

BERLIN BOARD OF EDUCATION
May 13, 2019
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING

Attendance: Richard Aroian – Absent
Julia Dennis – Departed at 9:52 p.m.
Jake Fisher
Jaymee Miller – Departed at 8:55 p.m.
Timothy Oakes
Adam Salina
Kari Sassu, Ph.D.
Tracy Sisti
Matthew Tencza – Arrived at 7:04 p.m.
Student Representatives: Alexander Halkias – Absent
Jenna Smalley – Departed at 9:04 p.m.

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; and Principal of Hubbard School Alfred Souza.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Pledge of Allegiance

Dr. Sassu called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. in the Richard D. Hubbard School Cafetorium at 139 Grove Street, East Berlin, Connecticut. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. ANTICIPATED APPOINTMENT

Director of School Security, Safety and Residency

Dr. Sassu requested this item be moved to the end of the agenda. Hearing no objection, the anticipated appointment of the Director of School Security, Safety and Residency appears later in agenda, prior to Adjournment as Item VIII.

III. STUDENT PRESENTATION – HUBBARD SCHOOL

The meaningful integration of technology is critical in the education of students given the world today. This applies not only to academic endeavors, but the visual and performing arts as well. Instrumental music students benefit from integrating technology into their learning experience both at home and in school. SmartMusic is a program that allows students to play along with recordings of their instrument and full band, self-assess and correct their mistakes, and submit assignments for teacher feedback. Mrs. Ryan and her students, Madalyn Donovan, Isabella Fuschino, Ellie Henriques, and Sara Langford, modeled the benefits of using SmartMusic as a teaching tool, as well as a digital avenue to facilitate student progress at home.

A short recess was taken from 7:18 p.m. until 7:22 p.m.

IV. COMMITTEE REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD

A. Report of Student Representatives

Miss Smalley reported spring sports are still underway this week, and this past Saturday senior Patty Mroczkowski set a new state record for the high jump, clearing a mark of five feet, ten inches; junior Audrey Feldman was selected as a Governor's Scholar and six junior students also qualified for National Merit recognition, based on the Fall SAT; AP testing is still underway this week; the spring choral concert is May 14, 2019 in the Berlin High School auditorium; this Saturday is the town-wide tag sale to support the Berlin High School Class of 2020; and on May 23, 2019 the senior Capstone Expo will be held throughout the day and evening.

As a follow up to Miss Smalley's report, Mr. Oakes reported on Saturday evening's thirteen inning Varsity softball game.

B. Committee Reports
1. Educational Resources Committee

Mr. Salina reported the Educational Resources Committee met prior to tonight's meeting and discussed the 2019-2020 budget, based on the first referendum vote, and the monthly budget report.

2. Student Achievement Committee

Ms. Miller reported the Student Achievement Committee met prior to tonight's meeting. Dr. McGurk provided an update of the status of the proposal to begin work with the School-Based Health Services. Based on certain information received, the Committee recommends investigating other options.

C. Correspondence to the Board

There was no correspondence to the Board.

V. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Ellen Lalicata, 1275 Worthington Ridge, Berlin, Connecticut, accompanied by her sons, Tekoda and Brody Philbin, and their father, John Philbin, addressed the Board concerning the current food policy at the Berlin Schools. Ms. Lalicata requested the Board of Education revisit the current policy on food allergies and reconsider her initial request to make mandatory a non-food policy for birthdays, in-class celebrations and classroom science experiments at the Berlin schools and to provide consistent, scheduled education to the students on the risks and threats associated with food allergies and the importance of inclusivity, understanding and care of food-allergic students. Ms. Lalicata provided Board members with a handout concerning her change request. She also provided a handout concerning food allergy awareness for the week May 12-18, 2019, as well as a copy of recent correspondence from Stacia Bjarnason, Ph.D., to Superintendent Benigni, Dr. Correia, and members of the Board of Education. Tekoda also shared his experiences feeling lonely, isolated and unimportant when students choose sweet treats over their classmates.

Ms. Laura Westman, 4 Edgerly Street, Berlin, Connecticut, addressed the Board concerning the elimination of Claire Cloukey's school counselor position at Griswold and Willard elementary schools.

Ms. Jan Zagorski, 63 Grandview Avenue, Berlin, Connecticut, addressed the Board concerning the reduction of the health class at McGee School.

Mr. John Richards, 239 Hawthorne Drive, Berlin, Connecticut, reported the Board of Finance meets tomorrow evening to approve the fiscal year 2020 proposed budgets, which will then go to the Town Council for their five day review and then to a second referendum on May 28, 2019. Mr. Richards' concern, as a member of the Board of Finance, is trying to read the vote and apply it as dollars in the next proposal. As he understands it, the Board's Operational Budget was voted too low, and on the town's side, it was voted too high. Mr. Richards indicated the Board's security plan is on the town's side, and he understands there to be a \$300,000 placeholder for personnel only. Mr. Richards reported originally \$575,000 was included in the Board's proposed budget for personnel, cameras, equipment and hardware. He inquired if a Director of School Security, Safety and Residency is named tonight, what direction does the Board see the security proposal going as the Board of Finance is trying to determine how to consider the security proposal and weigh the priorities.

Mr. Tencza responded the Board had a detailed number that applied to six security guards along with equipment, cameras, recording equipment and the officers' personal equipment and hardware. The conversations, all along with the Mayor, were that the monies would be held in Account 61; however, the \$575,000 never made it to that account, \$400,000 was the number that was placed there and the Board was never notified what that included or why it was reduced to \$300,000. If a Director of School Security, Safety and Residency is named tonight, Mr. Tencza indicated that salary would be part of the \$300,000. The future of that allocation is unknown to the Board as the Building and Site and Capital Budgets never made it to the Town Budget.

Superintendent Benigni responded he received a phone call from Town Manager Jack Healy stating the \$400,000 was decided when he was putting together the budget, and it was being reduced to \$300,000, based on the reductions to the mill rate, which Superintendent Benigni understood was for personnel and not for cameras and hardware.

In response to Mr. Richard's question as to the desired number of security personnel, Superintendent Benigni responded he would want to have a security guard in each building as well as the Director of School Security, Safety and Residency for a total of six.

Mr. Richards requested the Board provide Finance Director Kevin Delaney with their vision for the \$300,000 because, if the town side is reduced, that item could be part of the reduction.

VI. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes
 - 1. Regular Meeting of April 22, 2019
 - 2. Special Meeting of April 15, 2019
- B. Monthly Budget Report – Period ending April 30, 2019
- C. Request for Leave of Absence – Emma Hart Willard School, Teacher of Grade 3

Nicole King, teacher of Grade 3 at Emma Hart Willard School, requested an unpaid leave of absence, for childrearing purposes, to begin immediately following her maternity leave through the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

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

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

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Facilities Related Updates

Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno updated the Board on the BLAST program classroom at McGee School. Mr. Cugno reported the initial preliminary project cost was reported to be in the range of \$40,000 to \$50,000; however, after further inspection of the space was completed and programming was determined by the staff, it became apparent that renovations would be more costly. The current cost estimate from Jacunski Humes is \$192,000, which includes construction costs, appliances, architect/engineer fees and a five percent contingency. Mr. Cugno indicated this cost estimate is with all work being put out to bid and completed by private contractors. Mr. Cugno reported, in speaking with Doug Solak, as much of the job as possible will be completed by the staff of the facility department. It is anticipated the project will be completed by the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year; however, depending upon a schedule for fabrication of mill work and the availability of qualified construction firms this summer, the schedule for completion could extend into early fall. Final construction design documents should be completed in May with bids expected in early June. Mr. Cugno indicated funding for the project will need to come from the 2018-2019 Board of Education Budget and the Town's Capital Account.

B. Discussion – School-Based Health Center

At the March 25 meeting, School-Based Health Services provided a presentation on the services they offer to promote and enhance the physical and mental health of children and youth, particularly uninsured and under-insured populations. Superintendent Benigni reported that he, along with Linda Holian, visited the Clinton Public Schools and met with the administrators who oversee the implementation of the program. After that meeting, Superintendent Benigni and Ms. Holian had concerns regarding the program, which include family services not offered outside of school; similar diagnoses by professionals given to many students, which allow for billing to insurance; and exclusivity of professionals within the buildings.

C. Discussion Regarding the 2019-2020 Board of Education Operating Budget

Superintendent of Schools Brian Benigni reported there was a meeting last week with the Board of Finance Chair Sam Lomaglio and Mayor Mark Kaczynski, and unfortunately, there was no resolution. Mr. Tencza reported the meeting revolved around the \$400,000 cut to the Board of Education's Operational Budget by the Town Council. There was a Board of Finance meeting on May 9, 2019 at which the Board of Finance asked for community comments on the Board of Education and General Government budgets. There was a lot of conversation concerning the ESS Program, and the meeting was educationally focused. The Board of Finance meets tomorrow night to discuss and approve the fiscal year 2020 proposed budgets, which will then go to the Town Council and then to a second referendum on May 28, 2019.

D. Discussion – Healthy Foods

Mr. Tencza began by stating this is an important topic. It is not just about snacks coming into the schools but about student safety as well. He stated, in his current role, working with school food services across six different states, allergens are a major topic in every school district he speaks with and every program has a significant emphasis on how to address the eight major allergies. Mr. Tencza stated he feels very strong about this topic and feels the district's policy is not stringent enough. He understands why parents would want to bring treats in for their children, but at the same time, others, that cannot have them, are put at risk.

Superintendent Benigni led a discussion on potential changes to the current policy and practice of allowing food items to be brought into the schools for celebrations. Superintendent Benigni shared several options that are currently in place in other school districts and Board members were provided with a hand out from one of those districts that has a policy of non-food items currently in place for celebrations.

Board members shared their positions on this topic. Superintendent Benigni will provide Board members with two sample policies at the next Board meeting for further discussion.

E. Discussion – Book Vending Machine Sponsor Policy

Assistant Superintendent McGurk shared a draft proposal to allow local businesses and organizations to provide sponsorship/funding for books to be distributed to students through the book vending machines. Dr. McGurk discussed how the district will respond to an organization that approaches the district but has a product or purpose that is unsuitable for promotion within the Berlin Public Schools. A copy of the proposal was provided to Board members.

F. Camp Thundermoon – YMCA Lease at Willard

The Meriden-New Britain-Berlin YMCA will be leasing a portion of the Willard School facility during the summer (June-August) for operation of its Camp Thundermoon Program. Director of Business Operations Jeffrey Cugno presented a summary of the Agreement with the Board of Education. The lease is for five years, with a lease rate of \$20,000 per summer, and the lease can be canceled with ninety days notice. The YMCA will carry insurance and indemnify the Berlin Board of Education. Custodial and trash pickup will be provided.

In response to Mr. Salina's question if inflation is included on an annual basis, Mr. Cugno responded no, but will be considered.

A recess was taken from 9:04 p.m. until 9:10 p.m.

G. Interview Candidate for Director of School Security, Safety and Residency (executive session)

At 9:10 p.m., a motion was made by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Salina, to go into Executive Session to interview the candidate for the position of Director of School Security, Safety and Residency, inviting Superintendent Benigni.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 7:0

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

At 9:51 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

VIII. ANTICIPATED APPOINTMENT

Director of School Security, Safety and Residency

Superintendent Benigni recommended that the Board of Education appoint Mark G. Critz, Sr. as Director of School Security, Safety and Residency, effective July 1, 2019.

Moved by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, that the Board of Education appoint Mark G. Critz, Sr. to the position of Director of School Security, Safety and Residency, effective July 1, 2019.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 6:0

VII. NEW BUSINESS - CONTINUED

H. Discussion of Attorney-Client Privileged Communication Regarding Legal Rights and Authority Concerning Budgetary Matters and Referendum Issues, Advertising, and the Non-Lapsing Account (executive session anticipated)

At 9:55 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Oakes, seconded by Mr. Salina, to go into Executive Session, inviting Superintendent Benigni and Attorney Richard Mills, to discuss attorney-client privileged communication regarding legal rights and authority concerning budgetary matters and referendum issues, advertising and the non-lapsing account.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 6:0

In attendance for Executive Session were Board members Fisher, Oakes, Salina, Sassu, Sisti and Tencza. In addition, Superintendent Benigni and Attorney Richard Mills were present.

At 11:25 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

At 11:26 p.m., a motion was made by Dr. Sassu, seconded by Mr. Salina, to adjourn.

FAVOR: ALL
MOTION CARRIED: 6:0

Respectfully submitted,

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