

BARRE UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT
SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
Via Video Conference – Google Meet
January 7, 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
Emmanuel Ajanma, Director of Technology
Stacy Anderson, Director of Special Services
Penny Chamberlin, Director Central Vermont Career Center
Hayden Coon, BCEMS Principal
Jason Derner, Alternative Education Administrator
Chris Hennessey, BCEMS Principal
Carol Marold, Director of Human Resources
Lauren May, Director of Early Education
Jennifer Nye, BTMES Principal
Erica Pearson, BTMES Principal
Lisa Perreault, Business Manager
Brenda Waterhouse, SHS Principal

GUESTS PRESENT:

Dave Delcore – Times Argus

Lauren Ball	Heather Battistoni	Christie Berard	David Cameron	James Carpenter
Stephanie Collins	Tamara Cooley	Natessa Cournoyer	Allison Courtemanche	Lauralea Curavoo
Susannah Davis	Kevin Deutermann	Nora Duane	Alicia Grochowik	Jaime Guilmette
Allyson Healey	Shannon Huda	Brandy Kolling	Prudence Krasofski	Patrick Leene
Jennifer Luck-Hill	Ben Matthews	Tara Martin	Jessica Maurais	Alexander Maurice
Kaleb Metcalf	Ted Mills	Shelly Morton	Christine Parker	Tim Sanborn
Diane Solomon	Megan Spaulding	Elysha Thurston	Jan Trepanier	Rachael Van Vliet
Katherine Whitcomb	Jesse Willard	Kristin Ziter		

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 7, 2021, Special meeting to order at 5:31 p.m., which was held via video conference.

2. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

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

3. Public Comment for Items Not on the Agenda

Allyson Healey addressed the Board and read a prepared statement relating to the stressfulness of teaching during COVID, and her concerns that teachers are feeling pressure and are being blamed for issues relating to learning during COVID (being targeted and slandered on social media). Ms. Healey stressed the importance of education and supporting students and staff. Ms. Healey requested that individuals take a pledge to use kind thoughts, kind words and kind hearts throughout the day and carefully consider words being spoken when speaking about others.

Rachael Van Vliet, addressed the Board on behalf of the Barre Educators' Association. Ms. Van Vliet read a prepared statement relating to an earlier request from BEA asking that the community use compassion, patience, and trust that education professionals are making the most educationally sound and safe decisions under these difficult circumstances. The statement advised that ongoing unproductive rhetoric damages the community and stressed that it is best to work as a team. Ms. Van Vliet thanked the Board and Administrators for their support. The statement also advised that the tenor of discourse on social media and at Board meetings is causing some educational professionals to consider leaving the profession. The BEA requests that Board Members and other board meeting attendees follow Meeting Norms, including the 'Norm' to Respect others and their ideas.

Diane Solomon addressed the Board, reiterating the sentiment conveyed by Ms. Healey and Ms. Van Vliet. Additionally, Ms. Solomon reiterated her request that school related decisions be made utilizing COVID data provided by the State. Mr. Malone advised that it is his understanding that the school is operating under the guidelines provided by the State.

4. Current Business

4.1 Announced Tuition

A document titled FY22 Announced Tuition was distributed. The announced tuitions are as follows; K – 6 \$15,645 / 7 – 12 \$16,082 / CVCC \$17,496.

A document titled 'LEA ID: U097 LEA NAME: BARRE UUSD' was distributed.

A document titled 'LEA ID: VC002 LEA NAME: CENTRAL VERMONT CAREER CTR' was distributed.

Mrs. Perreault provided a brief overview of this process which is performed annually. In response to a query regarding the tuition amount remaining unchanged from FY21 (though the BUUSD cost per pupil has increased), Mrs. Perreault advised that the BUUSD did not receive the "Allowable Tuition" amount as required by statute. This information was due to the BUUSD on 11/01/20.

Because the Allowable Tuition amount was not received by the BUUSD, it was decided to be conservative and use the same amount as FY21.

On a motion by Mrs. Pompei, seconded by Mr. Isabelle, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Annual Tuition Rates as proposed (K – 6 \$15,645 / 7 – 12 \$16,082 / CVCC \$17,496). Mrs. Akley was not present for the vote.

4.2 FY22 Budget and Warning Approval

Thirteen documents were distributed;

Barre Unified Union School District Warning For March 2, 2021 Vote

'Why does Barre City have a higher homestead tax rate than Barre Town'

Projected Comparative Tax Rate Calculations (revised 01/07/2021) for BUUSD FY22 Budget Draft 3 (Barre City & Barre Town)

Minutes from the 03/02/2020 BUUSD Annual Meeting

A copy of an e-mail from Donna Kelty to Tina Gilbert (dated 01/06/2021)

FY22 BUUSD Budget Development Considerations (dated 01/07/2021)

BUUSD FY22 Proposed Budget – Draft 3 (dated 01/05/2021)

BUUSD FY22 Proposed Budget – Expense Summary – Draft 3 (dated 01/05/2021)

BUUSD FY22 Proposed Budget – Revenue Summary – Draft 3 (dated 01/05/2021)

CVCC FY2020 – FY2022 Budget Expense Summary – Draft 3 (dated 01/05/2021)

FY22 CVCC Projected Tuition (Draft #3)

A letter from the State of Vermont Department of Taxes to the Barre City Clerk (dated 12/21/2020)

A letter from the State of Vermont Department of Taxes to the Barre Town Clerk (dated 12/21/2020)

Mrs. Perreault advised that Draft 3 is included in the packet and includes a list of reductions that administrators are recommending based on feedback from Draft 2. Draft 3 includes \$651,407 in reductions. Draft 3 results in a 4.47% increase in the General Fund Expense Budget. It was noted that the Board had requested an increase no larger than 5%. Mrs. Perreault provided a brief overview of the Comparative Tax Rate Calculation document and noted that the BUUSD remains well below the state average on cost per pupil. Mrs. Spaulding provided an overview of the Finance Committee meeting, including a request that the budget increase by no more than 5% and that a second budget with an increase of 2% also be presented. This second budget will be further reviewed and refined if Budget 3 does not pass. The Finance Committee is recommending that the Board approve budget draft 3 as presented. There is concern that there is a double digit increase in taxes. Mr. Maurice read a prepared statement relating to his concerns over how budgets are drafted and areas which he feels should have increases and those which he believes could be decreased. Mr. Maurice queried regarding why some areas of the budget seem to show significant increases. Mr. Maurice advised that he attended the recent Finance Committee meeting, noting that it was informative and some of his questions were answered. The Superintendent, administrators, and the Board responded by providing clarification on the areas of concern. It was stressed that the major increase to the budget is related to line items that are outside of the control of the Board (salaries and benefits). Mrs. Perreault advised that the budget process is very

complicated, and volunteered to meet with Mr. Maurice to provide additional information regarding the process. Mr. Malone voiced concern regarding the tax rates, and noted that the Barre Town tax rate would have a significant decrease if the reappraisal is lodged in April. Barre City is going to be performing a reappraisal in the near future. Ms. Berard addressed the Board voicing concern over budget cuts noted in the 2% 'alternate' budget, including reductions to teacher positions. Ms. Berard would like some specific information relating to the positions being cut and other reductions included in that budget. Mrs. Spaulding clarified that the budget Ms. Berard is referring to is not the budget that is being put forth for approval tonight. The alternative budget is a document that will be reviewed in more detail if the budget does not pass and further cuts need to be made. Mr. Isabelle queried regarding additional COVID monies that may be available in the future. It was noted that COVID Relief funding will continue, but funding allocation has not been defined at this time.

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Ms. Cambel, the Board voted 8 to 1 to approve an Expenditure Budget of \$50,492,954 for the Barre Unified Union School District for FY22.

Mrs. Akley, Ms. Cambel, Mr. Cecchinelli, Mrs. Farrell, Mr. Isabelle, Mr. Malone, Mrs. Pompei, and Mrs. Spaulding voted for the motion. Mr. Boltin voted against the motion.

It was noted that due to the passing of Act 162, it may be necessary to make adjustments to the Warning. Some items that are normally addressed from the floor at the Annual Meeting, may be added to the Warning (to be voted on by Australian ballot). It was noted that at last year's Annual Meeting, Ms. Dawes advised that the deadline for submission of board seat positions makes it difficult to have ballots printed in time. The current Articles of Agreement state the deadline is 30 to 40 days prior to election. Ms. Dawes asked that the Board consider amending the Articles of Agreement to reflect a deadline of 'the sixth Monday before the election'. Changes to Articles of Agreement must be made by Australian ballot. For the change to become effective prior to next year's election, it would need to be approved by voters prior to that election. It was noted that the budget number has been set, so budget promotion materials can be worked on and approval of the Warning could be postponed. Mr. Wells advised that changing Articles of Agreement will require involvement of legal counsel and may not be able to be accomplished prior to the deadline for posting the legal Warning. It was agreed that the Superintendent will check with legal counsel regarding the possibility of presenting changes to the Articles of Agreement at the March 2021 election. If that is not possible, the Board will work to see that the requested change is presented at a future vote.

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Mr. Isabelle, the Board unanimously voted to approve an Expenditure Budget of \$3,331,442 for the Central Vermont Career Center for FY22.

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Ms. Cambel, the Board unanimously voted to table approval of the March 2, 2021 Warning until the next Board meeting which is to be held on 01/14/2021 and to have research performed regarding the ability of adding an Article to amend the Articles of Agreement, relating to when petitions are due.

It was noted that the Superintendent will move forward with contacting legal counsel regarding changing the Articles of Agreement.

4.3 FY22 BUUSD Annual Meeting Warning

A document titled Barre Unified Union School District Annual Meeting Warning For March 1, 2021 was distributed.

Mrs. Farrell moved to approve the Warning. Mr. Isabelle seconded the motion.

Mrs. Spaulding queried regarding whether or not an Annual Meeting can or will be held (due to COVID restrictions). Under Act 162, items typically voted by 'from the floor' can be voted on by Australian ballot. In the past, the Clerk and Treasurer have been nominated and voted on at the Annual Meeting. It needs to be confirmed that these positions (historically held by Donna Kelty and Carol Dawes) can be added to the ballot without use of petitions. Moving items to Australian ballot does require Board action. It was noted that Mrs. Kelty will be retiring mid- 2021, so it may be necessary to look into whether an individual needs to be named, or if a title (e.g. Barre Town Town Clerk) can be put on the ballot. Mr. Wells will contact legal counsel regarding answers to these questions. Mrs. Spaulding queried regarding the possibility of allowing the Board to appoint these positions, rather than having them voted on at an Annual Meeting. It is not known if this change would also require a change to the Articles of Agreement. An additional concern that was raised pertains to Article V (Authorization to Borrow Funds). It is not known what steps need to be taken if this is placed on the ballot and not approved by the voters. Mr. Malone would also like the Superintendent to seek legal advice on this matter. Mrs. Akley queried regarding whether or not an Annual Meeting could be held remotely. Documentation in the packet advises of individuals who can be contacted for clarification regarding 'adapting resources'. The Board agreed that to avoid any conflict of interest, Will Senning will be the individual to contact with adapting resources questions.

Mrs. Farrell withdrew the motion.

On a motion by Ms. Cambel, seconded by Mrs. Farrell, the Board unanimously voted to table approval of the 'Barre Unified Union School District Annual Meeting Warning, For March 1, 2021 Vote' until the January 14, 2021 Regular Board Meeting.

4.4 First Reading Electronic Communication Between Employees & Students Policy (B8)

A copy of the policy was distributed. It was noted that this is a policy that is supposed to be adopted without any changes.

Mrs. Pompei moved to approve policy B8. Mr. Isabelle seconded the motion.

Mrs. Spaulding has questions pertaining to the policy. Some questions pertain to possible formatting errors. Mrs. Spaulding will contact VSBA with some of her questions and Mr. Wells will research possible formatting issues. Mr. Wells advised that this policy is one that the BUUSD is required to adopt without changes.

Mrs. Pompei withdrew the motion.

Mr. Isabelle voiced concern that policies continue to be ‘kicked down the road’ and he believes that in an effort to protect students and staff, the Board needs to be taking action on policies.

Mr. Malone queried Mrs. Spaulding regarding her possible attendance at Policy Committee meetings so that her question can be addressed during the Committee meeting. Mr. Malone feels it would be beneficial to have questions answered in Committee prior to policies being presented to the Board.

The Board agreed to table discussion of this policy until the January 14, 2021 Regular Board Meeting.

Mrs. Spaulding will contact VSBA regarding her concerns. Mr. Wells will have formatting issues resolved.

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

A copy of the policy was distributed. Mrs. Spaulding prefers to table this policy, advising that it needs some ‘cleaning up’. Mrs. Spaulding will forward her changes and questions to the Superintendent, Mr. Cecchinelli, and Mr. Aither.

The Board agreed to table discussion of this policy until the January 14, 2021 Regular Board Meeting.

4.6 Reopening Update

Mr. Wells reported that the return to hybrid education has been successful with very few glitches. Based on feedback from the Board regarding moving the date back for grades 5 and 6, Mr. Wells advised that the date has changed from 02/01/21 to 01/25/21. Communication of the re-opening plan was also discussed, and has been added to the web page, broken down by grade, providing very clear information. Mr. Wells and Mr. Allen met to discuss frequent and multi-modal communication. Various forms of communication include; e-mails, texting, and the robo-call system to assure that the plan is clearly communicated. COVID Relief funds were used to purchase additional desks. Many desks have arrived and been installed in classrooms. The Transportation Coordinators have been working with STA to finalize bus routes. Mr. Isabelle queried regarding the data used for re-opening decisions. Mr. Wells displayed information reached by a link to a State of Vermont web page. This link is on the BUUSD web site. Mr. Wells provided a brief overview of the data. Currently, incidents of COVID in the District are low. Should a decision be made to modify the plan, the BUUSD will try to keep as many programs open as possible. Indicators at this point are favorable. Mrs. Spaulding queried regarding changes to assist with an increased amount of learning for grades 7 – 12. Mr. Wells advised that he has been working with the middle school principals, who have been working with faculty to increase the amount of learning being presented. The 6 foot distancing requirement still applies to those grades, which does pose additional challenges. Middle schools are looking to enhance what is presented in hybrid education. With the start of the next semester, the high school is looking for ways to increase the number of class sessions for students. Ms. Parker addressed the Board, advising that she looks forward to seeing middle school learning opportunities increase. Ms. Parker does not believe her middle school children are receiving enough instruction, and she is more concerned as more time passes and it is not known when middle school students will return to more in-person learning. There is concern that 8th graders will not be prepared for high school. Ms. Parker queried regarding what the current large spaces are being used for and if it’s possible to ‘think outside the box’ to find a way to utilize those spaces differently. Mr. Wells advised regarding space and staffing issues. Middle school administrators have reviewed spaces, and are working with faculty to improve the quality of hybrid learning. Mr. Hennessey understands the frustrations involved, and noted that it is very challenging to find ways to re-purpose the larger spaces in the building. Staffing challenges also complicate the issue. Ms. Pearson echoes Mr. Hennessey’s sentiment, and provided a brief overview of changes BTMES has implemented. There is currently an open Interventionist position. Staff is still lean at BTMES, but administrators are looking for ways to utilize staff creatively. Ms. Parker would like to see some improvements within the next month. Mrs. Pompei queried regarding specific details on improvements, and suggested that having teachers use microphones (blocking out background noise) could alleviate the issue surrounding student privacy. Mrs. Pompei is concerned that we are a good way into the school year and some of these issues haven’t been resolved. Perhaps we need to use technology more creatively. Mrs. Curavoo advised that in her classroom (kindergarten), she cannot have an interactive class session without calling on students. Recording live lessons is difficult for kindergarten. Mrs. Curavoo is concerned regarding comments pertaining to the effectiveness of classroom teachers, advising that she believes classroom teachers are being asked to perform two jobs (teaching in-person and on-line). Virtual Academy teachers have been trained to teach 100% on line, but classroom teachers have not. Mr. Hennessey advised that there are many complexities involved with providing live instruction on line. Mr. Wells advised that discussions have been held regarding the goal of having more video content. Melissa Metcalf addressed the Board, advising that her

son's teachers have been absolutely amazing this year. Ms. Metcalf queried regarding offering a 3rd option, so that some students could stay in hybrid mode while others return to in-person. Ms. Metcalf advised that COVID numbers are continuing to rise and new strains are being identified and she is not comfortable with her son returning to school for full in-person learning. Ms. Berard queried regarding an option of researching what other communities are doing. Ms. Berard is experiencing challenges trying to work her job and assist her children with their studies and would like everyone to work for better solutions. Mr. Wells advised that when looking at what other communities are doing, it is not an 'apples to apples' comparison based on many factors; student counts, building/classroom square footage, staffing, courses etc. Mr. Wells advised that the next in-service day will focus on gauging student progress, looking at scope and sequence to determine what essential skills have been taught, and then focusing on plans to address essential skills. The BUUSD will be working on a plan for recovering skills/learning that has been 'lost' (recovery of learning). Mrs. Spaulding queried regarding consideration for implementation of concurrent learning, and how privacy concerns would be an issue under that format. Mr. Wells advised regarding multi-modal teaching, which involves; lessons, small group work, and independent work. Regarding privacy issues, when classes are held remotely, individuals other than the students who are normally in the classroom, may be present. Ms. Simmons reiterated that all students have a right to privacy and that must be adhered to by the school. Mrs. Spaulding queried how other schools are able to hold classes in this manner. Mrs. Waterhouse advised regarding the many different ways in which high school staff are providing lessons and advised that consistency is beneficial to students. Mr. Sanborn advised that teaching concurrently changes the way instruction is delivered to those who are in-person (interactions are changed). Mrs. Waterhouse clarified that the term 'concurrent' means something different at the high school level. High school students participating in concurrent learning are taking courses that earn both high school and college credits at the same time. Mrs. Waterhouse believes the discussion that was just held, is more in line with a synchronous learning experience. Ms. Solomon is concerned regarding attendance, and queried whether or not remote days count as in-person days. Ms. Solomon believes the 9:00 a.m. TA check-in time may be problematic for some high school students who missed checking in. Mrs. Waterhouse advised that students, who are at the school during in-person learning, are marked as present. If students are present remotely, they are marked as tardy. This system is being utilized to assist with contact tracing. Students who are working remotely and do not log in to their classes are marked as absent. Mrs. Waterhouse advised that attendance is definitely lower than when the school is in all in-person learning. Mrs. Spaulding is concerned that students in grades 7 – 12 are not receiving additional instruction. Mrs. Spaulding advised regarding several parents who are concerned regarding a lack of academics and the impact of social isolation. Mrs. Spaulding is concerned that remote learning has been happening for months, but it appears it is not being done well. Mrs. Spaulding believes much is left to the discretion of teachers and that students and parents are struggling. Mrs. Spaulding would like to receive specific data relating to what is being taught and how, and specific plans (with dates) for improvements. Mr. Coon believes it would be more appropriate to present these types of questions to the Re-opening Committee rather than administrators. Mr. Coon advised that the Re-Opening Committee has not met in a while due to the winter break. Mrs. Waterhouse advised that there is no black and white answer to Mrs. Spaulding's questions, but advised that many improvements have been made over a short period of time. Mrs. Waterhouse advised that everyone is doing their best and continuing to make progress, but there is no way to create a perfect plan. Ms. Simmons advised that within the next week, there will be an in-service day, and reiterated Mr. Wells' overview of what will be covered during that session. In response to comments that much time has passed and instruction is still not being done well, Mr. Hennessey takes strong objection to those comments and reiterated the statements made by Ms. Healey and Ms. Van Vliet at the start of the meeting. Mr. Hennessey believes comments such as these are incredibly harmful and create a false narrative. Mr. Hennessey advised that the vast majority of feedback from parents regarding what is offered to the students is appreciative, thankful, and remarkably positive. Mr. Hennessey acknowledged that though there are some families for whom things are not working well, there are many who are not having issues. Mr. Hennessey believes that for anyone in the community to imply that things are not going well or that administrators and staff aren't trying, is a very false narrative. These types of comments are incredibly harmful. Administrators are working as hard as they can to get students back to in-person learning. Mr. Hennessey has been very concerned about false narratives coming out at Board meetings and believes it's time to say something. Ms. Parker suggested that for in-service days prior to the start of school next year, it would be beneficial to identify what students have missed and are behind on (students have missed almost a full year of school). Ms. Parker does not believe 8th grade students will have the necessary executive function skills expected of students moving on to high school. In-service days should include extra training on how to support these kids. Ms. Berard advised regarding some of the issues her children are facing. Mrs. Waterhouse advised that she is always open to receiving input from parents, and would welcome communication from Mrs. Berard so that they can try to work through her student's issues. Mrs. Waterhouse reiterated that much has been improved, and there is still work to be done. Mrs. Waterhouse would like families to reach out to her with any issues. Ms. Solomon requested that discussions/work of the Re-opening Committee be published so that there is transparency and parents can read about the work that has been performed and why certain decisions have been made. Ms. Pearson advised that in addition to academics, teachers are working to assist students' with their social and emotional well-being. Mr. Wells acknowledged that hybrid learning is not the ideal plan. Administrators and staff very much want students back in school. Everyone is continually working to make improvements and working with families to assist with resolving their individual challenges and issues.

5. Executive Session as Needed

No items were proposed for discussion in Executive Session.

6. Adjournment

On a motion by Mrs. Farrell, seconded by Mr. Isabelle, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrea Poulin