

**BARRE UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD MEETING**

Via Video Conference – Google Meet
January 14, 2021 - 5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Paul Malone (BT) - Chair
Sonya Spaulding (BC) – Vice-Chair
Victoria Pompei (BT) – Clerk
Gina Akley (BT)
Tim Boltin (BC)
Emel Cambel (BC)
Giuliano Cecchinelli (BC)
Alice Farrell (BT)
Guy Isabelle (At-Large)

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

David Wells, Superintendent
Mary Ellen Simmons, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction
Stacy Anderson, Director of Special Services
Penny Chamberlin, Director Central Vermont Career Center
Hayden Coon, BCEMS Principal
Chris Hennessey, BCEMS Principal
Carol Marold, Director of Human Resources
Jennifer Nye, BTMES Principal
Erica Pearson, BTMES Principal
Brenda Waterhouse, SHS Principal

GUESTS PRESENT:

Dave Delcore – Times Argus	Shane Aldrich	Christine Bell	Aliza Benoit	Chris Cheney
Allison Courtemanche	Tara Day	Erika Dolan	David Erwin	Kara Erwin
Betsy Francis	Karen Fredericks	Crystal Harvey	Yoko Kishishita	Prudence Krasofski
Stacey Lamberti	Patrick Leene	Chas Legge	Jody Leone	Melissa Locarno
Jen Malnati	Tara Martin	Ben Matthews	Jessica Maurais	Kathy Maurais
Ted Mills	Kristin Morrison	Rebekah Mortesen	Christine Parker	Tim Sanborn
Malinda Sayers	Diane Solomon	Megan Spaulding	Rachael Van Vliet	Sara Young

As the meeting was held via video conferencing, a roll-call vote was taken for each action item. Each Board Member was individually polled and voted to approve all motions that are listed as unanimously approved.

1. Call to Order

The Chair, Mr. Malone, called the Thursday, January 14, 2021, Regular meeting to order at 5:32 p.m., which was held via video conference.

2. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

4.2 Approval of January 7, 2021 Special Meeting Minutes – Table until next regular meeting.

Add 5.5 – Enrollment Report

Add 6.6 – Administrator Evaluations

6.5 Racial Equity Policy Discussion – Discuss under 5.3.4 Policy Committee Report

Meeting date changes were also noted under Agenda Items 5.3.2 and 5.3.3

On a motion by Mrs. Farrell, seconded by Mrs. Spaulding, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Agenda as amended.

3. Public Comment for Items Not on the Agenda

3.1 Public Comment

None.

3.2 Student Voice

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

4.1 Approval of Minutes – December 17, 2020 Regular Meeting

On a motion by Ms. Cambel, seconded by Mrs. Spaulding, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Minutes of the December 17, 2020 Regular Meeting.

4.2 Approval of Minutes – January 7, 2021 Special Meeting

Agenda Item tabled until the next Regular Meeting of the BUUSD Board.

5. Reports to the Board

5.1 Central Office

A copy of the BUUSD Central Office Newsletter for January 2021 was distributed. A document titled ‘Survey Results – Returning in Fall 2021?’ was distributed. Copies of the District Enrollment/Staffing Reports for 12/2020 and 01/2021 were distributed. Mr. Wells advised that he will provide an update on administrator evaluations at the first Regular Meeting in February, and an update on progress of evaluations at the second Regular Meeting in February. The results of the survey for students who plan to return next year was distributed in the packet addendum. Mrs. Pompei queried regarding how financials will be re-evaluated based on survey results that indicate 25% of students (who left the BUUSD during the 20/21 academic year) will not be returning. Mr. Wells believes that it will be necessary to gather additional data prior to planning. Budgeting and planning for staffing was done based on student counts from previous years. In response to a query, Mr. Wells advised that it is his belief that all Vermont schools will be returning to full in-person learning in the fall of 2021. The BUUSD will need to explore if they wish to offer full remote learning in the fall of 2021.

5.2 Building Reports

5.2.1 Spaulding High School

The Principal’s Report dated ‘01/07/20’ was distributed. The SHS Library Newsletter for January 2021 was distributed. There were no questions from the Board.

5.2.2 Central Vermont Career Center

The CVCC Director’s Report (Director CTE Bytes) dated January 2021 was distributed. A document highlighting work of CVCC Programs was also distributed. There were no questions from the Board.

5.2.3 Barre City Elementary and Middle School

The Co-Principals’ Report dated January 8, 2021 was distributed. Administrators want to stress how much they thank community members for making the drop-off procedure work so smoothly. Mr. Coon reminded the community of upcoming schedule changes. In response to a query, it was reported that the gym is only being used for PE on inclement weather days. Physical Education teachers having been working creatively to write plans for outdoor PE activities. Mr. Coon advised that the gyms are also being used for the delivery of intervention and special education services. Mrs. Nye advised that at BTMES the gyms are also used for arrival and dismissal of students. Mrs. Waterhouse advised that at the high school, PE classes are normally held indoors.

5.2.4 Barre Town Middle and Elementary School

The BTMES Building Report dated January 14, 2021 was distributed. A copy of the BTMES Newsletter was distributed. There were no questions from the Board.

5.3 Committee Reports

5.3.1 Communications Committee

Mrs. Farrell advised there was nothing to report.

5.3.2 Finance Committee

A report was provided last week. There is nothing additional to report.

5.3.3 Facilities & Transportation Committee

There were no updates from the Committee.

5.3.4 Policy Committee

In addition to the policies that will be presented this evening, Mr. Wells announced that the Policy Committee had two law school students in attendance at the last meeting (for discussion of an anti-racism policy). As the District has been working to address equity, the Committee met with these students who are currently working with municipalities/schools to write anti-racism policies. Utilizing these individuals, a policy could be drafted using input from the local community. Once drafted, the policy will be presented to the Committee, and then using current practices, would be presented to the Board for approval. It is thought that their legal background would be helpful in drafting a policy. It was clarified that the proposed policy does not replace an existing policy. It is the Board’s understanding that Board approval is not necessary for the Committee to work with these consultants. Mrs. Farrell stressed that

creation of this policy should be tied to the Vision, Mission, Strategic Planning initiative. The consultants should be made aware of this initiative. It was noted that the consultant's fee is \$900 and will be paid by grant funds. The next meeting is Monday, January 15, 2021 at 5:30 p.m.

5.3.5 Curriculum Committee

The next meeting is Tuesday, January 26, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. via video conference. Intervention Services will be the main focus of the discussion.

5.3.6 Negotiations Committee

Negotiations will be discussed in Executive Session.

5.3.7 Regional Advisory Board

The next meeting is February 8, 2021.

5.4 Financials

Two documents were distributed; 'BUUSD – FY21 Year End Projection Report (dated 01/05/21) and the CVCC FY21 Year-end Projections Report (dated 01/05/21).

Mrs. Spaulding queried regarding an update on school re-opening. It was noted that this item is not on the agenda. It was discussed last week, and Mr. Malone did not believe it would be discussed at this meeting. Mr. Wells was asked to provide a brief summary. Mr. Wells advised that the buildings are moving forward with plans for more in-person learning, including transportation plans, preparing classrooms and preparing for an increased number of students. Information on this increase of in-person instruction is posted on the BUUSD web site. A parent voiced concern relating to the lack of busing for pre-school students. It was noted that there are complications relating to the required installation of 5 point harnesses (for pre-school students), which render the seat unusable for older children, as well as the decision made under the re-opening plan, that for a multitude of reasons, pre-school students would not be transported this year. Mr. Wells will have Mr. Coon follow up with the parent. Concern was raised that there are many unresolved issues relating to school re-opening. It was noted that there are many different preferences from families (some want all remote learning, some want all in-person, and some want the hybrid model) and there is no resolution that will please all families. A parent requested that a plan be written now, for use in the future, if social distancing guidelines are amended by the State (to allow students to be closer than 6 feet). Mr. Malone reiterated that the BUUSD operates under the guidelines from the State, and that guidelines can change quickly. Concern was raised that the 6 foot social distancing rule has not changed since school opened, and that other schools are allowing more students in their schools. It was noted that the configurations at other schools are not known/documented and that all schools have different student counts and square footage/classroom configurations. Schools differ and cannot be compared 'apples to apples'. Frustration was voiced that this issue is continually raised in Board meetings. It was agreed that online posting of information relating to learning structures of other schools might be beneficial as it will allow community members to view the information and this topic will not have to be brought up repeatedly in Board meetings. It was noted that using outside facilities poses many issues, including staffing and maintenance. Concern was reiterated that students in the upper grades have received very little in-person instruction since last March, and may not be prepared for moving on to high school and/or college. Though it is hoped that all in-person learning can resume after April vacation, but the return to in-person learning is dependent on COVID statistics and State guidelines. Mr. Wells encourages the community to view the COVID plan on the BUUSD web site. Mr. Wells reiterated that not all parents are open to a return to all in-person learning, and advised that Mrs. Waterhouse is working with parents to resolve student issues. Parents of high school students who are experiencing difficulties should contact Mrs. Waterhouse.

5.5 Enrollment Report

The Enrollment Report was discussed under Agenda Item 5.1. There was no additional discussion under this agenda item. Additional discussion was held regarding busing for pre-school students. Mr. Wells advised that he hopes to have transportation for pre-school students reinstated next year.

6. Current Business

Copies of all policies referenced in Agenda Items 6.1 through 6.4 were distributed. A copy of e-mail correspondence relating to policies (dated 01/12/21) was also distributed.

6.1 First Reading Firearms Policy (C5) Required Policy

Mr. Cecchinelli provided a brief overview of the policy. Mrs. Pompei voiced concern that the Implementation section is being removed, advising that it contains specific information regarding various requirements (items that 'shall' be performed), which relates more to policy than procedures. It was noted that the policy does not mention that the Superintendent must contact law enforcement when a student is found to be in possession of a weapon. Mr. Wells advised that the Policy Committee has been removing procedures from policies. It was noted that items in this section do not necessarily involve procedures, but are part of the policy and list requirements. With the removal of this section, the superintendent is not required to adhere to some of the requirements listed under the implementation section. It was stated that the Board should follow up to see that written procedures are in place. It was noted that the Board does not have control over procedures and if this policy is approved without the implementation section, a mandatory expulsion hearing is no longer required.

On a motion by Mr. Isabelle, seconded by Ms. Cambel, the Board voted 5 to 4 to approve the First Reading of the Firearms Policy (C5). Mr. Boltin, Ms. Cambel, Mr. Cecchinelli, Mrs. Farrell, Mr. Isabelle, and Mr. Malone voted for the motion. Mrs. Pompei and Mrs. Spaulding voted against the motion. Mrs. Akley was not present for the vote.

6.2 First Reading English Learners Policy (C4) Required Policy

Mr. Cecchinelli provided a brief overview of the policy advising that this is an amended version from the VSBA.

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Mr. Isabelle, the Board unanimously voted to approve the First Reading of the English Learners Policy (C4). Mrs. Akley was not present for the vote.

6.3 First Reading Electronic Communications Between Employees & Students Policy (B8) Required Policy

Mr. Cecchinelli provided a brief overview of the policy, advising that procedures were removed and definitions were added.

Discussion was held regarding possible formatting issues. Mr. Wells provided clarification regarding the possible formatting issue.

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Mrs. Farrell, the Board unanimously voted to approve the First Reading of the Electronic Communications Between Employees & Students Policy (B8). Mrs. Akley was not present for the vote.

6.4 First Reading Prevention of Sexual Harassment as Prohibited by Title IX Policy (C12) Required Policy

Mr. Cecchinelli advised that this is a policy that is supposed to be adopted without changes. It was noted that there were many questions and concerns regarding this policy. Mr. Wells advised that VSBA and BUUSD attorneys strongly recommend that this policy not be modified. The policy is based on Federal statute. Mrs. Spaulding voiced concern that there are many procedures that need to be written for this policy and additionally advised that this policy does not address preventing sexual harassment.

Mrs. Spaulding believes the policy has too many loop holes, doesn't address prevention of sexual harassment, and advised that she will not support this policy. Mr. Cecchinelli suggested crafting an additional policy to address prevention of sexual harassment.

Mrs. Spaulding wants assurance that procedures and handbooks will be created in a timely manner. Mr. Aither will be working on procedures that tie to this policy. Mr. Cecchinelli will contact Mr. Aither regarding procedures. Ms. Simmons advised that in her experience, procedures are usually written after policies are approved.

On a motion by Ms. Cambel, seconded by Mr. Isabelle, the Board voted 7 to 1 to approve the First Reading of the Prevention of Sexual Harassment as Prohibited by Title IX Policy (C12). Mr. Boltin, Ms. Cambel, Mr. Cecchinelli, Mrs. Farrell, Mr. Isabelle, Mr. Malone, and Mrs. Pompei voted for the motion. Mrs. Spaulding voted against the motion. Mrs. Akley was not present for the vote.

6.5 Racial Equity Policy Discussion

Discussion was held under Agenda Item 5.3.4.

6.6 Administrator Evaluations

A brief report was provided in the Superintendent's Report. Mrs. Pompei advised that she has major concerns if the Board only begins the evaluation process in February, as the Board changes in early March. It is supposed to be the Board that has been in place for a year that does the evaluations, not a new Board. This process has always started in December to allow for the existing Board to perform evaluations. Mrs. Pompei reiterated her concern that the Board will just begin hearing about the process in February. Mr. Wells advised that he will provide an update at the second meeting in January. Mr. Wells clarified that he would provide an update on the procedure and on what will occur in February. Mr. Malone reiterated Mrs. Pompei's concern that if the evaluation process does not begin until February it will not be completed until at least the end of February and that current Board Members will not be able to participate in the evaluation process. Mr. Wells will provide additional information on January 28, 2021, and confirmed that evaluations will be completed prior to the March deadline. It was confirmed that evaluations will be ready for the first meeting in February. Mrs. Spaulding confirmed that the Superintendent's evaluation will be completed by the current Board. This evaluation should be completed in January.

7. Old Business

7.1 FY22 Budget and Annual Meeting Warning(s) Approval

A copy of the 'Barre Unified Union School District Warning For March 2, 2021 Vote' was distributed.

A copy of an e-mail between the Superintendent and Sean M. Toohey (dated 01/12/21) was distributed.

Mr. Wells advised regarding Act 162 which is a temporary Act (under COVID) which allows districts who normally vote 'from the floor' at Annual Meetings, to hold votes utilizing Australian ballots. Board action is required to allow for voting by Australian ballot. An informational meeting can be held remotely. Mr. Wells advised that Act 162 (for this year) waives the requirement for Board candidates to collect signatures and submit petitions (for board seats). Though petitions are not required, candidates need to sign a consent form in order to be put on the ballot. The deadline for submission of consent forms is 01/18/2021. Mr. Wells advised that it is his understanding that the deadline is the 6th Monday prior to the vote. Mr. Wells consulted with legal counsel regarding the deadline for Board petitions and was advised that the dates are in statute and cannot be changed. It was clarified that according to statute the deadline for this year is January 25, 2021.

On a motion by Mr. Isabelle, seconded by Ms. Cambel, the Board unanimously voted that pursuant to Act 162 of 2020, the BUUSD shall conduct the District's 2021 Annual Meeting business using the Australian ballot voting method for all Articles. Mrs. Akley was not present for the vote.

Mrs. Spaulding advised that there will be four open seats, 2 for Barre City and 2 for Barre Town. Mrs. Spaulding encourages interested parties to contact members of the current board. Mr. Wells advised that Mrs. Gilbert has contacted Mr. Koch regarding his interest in being on the ballot for the position of Moderator. Ms. Dawes and Mrs. Kelty have not yet been contacted.

On a motion by Mr. Isabelle, seconded by Mrs. Pompei, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Barre Unified Union School District Warning For March 2, 2021 Vote. Mrs. Akley was not present for the vote.

Mr. Isabelle suggested that the Board discuss having ballots mailed to all registered voters. Mr. Malone believes the City Council has decided not to send ballots to all voters for Barre City business. Mr. Isabelle advised that he believes the school Board has the right to require that school related ballots be mailed to all registered voters. Mr. Wells reported that the City and Town Clerks would prefer to send out post cards advising voters of how to obtain a paper ballot.

7.2 Second and Final Reading Notice of Non-Discrimination Policy (A22) Recommended Policy

Copies of policies referenced under Agenda Items 7.2 – 7.4 were distributed.

On a motion by Mrs. Farrell, seconded by Mrs. Spaulding, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Second and Final Reading of the Notice of Non-Discrimination Policy (A22), and agreed to adopt said policy. Mrs. Akley and Mr. Cecchinelli were not present for the vote.

7.3 Second and Final Reading Employee Unlawful Harassment Policy (B5) Required Policy

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Mrs. Farrell, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Second and Final Reading of the Employee Unlawful Harassment Policy (B5), and agreed to adopt said policy. Mrs. Akley and Mr. Cecchinelli were not present for the vote.

7.4 Second and Final Reading Homeless Students (C13) Policy - Required Policy

On a motion by Mrs. Farrell, seconded by Mrs. Spaulding, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Second and Final Reading of the Homeless Students (C13) Policy, and agreed to adopt said policy. Mrs. Akley and Mr. Cecchinelli were not present for the vote.

7.5 Vision, Mission, and Strategic Goals

The Design Team met for the first time last week, Each individual representing a stakeholder group is currently trying to recruit individuals to participate in the stakeholder public feedback meetings. The Design Team will meet again next week. It is not known if the meetings are posted online.

8. Other Business/Round Table

Mr. Isabelle expressed his appreciation to students for their comments at previous meetings. Mr. Isabelle feels badly that the teachers who spoke at the last meeting were feeling that they are being 'dumped on' on social media. Mr. Isabelle suggests that folks stay off social media.

Mr. Boltin has heard from students that teachers are vocalizing their concerns and their lack of interest in having students return to school. Mr. Boltin feels that it is not appropriate for teachers to be expressing their frustrations to high school students.

Ms. Cambel advised that this has been a trying week in various ways and she is saddened to see how things 'come to roost' on school districts and she is sad to see how angry people are. Ms. Cambel agrees that it may not be a good time for teachers to be using social media and advised that individuals do not always have all the facts prior to posting information.

Mrs. Spaulding advised that she sent questions to the entire Board regarding the closing of BCEMS on January 14, 2021 and she would like the Superintendent to address her concerns, specifically regarding protocols and guidance from the Department of Health. Mr. Wells advised that last evening, a school community individual was informed of a positive COVID test. The nurse and administrators discussed the situation and the Department of Health was notified. The BUUSD did not hear back from the Department of Health until twelve hours later. After discussion of the facts, and reviewing the timeline, it was determined that there would be multiple staff members who would need to quarantine until the school heard back from the Department of Health. Mr. Wells advised that each COVID instance is unique. After discussion with the Department of Health, it was determined that the school could open on January 15, 2021. This instance did involve multiple key staff members who are involved throughout the school. Mr. Wells is not able to share additional information as it might disclose confidential/identifying information. Other incidents in other schools have not involved closure of those schools.

Mr. Wells advised that a doctor from the Department of Health has agreed to hold two informational sessions (one for staff and one for community members) regarding COVID Safety in Schools.

Mrs. Pompei advised that she will not be running for re-election. She is disappointed with how Board Members are being presented as being unsupportive of teachers and the community. Mrs. Pompei donated her first year Board stipend to the BTMES ECO Program and feels it is unfair for her to be labeled as unsupportive. Mrs. Pompei has volunteered many hours and donated money and materials to support many programs in the school system, and yet has been labeled as unsupportive. Mrs. Pompei also reported that negative comments (about her) have been posted on social media. Being a Board Member requires making difficult decisions. Mrs. Pompei advised that shortly after she made a suggestion about a cut to a staffing position, she was given a frosty reception at BTMES for several weeks (on days when she came in to volunteer). Her character and motives have been questioned. Her time as a Board Member has made her question the schools and the community. She hopes that taking some time away will help restore her confidence in both.

Mrs. Akley understands that there is a lot of frustration on all sides, and that as more information becomes available, some may question decisions that were made. Everyone is genuinely trying to make the best decisions possible to keep students safe. Mrs. Akley advised that today, new COVID counts were the highest she's seen them, there is now a more contagious strain of the virus, and she feels that we are on the precipice of things getting really out of control again. Mrs. Akley believes wholeheartedly that the goal of those responsible for making decisions, is to get students back in school as much as possible and as quickly as possible, and she fully supports the decisions being made to keep the children safe.

Mrs. Farrell responded to Mrs. Pompei's comments, advising that in the years she has known Mrs. Pompei, her perspectives have been welcomed and inspiring. Those who speak otherwise don't have a good grasp on who Mrs. Pompei is. Additionally, Mrs. Farrell advised that during the January thaw, the buses need to be washed.

Mr. Cecchinelli urges anyone who likes to vocalize on on-line venues to consider submitting a consent form and participate in the District's business as a board member.

Mr. Malone advised that within the new district there have been some bumps and bruises, but by-and-large the District has pulled together as a team and worked through differences. Mr. Malone advised that he too, will not be running for re-election as a Board Member. Mr. Malone may continue to participate with verbal input or participation at the committee level. Mr. Malone firmly believes in education and that the District has an obligation to educate students to the highest level. Mr. Malone reiterated that it has been a very difficult year with many different issues coming into play. Mr. Malone appreciates that many have worked so hard to navigate through these difficult times. Mr. Malone believes things are moving in the right direction. Mr. Malone reiterated Mrs. Farrell's comments relating to Mrs. Pompei, advising that he has worked with Mrs. Pompei since she started on the Board and much appreciates her efforts to see that the BUUSD operates as effectively and economically efficient as possible. Mr. Malone extended his personal thanks to Mrs. Pompei.

9. Future Agenda Items

The next meeting is Thursday, January 28, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. via video conference.

- Policy Readings
- Administrator Evaluations
- Instruction Delivery Data for Similar Sized Districts and Update on BUUSD Instruction Delivery
- Superintendent's Goals

10. Executive Session as Needed

10.1 Negotiations

Negotiations/Labor Relations Agreements was proposed for discussion in Executive Session

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Mr. Isabelle, the Board unanimously agreed to find that premature general public knowledge of the item proposed for discussion, specifically Negotiations/Labor Relations Agreements, would clearly place the Barre Unified Union School District at a substantial disadvantage should the discussion be public.

On a motion by Mr. Isabelle, seconded by Mrs. Spaulding, the Board unanimously voted to enter into Executive Session, with Mr. Wells in attendance, at 7:42 p.m. under the provisions of 1 VSA section 313 to discuss the items proposed for discussion.

The remaining information was provided by the Board Clerk.

On a motion by Mrs. Farrell, seconded by Mrs. Spaulding, the Board unanimously voted to exit Executive Session at 7:59 p.m.

11. Adjournment

On a motion by Mrs. Farrell, seconded by Mrs. Spaulding, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn at 7:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrea Poulin