

Special Education in Berlin for 2018-2019: As of October 1, 2018, 166 students (an increase of 55 students over the last 5 years) are eligible to receive accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (ADA); 19 students receive services in out-of-district facilities; 11 students attend parent choice programs such as magnet schools, Vo-Ag and private schools; and 5 students receive service plans. Four hundred nineteen (419) students (an increase of 73 students over the last 5 years) receive direct special education services from the staff and schools. As of this evening, there are 427 students receiving direct special education services from the staff and schools, 183 students are eligible to receive accommodations under Section 504, 7 students are receiving service plans and 14 students are being referred for special education.

As of July 1, 2018 through January 23, 2019, 23 new students have entered the district requiring special education services. Nine of the 23 students have significant needs requiring paraprofessional support, outside evaluations and/or specialized programming; one of these students was out-placed last week; and one of these students was already in an out-of-district placement.

The total special education staff has increased by 28.7 over the last nine years due to new programs to meet the needs of students. Included in the presentation was a breakdown of the number of special education students, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, specialized programs and related service staff for each school and the Berlin Transition Academy.

Special Education Department Operational Budget:

General (\$30,130): Ms. Holian is requesting funds for travel, field trips for students in the BLAST Program, supplies and equipment. This account has not seen an increase in the last five years.

Classroom (\$21,102): Ms. Holian is requesting funds for special education teacher supplies (\$500 each teacher).

Pupil Personnel (\$558,102): Ms. Holian is requesting funds for professional services, conferences, administrative travel, dues and fees, repair and maintenance, printing, non-instructional supplies and professional reading material. In addition, Ms. Holian is requesting an additional \$275,000 from the current budget to fund the ESS Program at Berlin High School.

Occupational Therapist/Physical Therapist (\$2,795): Ms. Holian is requesting funds for supplies.

Social Worker and Psychologist (\$4,850): Ms. Holian is requesting funds for supplies.

Special and Language Pathologist (\$2,812): Ms. Holian is requesting funds for supplies.

Transition Academy (\$13,500): Ms. Holian is requesting funds for field trips, supplies and rent. Not included is an \$8,500 stipend to allow students to manage their money for community experiences.

2019-2020 Requests to Support Student's Academic and Social and Emotional Needs: Although not part of the 2019-2020 proposed budget, Ms. Holian requested three FTE paraprofessionals (\$75,000) to continue to keep high needs students in district through specialized programs. Many of these students require a one to one or two to one student to teacher ratio. Five new students moved into the district over the past two years and four of the five students came to the district with one to one paraprofessional support and one student has been identified and is requiring one to one support. There is a need for three paraprofessionals for students moving into the BLAST program from preschool.

Although not part of the 2019-2020 proposed budget, due to additional students receiving an increase in math and reading supports at Griswold and Willard schools, Ms. Holian requested increasing two part-time teachers from .50 FTE to .80 FTE at both schools.

Although not part of the 2019-2020 proposed budget, due to an increase in needs at the preschool level, Ms. Holian requested to increase the physical therapist from three days to four days a week and due to an increase in fine motor and sensory needs, Ms. Holian requested a part-time certified occupational therapy assistant at the elementary level.

Included in the 2019-2020 Budget is the Effective School Solutions (ESS) program at Berlin High School (\$275,000). Although requested for McGee, the ESS program was removed from the current proposal. Berlin schools are dealing with a significant increase in students experiencing social and

emotional distress. This includes both the general population as well as students receiving services on an IEP or 504 plan. There is an increase in family, school and social stressors as well as anxiety and depression. Students are lacking effective coping skills due to these stressors. As of tonight, there have been 46 DCF referrals, 22 reports of concern, 23 at risk reports, 2 risk assessments conducted by the district's consulting psychiatrist and 9 psychiatric evaluations. Included in the presentation was the needs assessment data from school counselors.

The mission of ESS is to provide intensive clinical programming for students with significant emotional and behavioral problems so they can be maintained within the public school system and benefit from the wide range of educational, social and extra-curricular opportunities that are only available in public schools. This is accomplished by bringing psychiatric expertise, proven treatment protocols, experienced mental health professionals, clinical supervision and quality management activities into the educational environment so that struggling students can stay and thrive in the public school setting. Ms. Holian provided a listing of the clinical services; ESS results for urgent sessions, family contacts, parent support groups and individual sessions; ESS staffing; documentation standards; a partial list of the high risk student issues ESS has encountered with students in the Berlin public schools; pre and post ESS results for 2017-2018 and the first marking period for 2018-2019; and parent comments.

B. Curriculum and Instruction Budget

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk presented the Curriculum and Instruction Budget for 2019-2020 and responded to questions from the Board concerning her presentation. Board members were provided with a handout containing the curriculum program budget summary. Ms. McGurk indicated the budget she is presenting is for funds that will invest in the professional staff and continuous improvement in terms of new learning, new curriculum and new programs for students.

Although Instruction Supplies has a significant decrease from the current budget, Ms. McGurk indicated this is more of a shift than a huge reduction as technology funding is now located in a different part of the budget. With regard to textbooks, Ms. McGurk is requesting \$49,080 (an increase of 146% or \$29,129) for textbook purchases for a UCONN course, Food I course, and the replacement of outdated math and social studies textbooks at Berlin High School.

Due and Fees, at the request of Superintendent Benigni, were decreased by 100%.

C. District-wide Non-instructional Programs/Athletics

Director of Athletics Jeff Mauri presented the 2019-2020 Athletics Budget. A copy of his presentation was provided to Board members. Mr. Mauri reported the proposed 2019-2020 Athletics Budget is \$357,270, which for the high school is \$35,375 less than the current year's and for the middle school is \$7,800 more than the current year's. Mr. Mauri indicated there are cuts in the equipment budget due to surpluses and increases for officials as these costs will increase next year. Mr. Mauri is requesting an additional \$2,500 for contracted medical services for school nurse summer hours to update physicals. Mr. Mauri reported there is a reallocation of funds for uniforms on the replacement cycle and included in this budget is the replacement of uniforms for boys baseball, boys cross country and girls basketball.

At the Board's request, Mr. Mauri will provide a listing of the equipment purchased this current year for boys baseball and girls softball; the budget for girls soccer at McGee; and a breakdown of the number of coaches, teams (freshman, junior varsity and varsity), athletes, total cost and stipends attached to each sport.

D. Site and Building

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported the Board submits requests to the town for site and building, which are carried under town Department 61-School Expense. The total proposed Site and Building requests total \$703,800, which includes security cameras district wide, improvements to the front office vestibule at Griswold School (\$30,000) and replacement carpet (\$30,000) and painting (\$10,000) in the library media center at McGee. Board members were provided with a complete list of the Site and Building requests.

E. Capital Requests

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported, the Board also submits requests to the town for capital equipment, which are carried under town Department 61-School Expense. The total proposed Capital requests total \$2,009,255, which includes the replacement of the phone system in the elementary schools (\$160,000), district-wide information technology (\$1,001,175) and district-wide security (\$365,000). Board members were provided with a complete list of the Capital requests.

F. Board of Education Overall Review

Mr. Tencza requested Board members provide him with any question in advance of the Monday, January 28, 2019, Board meeting so he can put them together for Superintendent Benigni to respond in order for the Board to have a focused conversation on the overall budget Monday evening.

III. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:49 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Ms. Dennis, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:0; including President Tencza

Respectfully submitted,

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