

BETHANY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT



Board of Education

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Colleen Murray, *Superintendent*

September 23, 2021

Greetings from the Bethany Board of Education!

Now that school is in full swing, we, the members of the Board of Education, are writing to introduce ourselves, and to invite you to come to our fall Board Open Forum, on **Thursday, October 28 at 6:30 PM**. This is a great opportunity to meet with both Board members and district administrations, to ask any questions you may have, and to discuss what's going on at the school.

The Board of Education consists of nine elected residents of Bethany. The attachment to this letter gives some details about how we operate. This year we welcome three new members to the Board: Angelo Amato, Angel Irigoyen, and Amy Lestinsky.

These are challenging times. We are again faced with how best to educate and support our children in the face of the ongoing COVID pandemic. Many matters, including the requirement that staff and students wear masks at school, are governed by state law and policy. We will be following changes in the pandemic and in state regulations over the course of the year, in close cooperation with our partners at the health department.

We are immensely proud of how the Bethany Community School handled the pandemic last year; we were one of the only schools in the state to stay open for in-person learning all year, with the exception of a few periods of planned remote learning after school vacations. This would not have been possible without the leadership of Superintendent Colleen Murray, Director of Special Services, Curriculum and Instruction Kai Byrd, and Principal Tom Reed-Swale, and the dedication of our teachers and staff. This year, we are committed to continuing to provide the children of Bethany with the best education despite these ongoing challenges, and to supporting their social and emotional needs.



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If you are interested in learning more about the operations of the school, or if you have thoughts or concerns to share, we invite you to attend one of our monthly Board meetings, which are typically at 6:30 PM on the second Wednesday of the month, in the Learning Commons. The schedule of meetings is posted on the school website. Meetings are open to the public. While these meetings are not the venue for a back-and-forth discussion, there are opportunities for public comment; there are also typically reports from the PTO and presentations by students or teachers highlighting some of the exciting things that are going on at the school. Board of Education meetings are recorded and posted on the District website. If you are unable to attend the in-person meeting you can submit a public comment which will be read at the meeting. To submit a public comment go to the District website at www.bethany-ed.org > Board of Education > [Submit a Public Comment](#).

Twice each year we hold a Board Open Forum, to allow for the kind of back-and-forth discussion that is not possible at regular Board meetings. The first Open Forum will be held on **Thursday, October 28 at 6:30 PM**. This is an opportunity to bring questions and suggestions to the Board and to engage in discussion on a range of issues. We have held such Forums twice a year for the past several years, and they have been quite successful. We are pleased to do so again this year.

We wish you all a productive school year and look forward to working together!

In partnership,

Christopher Pittenger, Chair

Amy Lestinsky, Vice Chair

For the Bethany Board of Education

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Who are the members of the Bethany Board of Education (BOE)? The nine members of the BOE are elected to staggered six-year terms, with three seats up for election every two years. There was an election in May of this year; the next will be in 2023. The Board is led by a Chair and a Vice-Chair, who convene meetings and work with the Superintendent to set our agenda. Some members of the Board are parents with students in the school; others are not. All are Bethany residents, citizens, and taxpayers.

What does the Board do? The BOE sets policy for the school and oversees its operation. The BOE does not run the school on a day-to-day basis; that is the job of the Superintendent, the Principal, and the rest of our excellent professional staff. Rather, we set policy and goals, negotiate employment contracts, work with the Superintendent to develop the budget each year, and in general oversee the administration to ensure that the school is run well. The Board does not in general discuss specific students or staff members.

When and where does the Board meet? The Board meets once a month, typically on the second Wednesday of the month (there is a schedule of specific meeting dates on the BCS website). Meetings are in the Learning Commons, generally at 6:30 PM. From time to time, additional meetings are scheduled to address particular issues that require extra time or special attention, such as the development of the budget. Special meetings are posted at the Town Clerk's office, in the Superintendent's office, at the school, and on the BCS website.

What is discussed at meetings? The Superintendent and Board Chair develop the agenda for each meeting about a week in advance. The agenda is posted in the Town Clerk's office, in the Superintendent's office, at the school, and on the BCS website, at least 24 hours before the meeting. Meeting minutes are posted on-line once they have been reviewed and approved, which is usually shortly after the next month's Board meeting.

Who can attend BOE meetings? BOE meetings are open to the public. They are also recorded and posted on the District website, so as to be accessible to those who cannot attend in person. There are exceptions to this for 'executive session' when confidential issues, like contracts or specific personnel matters, need to be discussed. When an executive session is called for it usually takes place at the end of the regular monthly meeting.

Can I speak at BOE meetings? There are 'public comment' times set aside at the beginning and the end of each BOE meeting. These are opportunities for comment from any member of the community who wishes to speak. This represents a very valuable way for us to hear concerns about issues of school policy. Comments are generally limited to three minutes per person, to keep the meeting moving. Board of Education meetings are recorded and posted on the District website. If you are unable to attend the in-person meeting you can submit a public comment which will be read at the meeting. To submit a public comment go to the District website at www.bethany-ed.org > Board of Education > [Submit a Public Comment](#).



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What issues can I bring up? The most productive use of this time is to address issues relevant to the meeting agenda or of general school policies and to bring things to the Board's attention – either complimentary or concerning – that may influence policy. Concerns about individual students or staff members are best taken up with classroom teachers, the administration, or other members of the staff (such as the school nurse), who are in a better position to address them than the Board as a whole. Such individual concerns should not be raised in the public Board meetings, out of respect for confidentiality.

What will the response be? In general, there is not a discussion of issues raised during the public comment session. This is because (i) the meeting is constrained by the agenda set in advance; (ii) a full response to issues raised may not be possible immediately and may require some research and discussion between the administration and the Board; and (iii) Board meetings generally have a lot of ground to cover, and the schedule does not permit lengthy discussion of things not on the agenda. All issues raised in the public comment session are carefully noted, however, and will be followed up by the Superintendent or in a later meeting of the appropriate Board committee or of the full Board. Our Open Forum sessions, which are held twice each year, are set aside for more general back-and-forth discussion.

How about the rest of the meeting? Other than the public comment periods at the beginning and the end of the meeting, visitors are not able to participate in the Board meeting. Again, this is because of the need to make it through a lengthy agenda efficiently. You are welcome to stay and hear the discussion and any votes, and to comment on the proceedings in the public comment period at the end.

How else can I contact the Board? All Board members have BOE email addresses; these are posted on the website. Inquiries, requests, or suggestions can also be sent via the Principal or the Superintendent's office. In many cases, the administration can address your questions directly and efficiently; in others, when appropriate, they can be added to the Board's agenda for a future meeting. Any issues involving individual children or school employees should be addressed to the Administration first; the Board generally does not have access to information about individual students or staff members.

What are the Board committees? The details of many issues that the Board deals with are delegated to specific committees, each consisting of several Board members. Specific committees include Finance, Transportation, Curriculum, Negotiations, Facilities, and Policy; the Board can create other 'ad-hoc' committees if needed to address particular issues that arise. Committee meetings are posted in the Town Clerk's office, in the Superintendent's office, at the school, and on the BCS website. While Committee meetings are open to the public, the discussion is limited to Board members addressing the posted Agenda, and there is not typically the opportunity for public comment. Any such public comment should be brought to our monthly Regular Board Meeting.