

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION
February 25, 2019
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Richard Aroian - Absent
Julia Dennis
Jake Fisher
Jaymee Miller
Timothy Oakes
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti - Arrived at 7:26 p.m.
Matthew Tencza
Student Representatives: Alexander Halkias
Jenna Smalley

Also in attendance: Superintendent of Schools Brian J. Benigni; Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Erin McGurk; Director of Human Resources Denise Parsons; Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Linda Holian; Principal of Berlin High School Eileen Eustis; Principal of McGee Middle School Salvatore Urso; Principal of Griswold School David Kitzman; and Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Tencza called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. in the Richard D. Hubbard School Cafetorium at 139 Grove Street, East Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. STUDENT PRESENTATION – RICHARD D. HUBBARD SCHOOL

A primary focus area of Hubbard School has been the promotion and capacity building of the Berlin Learner Outcomes. This year, third grade has placed particular attention on the Berlin Learner Outcomes of being mindful and responsive collaborators who think interdependently. To launch this focus area, students participated in a Global Read Aloud opportunity with other second and third grade classrooms around the world. As part of the process, Grade 3 students participated in a postcard exchange with each of the 50 states in our country as well as four other countries involved in reading the same text. Since this enriching experience, third grade staff has aligned their year-long social studies study of Connecticut with the informational writing unit in Writer's Workshop to provide authentic opportunities for students to collaborate. Presenting this evening were teachers Meg Wesoly and Mary Raney, along with student presenters Brody Andrade, Jacob Carling, Lucas Jorge and Giuliana Luongo.

A short recess was taken from 7:26 p.m. until 7:33 p.m.

III. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Miss Smalley reported the Berlin High School music department will present *Shrek, The Musical* on March 8 – 10, and tickets are available on-line at the school's website; course registration is open for next school year, and students received the Program of Studies in Advisory last week; and the Red Cross Club is holding their annual blood drive March 11, 2019.

Mr. Halkias reported there are over 75 students and staff performing in the production of *Shrek, The Musical*, and Mr. Boyle has indicated he is excited for this event. Mr. Halkias provided Board members with the state tournament schedule for track, wrestling, girls basketball and boys basketball. Mr. Halkias reported the 8th grade parent night is February 27, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. in the auditorium at Berlin High School.

B. Correspondence to the Board

There was no correspondence to the Board this evening.

Superintendent Benigni reported Next Gen Personal Finance has named Berlin High School a gold standard school, and the State Department of Education has identified Willard Elementary School as a school of distinction.

IV. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Mayor Mark Kaczynski addressed the Board concerning the hiring of armed security guards within the schools.

Add Items to the Agenda:

Mr. Tencza indicated he would like to add to this evening's agenda a discussion, concerning some of the state proposals and the potential impact on the district, to appear following facilities related updates, as Item VI.D., and prior to adjournment, an Executive Session regarding an item of personnel.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Salina, to add Item VI.D. to discuss state proposals and the potential impact on the district.

**FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Tencza**

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Oakes, to add an Executive Session to the agenda for a personnel matter.

**FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Tencza**

V. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes
 - 1. Regular Meeting of February 11, 2019
 - 2. Special Meeting of February 11, 2019
- B. Overnight Field Trip Request – BHS Upbeat – Camp Woodstock – March 15-17, 2019

Berlin High School Principal Eileen Eustis and Director of Upbeat Jack Rudy requested permission for approximately 90 students to travel to Camp Woodstock, in Woodstock, CT, to attend the March

Advanced Leadership Weekend. The Advanced Leadership Weekend is for sophomore, junior and a select number of freshmen peer leaders to advance their leadership skills through a variety of workshops and activities to build on their social and leadership skills.

Moved by Ms. Dennis, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to approve the consent agenda as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Tencza

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. School Security, Safety and Residency Director and Armed Security Guards

The Board continued its discussion from the February 11 meeting regarding the hiring of a school security, safety and residency director and armed security guards. At that meeting, a recommendation was made to hire a school security, safety and residency director for the district, two armed security guards at the high school, one armed security guard at McGee, and one armed security guard at each elementary school. Ms. Sisti reported she, along with Superintendent Benigni, met privately with each of the administrators. She reported four of the principals were in favor of armed security guards and one was not; four of the principals were in favor of concealed weapons and one was indifferent; there were concerns of having the weapon concealed for families that have dealt with trauma; most of the principals indicated they would want to be part of the hiring process; all were concerned if guards were not armed would there be funds for security; and all principals indicated the public survey was the driving force for their decisions. The Board discussed the importance of the relationship armed security guards would need to have with students and the need for highly-skilled individuals. One member also discussed the importance of skill in the use of de-escalation techniques by these guards, as well as the abilities of these individuals to interpret behaviors of children who are not able to communicate effectively.

Mayor Mark Kaczynski indicated these security officers would work very closely and train with the Berlin Police Department and would coordinate with the school resource officers and the Berlin Police Department.

Moved by Ms. Dennis, seconded by Mr. Salina, to approve the hiring of a school security, safety and residency director for the district, two armed security guards at the high school, one armed security guard at McGee, and one armed security guard at each elementary school.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 7:1; including President Tencza; Dr. Sassu opposing

B. Open Choice Program Participation

Superintendent Brian J. Benigni reported on the current number of Open Choice Program (CHOICE) students in the Berlin schools and presented a recommendation to the Board regarding the level of participation for the 2019-2020 school year.

Superintendent Benigni provided Board members with a document reflecting, by grade, his recommended number of CHOICE students for 2019-2020. Superintendent Benigni reported the district currently has one hundred twenty-eight (128) CHOICE students, and the projected maintained seats for 2019-2020 are one hundred eighteen (118). Superintendent Benigni recommended the district accommodate an additional fourteen (14) students for the 2019-2020 school year, and he provided the Board with a breakdown of his recommendation for placement of these students within grade kindergarten (13) and grade 7 at McGee (1). Superintendent Benigni indicated the grade 7 student is a sibling of one of the recommended kindergarten students. Superintendent Benigni indicated these numbers do not put class sizes at an alarming rate.

Mr. Tencza thanked Superintendent Benigni for his report, and indicated he appreciated limiting the open seats to kindergarten, with the exception of the grade 7 seat.

Ms. Dennis thanked Superintendent Benigni for opening seats in kindergarten; however, she indicated, while she was campaigning, going to over 2,000 homes, people she talked with in town, were not necessarily happy with the issues that come up with CHOICE students. Ms. Dennis indicated that, although she is for education equality and for opportunities for students, she needs to respect the concerns of people in town.

Superintendent Benigni indicated funds are tied to the CHOICE program, which are tied directly to teachers' salaries, and without these funds, the budget is at a greater deficit. Superintendent Benigni believes opening seats at the kindergarten level is an initial step in the right direction, and he will see how well the district functions and will evaluate year to year.

Moved by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Salina, to approve the Superintendent's recommendation regarding the level of participation in the Open Choice Program for the 2019-2020 school year as presented.

FAVOR: ALL

MOTION CARRIED: 6:2; including President Tencza; Ms. Dennis and Ms. Sisti opposing

C. Facilities Related Updates

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno reported the security vestibules are funded and construction at Willard School will start in April and finish the end of May; construction at McGee Middle School will start in June and finish sometime in July; construction at Hubbard School will start the middle of July and finish the end of July; and construction at Griswold School will start the end of July and finish the middle of August. Mr. Cugno reported the process to renovate a room to a Special Education classroom at McGee Middle School for students who need extra space and care has begun.

D. Discussion Regarding State Proposals and the Potential Impact on the District

Board members discussed the impact that Proposed Bill No. 454, *An Act Concerning the Creation of Regional School Districts*, Proposed Bill No. 457, *An Act Concerning the Size of School Districts* and Governor Lamont's proposal for a municipal cost-sharing plan for teachers' pensions would have on the district.

VII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 8:40 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Dr. Sassu, to enter into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter and to invite Superintendent Benigni.

**FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 8:0; including President Tencza**

In attendance for Executive Session were Board members Dennis, Fisher, Miller, Oakes, Salina, Sassu, Sisti and Tencza. In addition, Superintendent Benigni was present.

At 9:02 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:03 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