

**BARRE UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD MEETING**

Via Video Conference – Google Meet
October 14, 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
Emmanuel Ajanma, Director of Technology
Josh Allen, Communications Specialist
Stacy Anderson, Director of Special Services
Hayden Coon, BCEMS Principal
Jody Emerson, Director Central Vermont Career Center
Jamie Evans, Facilities Director
Pierre Laflamme, BCEMS Principal
Carol Marold, Director of Human Resources
Lauren May, Director of Early Education
Ted Mills, BTMES Assistant Principal
Rebekah Mortensen, Assistant Director of Special Services
Jennifer Nye, BTMES Principal
Erica Pearson, BTMES Principal
Mary Ellen Simmons, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Brenda Waterhouse, SHS Principal

GUESTS PRESENT:

Dave Delcore – Times Argus	Martha Blaisdell	Stacie Boltin	Charlotte Brault	Chris Cheney
Tamara Cooley	Venus Dean	Nora Duane	Nicole Gallup	Heidi Glassford
Miranda Green	Chelsea Haberek	Josh Howard	Joseph Kill	Prudence Krasofski
Marcy Kreitz	Colleen Kresco	Nancy Leclerc	Carrie Martell	Ben Matthews
Jessica Maurais	Kristin Morrison	Victoria Pompei	Terry Reil	Ed Rousse
Jessica Roy	Noah Rubel	Tara Simpson	Diane Solomon	Jan Trepanier
Fianna Verret	Jackie Wheeler			

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, October 14, 2021, Regular meeting to order at 5:30 p.m., which was held via video conference. Mrs. Spaulding provided an overview of the Board Norms and Public Comment protocols.

2. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

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

3. Public Comment for Items Not on the Agenda

3.1 Public Comment

A community member requested an update on the seatbelt issue, and provided input related to the bus driver shortage, its impact, and suggestions for possible solutions. Community members expressed great concern regarding the current protocols for COVID exposures, noting that the current protocols cause employment issues for parents, a loss of academics, and increased anxiety for students. It was suggested that the school close for two weeks for a deep cleaning, and that unvaccinated individuals be tested prior to returning.

3.2 Student Voice

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

4.1 Approval of Minutes – September 23, 2021 Regular Meeting

On a motion by Mr. Isabelle, seconded by Mrs. Akley, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Minutes of the September 23, 2021 Regular Meeting.

5. Current Business

5.1 New Hires

The resumes and BUUSD Notification of Employment Status Forms for Kimberlyn Gilbert (BCEMS K – 4 Interventionist), and Karen Harker (SHS ELL 25% and English Interventionist 75%) were distributed.

Mr. Hennessey provided an overview of the candidates. It is noted that as these hires are occurring after August 1, the positions are for the remainder of the current year. The candidates will need to apply for positions if they wish to stay in the District next year. Mr. Hennessey answered questions from the board.

On a motion by Mr. Isabelle, seconded by Mrs. Akley, the Board unanimously voted to approve the hiring of Kimberlyn Gilbert and Karen Harker.

5.2 Resignations/Retirements

No letters of resignation were distributed.

5.3 Review Draft of Official Screening Committee Charge

A document titled ‘Superintendent Candidate Screening Committee Charge’ was distributed.

A copy of a letter from Daniel French, Ed.D., Secretary of Education, (dated 09/30/21) was distributed.

Brief discussion was held regarding the Committee Charge. Mrs. Spaulding advised that because this agenda item was not listed as an action item, she would prefer to adopt the document at the next Board meeting. It was agreed that official adoption of the Screening Committee Charge, will be added to the next agenda. It was noted that Secretary French has approved the hiring of a new Superintendent, and the process may move forward prior to adoption of the Charge.

5.4 Listening Session Regarding Surplus Funds

Community members were thanked for attending the meeting. Mr. Allen displayed a presentation titled ‘Use of Surplus Funds and ARP ESSER Update’ (dated 10/14/21). The presentation included information on; ESSER grant input provided by administrators and staff, as well as community input at the public forum and via a survey, a basic overview of revenues, expenditures, and the tax rate, information regarding why the surplus is so high this year, and options going forward (Carry the surplus into next year, Deposit funds into specific reserve funds, designating funds to specific projects, or a combination of any of the three options). The surplus is currently \$2,800,000. The current recommendation from the Superintendent is to move \$1,200,000 to the Capital Improvement Fund, use \$1,000,000 to close out the Current Expense Note, and to move \$600,000 to the Tax Stabilization Fund. Community members provided feedback including; concern that this agenda topic was not specifically Warned to the community (it is listed as a regular agenda item), concern that the sprinkler system has not been recently estimated, and a belief that the requirement to sprinkle SHS has not been proved, concern regarding paying off the Current Expense Note without voter approval, concern regarding moving surplus funds to specific funds without voter approval, concern regarding cuts made last year which had a negative impact on students (assistant coaches, the PSTL Program, and transportation for field trips), a request to put zero dollars in the Tax Stabilization Fund, the importance of having quality ventilation systems, a suggestion that the District work to communicate better with the community and have more involvement with local businesses, a query regarding alignment (since consolidation under Act 46), a reminder that in previous discussions it was noted that a good alarm system is more important than a sprinkler system, and support for paying off the Current Expense Note (which would result in savings in the long term). The Board held discussion which included; a query on the interest rate on the Current Expense Note, concern of adding positions using surplus funds (which is ‘one time funding’), the FY20 deficit, concern over unfilled positions, concern that hiring will become even more difficult in the future, a request that a disinterested qualified financial advisor be hired to assess the situation, and a suggestion to add back to the budget, items that have a positive impact on students (funding positions for a specified number of years). Mrs. Spaulding advised that no official action will be taken

this evening. Lengthy discussion continued, with Board Members expressing concerns, and making suggestions regarding how the surplus should be dealt with. Additional community feedback including; a query regarding refunding tax payers (it was noted that this has been researched, and is not allowed). The Tax Stabilization Fund is a surplus fund that sets money aside to lower tax impacts in the future. Additional feedback included considering utilizing surplus funds for classroom supplies (text books, band and art supplies etc.), support transportation, better promotion of Board meetings and ‘recruitment’ of students to attend Board meetings, a query regarding ways in which the District interacts with the Barre Partnership, identification of differences between BCEMS and BTMES, ways to improve community engagement, a suggestion that surplus funds be used for one-time costs that would otherwise not be doable, and additional discussion on bus drivers. It was clarified that transportation is provided by an outside vendor and drivers are not employees of the District. A request was made that the use of surplus funds be in alignment with the Strategic Plan. Mr. Evans provided additional information relating to the sprinkler system at SHS, and his belief that although the building is safe (and has an upgraded fire alarm panel), the District will eventually need to complete the sprinkler system. A major modification to the building will trigger the need to sprinkle the building. The Board and administrators held brief discussion and thanked all of this evening’s participants and attendees.

6. Old Business

6.1 COVID Update

Members of the public provided feedback regarding frustration and hardships resulting from the current contact tracing protocols, a request that the District have a back-up plan, a request for staff or community members to drive buses, the possibility that regular testing could allow students to return to school faster, and concern that vaccinated individuals who have no symptoms, could be COVID positive, and bringing the virus to school. Mr. Hennessey advised that there are a rising number of COVID incidents due to the Delta variant and that the situation is very difficult for everyone. Mr. Hennessey provided an overview of the history of COVID at the schools, and various changes to modes of instruction. At one point, the number of cases was manageable. Currently, the number of cases has become unmanageable. This is an issue across the state. Mr. Hennessey acknowledged that since the start of this school year, the District is in a constant cycle of positive cases. The protocols being followed are mandated by the State and are problematic. Large numbers of students (sometimes 100’s per day) are being excluded from school. Mr. Hennessey noted that students that are supposed to be in quarantine, are not always adhering to quarantine guidelines (for some families it is not possible and some families are outright refusing to comply). Vermont COVID cases are surpassing all of the other states in New England. The District wants to begin ‘Testing to Stay’, but implementing this program is problematic because the District does not have the capacity to perform testing (because staff are all working contact tracing). There is also a concern that there will be a shortage of tests. There are many outstanding questions and concerns. Mr. Hennessey supports Test to Stay, but does not want to over promise something that the District may not be able to deliver on. Regarding utilizing staff and volunteers for bus drivers, Mr. Hennessey advised that the District uses a vendor and the vendor employs the drivers. Volunteers cannot drive for STA. Bus drivers need a CDL and a bus driver endorsement. STA is struggling to fill driver positions. Volunteers could probably be used in a ‘Test to Stay’ program. Mr. Hennessey advised that he may change his weekly report to include real-time numbers. The State’s website is incomplete and inaccurate. Mr. Hennessey stressed that he has been advocating at the State level, to get support, and to help change the current protocols in an effort to assist all the students and families that are struggling. The Board and community members are encouraged to bring their concerns to the State. Mrs. Akley appreciates the level of communication being received this year, and stressed that families with sick children need to keep their children at home. Ms. Badeau noted that in all her years in the education system, she has never seen staffing shortages of this magnitude. Ms. Smith thanked Mr. Hennessey for his efforts with communication and transparency. Ms. Smith was lauded for speaking out (to the Secretary of Education) at the VSBA Regional Meeting, clearly articulating the needs of our community, the challenges being faced, and how support is needed. Mr. Hennessey advised that though many schools in the state are in the same situation, the Barre community has a high positive count and we have some of the largest schools in the state. Mrs. Spaulding believes that part of the challenge is that there is no longer a State of Emergency and many supports are gone. Even though COVID is rampant, many people are not taking it seriously. In response to a query regarding mandatory vaccinations for staff, Mr. Hennessey reported that the Teachers Union supports the mandate, and a memorandum of understanding is being drafted. Though a mandate is coming from the State, he anticipates that the District will be ready earlier, possible by early next week.

7. Other Business/Round Table

Mr. Isabelle thanked the Times Argus Sports Editor for highlighting sports teams.

The Superintendent and the Board thanked community members for their attendance and providing feedback, and acknowledged the struggles that students, families, and staff are enduring due to COVID.

Administrators and staff were also thanked for their attendance at this evening’s meeting.

8. Future Agenda Items

- Official Adoption of Screening Committee Charge
- Appointment of Two Board Members to the Screening Committee
- COVID Update
- Surplus Funds
- SHS Foundation (with Ed Rousse)

- One item will be added to the Parking Lot: 'School Education Financing 101'

9. Next Meeting Date

The next Regular Board Meeting is Thursday, October 28, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. at the BUUSD Central Office and via video conference. Given the increase in the number of COVID cases, community members are encouraged to attend virtually.

10. Executive Session as Needed

No items were proposed for discussion in Executive Session.

11. Adjournment

On a motion by Mrs. Farrell, seconded by Mrs. Pregent, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn at 7:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Poulin