

**BARRE UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD MEETING**

BUUSD Central Office and Via Video Conference – Google Meet
September 9, 2021 - 5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Sonya Spaulding (BC) – Chair
Alice Farrell (BT) – Vice Chair
Guy Isabelle (At-Large) - Clerk
Gina Akley (BT)
Renee Badeau (BT)
Tim Boltin (BC)
Chris Parker (BT)
Sarah Pregent (BC)
Abigayle Smith (BC)

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Chris Hennessey, Superintendent
Jody Emerson, Director Central Vermont Career Center
Carol Marold, Director of Human Resources
Lisa Perreault, Business Manager
Mary Ellen Simmons, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Brenda Waterhouse, SHS Principal

GUESTS PRESENT:

Dave Delcore – Times Argus	Nora Duane	Josh Howard	Prudence Krasofski	Colleen Kresco
Dave Lawrence	Allison Mills	Terry Reil	Brian Wilkin	

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, Mrs. Spaulding, called the Thursday, September 9, 2021, Regular meeting to order at 5:34 p.m., which was held at the BUUSD Central Office and via video conference.

It was announced that due to internet issue, the physical location of the meeting was moved from BCEMS to the BUUSD Central Office. Mrs. Spaulding provided an overview of Meeting Norms and Participation Guidelines.

2. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

Add 5.9 COVID Update – this will be a recurring Agenda item.

Delete 11.1 – Compensation of Personnel (will be kept as a placeholder).

It was noted that the next Communications Committee Meeting has been moved from 10/07/21 to 10/06/21.

On a motion by Mrs. Pregent, seconded by Ms. Parker, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Agenda as amended. Mrs. Farrell and Ms. Smith were not present for the vote.

3. Public Comment for Items Not on the Agenda

3.1 Public Comment

A community member commented regarding community members' participation on Committees.

A community member expressed concern regarding students not being allowed to use seatbelts on buses and the reasons behind the decision for students not to use seatbelts. Mrs. Spaulding advised that Committee structure will be discussed at a Board Meeting in the near future, and advised that she or Mr. Hennessey will respond to the community member regarding seat belt concerns.

3.2 Student Voice

None.

4. Consent Agenda

4.1 Approval of Minutes – August 26, 2021 Regular Meeting

On a motion by Mr. Isabelle, seconded by Mrs. Akley, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Minutes of the August 26, 2021 Regular Meeting. Ms. Smith was not present for the vote.

5. Current Business

5.1 New Hires

The resume and BUUSD Notification of Employment Status Form for Kathryn Matthews (BCEMS Nurse) was distributed. There were no questions from the Board.

On a motion by Mr. Boltin, seconded by Mrs. Farrell, the Board unanimously voted to approve the hiring of Kathryn Matthews. Ms. Smith was not present for the vote.

5.2 Resignations/Retirements

A letter of resignation from Charles ‘Chad’ Olivieri was distributed. Mr. Hennessey advised that this recently hired candidate rescinded his letter of acceptance and will be working in another district.

5.3 SHS Assistant Coaches

Mr. Hennessey advised regarding the decision not to pay assistant coaches. Difficult choices were made when drafting a budget for the third vote. The amount of the budget reduction is \$18,000. Mr. Hennessey advised that many districts do not pay assistant coaches, but that assistant coaches are valued individuals. This budget cut impacts three sports (Girls Hockey, Boys Hockey, and Football – a total of five positions) at SHS. Mrs. Spaulding read a letter to the Board from Diane Solomon, who has strong thoughts regarding paying assistant coaches, and given the anticipated surplus, would like to see pay reinstated for assistant coaches. A community member expressed concern regarding difficulty finding individuals to serve in assistant coaching positions, noting that there is a very large time commitment involved, and he has safety concerns, as well as concerns that valuable ice time cannot be used efficiently unless an assistant coach is present. Lengthy discussion was held including: concern that some assistant coaches have been paid, and some were volunteers, possible loss of student participation in sports, safety concerns, concern that coaches and assistant coaches were not part of budget discussions when the decision was made to remove this item from the budget, concern that assistant coaches were not directly notified (by school personnel) of this budget reduction, a suggestion that assistant coaches be paid this year and that this issue be revisited for the FY23 budget, a query regarding whether or not assistant coaches are considered paid employees (W2, or 1099MISC), whether or not the Master Agreement has information pertaining to assistant coaches (Appendix B addresses this matter), equity, and a fair pay structure for all assistant coaches. It was reiterated that the budget reduction does not signify that these positions are not wanted or needed. Assistant coaches are necessary and valued. It was noted that this item is on tonight’s Agenda for discussion purposes only and that no action will be taken this evening.

5.4 Superintendent Search Timeline

A document titled ‘Superintendent Search Timeline’ was distributed.

The document is a basic timeline (13 weeks), and is not definitive as far as the dates listed. If the search starts by mid-October, the hiring cycle could be completed before the end of the year. This Superintendent Search is a general ‘new’ search. The Board agreed to take the first formal steps in September. The two required steps are; 1. To approve the ‘charge’ and 2. To seek Board approval for the Board Chair to sign a letter to the Secretary of Education (requesting permission to open a Superintendent Search). This item will be added to the September 23, 2021 Agenda.

5.5 Food Service Renewal Approval

A copy of a letter from George Carone (Lexington Independents) to Lisa Perreault (dated 08/24/21) was distributed.

Mrs. Perreault advised that the Food Service contract needs to be renewed annually. Board approval is required. Mrs. Perreault advised that the District does not contribute to the Food Service Program, which is self-supporting, and has actually resulted in a profit in recent years.

On a motion by Mrs. Farrell, seconded by Mrs. Pregent, the Board unanimously voted to approve the annual renewal of the Lexington Independents food contract, and the meal increases as proposed.

5.6 Woodchip Contract RFP Recommendation

A document titled ‘BUUSD Woodchip RFP Results, 2-yr. contract’ was distributed. It is the Superintendent’s recommendation to contract with LimLaw’s Pulpwood, Inc. Mr. Hennessey provided a brief overview of the recommendation and answered questions from the Board.

On a motion by Mr. Isabelle, seconded by Mrs. Akley, the Board unanimously voted to accept the Superintendent’s recommendation and agreed to contract with LimLaw’s Pulpwood, Inc. for woodchip acquisition.

5.7 Fuel Oil/Propane RFP Recommendation

A document titled ‘BUUSD Fuel Oil and Propane’ was distributed. It is the Superintendent’s recommendation to contract with Irving.

Mr. Hennessey provided a brief overview of the recommendation.

On a motion by Mr. Isabelle, seconded by Mrs. Akley, the Board unanimously voted to accept the Superintendent's recommendation and agreed to contract with Irving as the District's vendor for fuel oil and propane.

5.8 Board Engagement Document

A document titled 'How to Engage with the BUUSD Board' was distributed.

Mrs. Farrell advised that the Communications Committee discussed the document and did not have any significant changes. The document is being provided to the Board for feedback. Mrs. Spaulding advised regarding the reason this document is being created. Mrs. Spaulding requested that Board Members provide input/feedback to herself or Mrs. Farrell. Mr. Allen will be advised regarding updates to the document and the document will be presented for approval at a future meeting.

5.9 COVID Update

Mr. Hennessey provided an overview of 'where we are', and actions anticipated for the future. Mr. Hennessey noted that the decision to close BTMES on 09/08/21 was a difficult decision, and he appreciates the hardship it puts on parents. The decision was made in the best interest of students and staff. Contact tracing is very complex. There were three positive cases and almost 200 'close contacts'. The Department of Health has provided contact tracing guidelines, which are quite specific. The number of statewide cases in schools is much higher than it was last year at this time (81 vs. 5). The District's goal is to be up and running for full time in-person learning, with as few restrictions as possible. This year, no COVID guidelines have been provided by the AOE, and it is not anticipated that they will be issuing any guidelines soon. Secretary French and Governor Scott made it clear in a recent press conference, that there is no move towards recognizing remote learning options. Remote options were only approved last year because a State of Emergency had been declared. In response to a query, it was noted that any school closures will need to be made up (the same as with 'snow days'), even if remote instruction is provided on those days. With no State of Emergency, attendance must follow statute. Frustration was voiced regarding perceived inflexibility and lack of guidance from State Government, and that there is no State of Emergency in place. School closures or needing to keep students home (because of exposure) is causing great hardships for families/parents. Mr. Hennessey encourages individuals to reach out to governmental representatives. Mrs. Spaulding advised that given the current climate, she recommends continuing virtual meetings, with the required in-person portion of all Board and Committee meetings held at the BUUSD Central Office (rather than in any of the schools). Based on the number of school closure days at each school, it is possible that the 'last day of school' will differ for each school. Concern was raised regarding teacher contracts, which dictate the number of teaching days. If teachers are asked to teach remotely (during closures) and the remote days do 'not count', teachers will be asked to work more days than they are contractually obligated to.

6. Old Business

6.1 Surplus Funds

A document titled 'Superintendent's Recommendation for Use of Surplus Funds – Revised 08/26/21' was distributed.

A community member requested that a public forum be held for the purpose of discussing use of surplus funds.

Mrs. Spaulding stressed that in the past, surplus monies have been allocated to specific funds, not specific projects.

Conversations/decisions on surplus funds have stalled (no action) because discussion centers on specific projects, not the allocation to specific funds. Mrs. Spaulding would like the Board to make a decision regarding where funds should be moved, and hold discussions on specific projects at a later date. It was noted that when monies are allocated to the Capital Improvement fund, those funds must be used for Capital Improvements. Lengthy discussion was held, including; the possibility of moving more funds to the Tax Stabilization Fund, an overview of how the Tax Stabilization Funds are utilized (funds are put towards revenue, to off-set expenses, not used for 'new' budget lines), the recommendation to put \$2.4 million dollars (of the projected \$3.2 million dollar surplus) into the Capital Improvement Fund, concern that having a large surplus may prove problematic during negotiations, factors that need to be considered (possible HVAC improvements, and the current Expense Note, which expires on 12/17/21), the possibility of holding a public forum, the importance of using surplus funds for 'one time' expenses, not expenses that cannot be sustained in the future, the feasibility of hiring an independent financial consultant to assist with determining how to use surplus funds, a potential recommendation from auditor Tyler Kimberly (next week), and results from next week's Facilities Committee meeting. This item will continue to be on the Agenda until a decision can be made. A 'listening session' may be added to a future Board meeting (for the purpose of receiving public feedback on this matter).

6.2 Enrollment

A document titled 'September 2021 District Enrollment/Staffing' was distributed.

A document titled 'Home Study Report (AOE provided data)' was distributed.

Mr. Hennessey advised regarding some errors on the staffing report (grades 5 – 8 have 4 teachers each, not 6 or 7).

A community member queried regarding the reasons behind declining enrollment (students going to private schools, home schooling, moving?). It was noted that student counts have been declining over the years. Sometime in the future, Mrs. Spaulding would like to hold discussions with Mrs. Perreault and Mrs. Pregent regarding the impact declining enrollment has on the budget. It will be important to convey this information to community members. Mr. Hennessey noted that there has been a significant increase in home schooling, which is a direct result of COVID. The schools are currently in the process of enrolling students. BCEMS currently has no registrar. The BTMES registrar has been assisting BCEMS. It was announced at a recent Superintendent's meeting, that schools around the state are dealing with three common issues; condition of facilities, the COVID crisis, and declining enrollment. These three

issues are having a huge impact on school finances across the state. It was noted that CVCC has the highest enrollment in its history. Mr. Hennessey answered questions from the Board, and confirmed that there are only 2 outside placed students from BCEMS. This reduction in outside placements is the direct result of the implementation of Restorative Classrooms at BCEMS. Mr. Hennessey is very proud of this program, which has changed the culture at the school and has allowed students to remain within the BCEMS community.

7. Committee Reports

7.1 Superintendent Report

A copy of the Superintendent's Report (dated 09/03/21) was distributed.

Mr. Hennessey had nothing to add to his report, other than to stress his concerns over 'bullet #3', regarding staffing shortages. There were no questions from the Board.

7.2 Building Reports: SHS, CVCC, BCEMS, and BTMES

Building Reports from SHS, CVCC, BCEMS, and BTMES were distributed.

A CVCC Governance Meeting was held on September 7, 2021. Discussion included shifting the timeline to accommodate a vote in March of 2022 (Town Meeting Day), for a change in governance structure (to a new district effective July 1, 2022). It will be important to educate the Barre community, as well as the other sending school communities.

Brief discussion was held regarding whether or not principals should be in attendance at Board meetings. Mr. Hennessey advised that the goal is to review the nature of the meetings, let the reports speak for themselves, avoid controversy, and address matters in a planned way (by allowing administrators to prepare in advance – to answer questions on specific topics). Mr. Hennessey advised that only 2 of the 10 school districts in the Winooski Valley Superintendent's Group have administrators come to meetings. One of those two districts is looking to change that practice. Mr. Hennessey advised that if he cannot answer questions from the Board, he will contact administrators for additional information. Mrs. Spaulding believes the VSBA also agrees with not having administrators at meetings.

7.3 Communications Committee

The Committee met on September 2, 2021. Discussion centered mainly on discussion of strengthening communication with all community members, including those who do not have direct contact/involvement with the schools. Additional discussion included 'back to school' communication and a review of the Communication with the Board document.

The Thursday, October 7, 2021 meeting has been rescheduled.

The next meeting is Wednesday, October 6, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. at the BUUSD Central Office and via video conference.

7.4 Finance Committee

The Committee met on September 7, 2021. Discussion included an update on ESSER Funds, including the survey and public forum, FY21 year-end projections, a review of an updated Comparative Tax Calculation Report, and an update on the State mandated PowerSchool e-Finance system. Districts who have converted to this system report that it is inefficient and lacks necessary features. The next meeting will include FY23 budget development.

The next meeting is Tuesday, October 5, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. at the BUUSD Central Office and via video conference.

7.5 Facilities & Transportation Committee

The Committee met on August 11, 2021.

The next meeting is Monday, September 13, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. at the BUUSD Central Office and via video conference.

7.6 Policy Committee

The Committee met on August 16, 2021. Discussion included a review of the Policy Index, an overview of policies that have been automatically rescinded as of the end of the COVID State of Emergency, and review of Policy F20 - Fiscal Management and General Financial Accountability. This policy, in part relates to the threshold for expenses/projects that need to go out to bid (old threshold \$15,000, new threshold \$40,000). The Committee is recommending that the threshold requiring Board approval remain at \$15,000 (which differs from the threshold that requires bids). The law pertains only to the threshold for bids. Boards determine the threshold for projects they wish to approve. The recommendation to keep the policy as is will be presented at a future Board meeting. Additional discussion included a review of a draft Electronic Surveillance policy.

The next meeting is Monday, September 20, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. at the BUUSD Central Office and via video conference.

7.7 Curriculum Committee

The Committee met on August 17, 2021. Discussion included the FY21 / FY22 Work Plan, grant expenditures, and alignment of curriculum (vertically and horizontally)

The next meeting is Tuesday, September 28, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. at the BUUSD Central Office and via video conference.

7.8 Negotiations Committee

Negotiation sessions will resume next week. The next Committee meeting date is to be determined.

8. Other Business/Round Table

Mr. Isabelle advised that some Boards are making decisions to require vaccination of all students and staff. Though Mr. Isabelle is an advocate for vaccines, he does not want the BUUSD to mandate them at this time.

Mrs. Farrell believes that Barre is becoming a very diverse community, and may soon receive new community members. Mrs. Farrell thinks it would be a great opportunity for the school and students, to work with new community members.

Mrs. Spaulding reminded the Board that the VSBA Regional Meeting will be held on 10/07/21. The meeting will most likely be held virtually. Mrs. Spaulding encourages all Board Members to attend.

Mr. Hennessey thanked the Board for their support, noting that it is much appreciated.

9. Future Agenda Items

- COVID Update (recurring until further notice)
- Board Engagement
- Policy F20 - Fiscal Management and General Financial Accountability
- Committee Structure
- Superintendent Search Update
- Executive Session for Compensation of Personnel

- Student Enrollment (Parking Lot - TBD)
- Surplus Funds – Parking Lot – TBD)

10. Next Meeting Date

The next Regular meeting is Thursday, September 23, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. at the BUUSD Central Office and via video conference.

11. Executive Session as Needed

~~11.1 Compensation of Personnel~~

No items were proposed for discussion in Executive Session.

12. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Isabelle, seconded by Mr. Boltin, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Poulin