

**BARRE UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT
REGULAR BOARD MEETING**

Barre Town Middle and Elementary School Library and Via Video Conference – Google Meet
May 26, 2022 - 6:00 p.m.

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Sonya Spaulding (BC) – Chair
Alice Farrell (BT) – Vice Chair
Chris Parker (BT) - Clerk
Renee Badeau (BT)
Tim Boltin (BC)
Nancy Leclerc (At-Large)
Terry Reil (BT)
Sarah Pregent (BC)

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Giuliano Cecchinelli, II (BC)

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Chris Hennessey, Superintendent
Hayden Coon, BCEMS Principal

GUESTS PRESENT:

Dave Delcore – Times Argus	Jeff Blow	Karen Burnor	Adam Chase	Richard Cooke
Leah Deering	Michael Deering	Nicole Gallup	Sarah Helman	Josh Howard
Brian Judd	Pietro Lynn	Paul Malone	Deanna Mandell	Tara Martin
Ben Matthews	Allison Mills	Dean Preston	Heather Slayton	

1. Call to Order

The Chair, Mrs. Spaulding, called the Thursday, May 26, 2022, Regular meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., which was held at the Barre Town Middle and Elementary School Library and via video conference.

2. Pledge and Mindfulness Moment

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. In lieu of a Mindfulness Moment, the Board held a moment of silence to offer support for those who lost their lives this week. Mrs. Spaulding read the Board Norms. Mrs. Spaulding thanked community members for their attendance and read the public comment guidelines.

3. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

Mr. Reil would like to remove Agenda Item 12.1, or move it out of Executive Session. Mr. Reil read from the 03/25/21 Meeting Minutes, noting that the Superintendent, Mr. Wells, spoke with BUUSD legal counsel (Pietro Lynn) and was advised that the training session with the attorney was not a public meeting and is not an Executive Session matter. Lengthy discussion was held, including; a query as to the reasons why board training should be held in private, and the possible benefits of letting the public (including those considering running for the Board) attend training, Mrs. Spaulding’s understanding that legal counsel recommended that training be held in Executive Session, a query regarding why training is taking place (at legal council’s suggestion), concern that the Board did not, as a whole discuss/agree to holding training with legal counsel, a query regarding the topics to be discussed in training, and a suggestion to ask legal counsel his opinion. Mr. Hennessey announced that he just (during the meeting) contacted Mr. Lynn, who advised that training is not considered a meeting (Open Meeting Laws do not pertain to training). Mr. Hennessey advised that he had originally reached out to legal counsel regarding training. Ms. Badeau advised that she would like training in an effort to perform better as a Board Member. Mrs. Poulin read from Open Meeting Law statute that states that training programs are not considered a ‘meeting of the Board’, thus are not subject to Open Meeting Law or Executive Session, and can be held publicly or privately, depending on the Board’s preference. Mrs. Poulin confirmed that last year’s training occurred after the Board meeting adjourned. Two requests were made that the Board vote regarding whether or not to hold training and if it should be private or public. Mrs. Spaulding declined the requests to hold a vote. A member of the public requested to speak. Mrs. Spaulding advised that she would not take public comment on this Agenda Item. The Board will discuss this matter further with Pietro Lynn when he joins the meeting.

Delete 12.1 Board Training

On a motion by Mrs. Pregent, seconded by Ms. Parker, the Board voted 6 to 1 to approve the Agenda as amended. Mr. Reil voted against the motion.

4. Public Comment for Items Not on the Agenda

4.1 Public Comment

Brian Judd addressed the Board, expressing concern for teachers and students. Mr. Judd also advised that he is running for State Representative for Barre City.

Paul Malone proposed that the Board reconsider reinstating the SRO position at SHS.

Michael Deering expressed concern regarding the Board Chair's demeanor regarding Public Comment (under Agenda Item 3). Additionally, Mr. Deering noted that his daughter expressed concern (2 weeks ago) regarding students not being allowed to wear seat belts on buses, and she has not heard back from the Superintendent. Drivers wear seat belts, but students cannot. The bus coordinator advised his daughter that the seat belt issue relates to COVID, and he would like the matter addressed as soon as possible. Mr. Deering expressed concern regarding holding training in private, citing that community members would also like to be informed on this matter.

Josh Howard addressed the Board in support of reinstating the SRO position at SHS. Additionally, Mr. Howard noted that he raised the seat belt issue over a year ago, and it still has not been addressed. Mr. Howard would like to see this matter resolved. Mr. Howard requested that a current enrollment report, current vs. December 2021 (broken down by school) be presented at a future meeting.

4.2 Student Voice

None.

5. Consent Agenda

5.1 Approval of Minutes – May 12, 2022 Regular Meeting

On a motion by Mrs. Pregent, seconded by Mrs. Farrell, the Board unanimously voted to approve as amended, the Minutes of the May 12, 2022 Regular Meeting.

6. Current Business

6.1 New Hires

The resumes and BUUSD Notification of Employment Status Forms for Liliya Meadows (BTMES Elementary Special Educator), Mary (Vika) Simons (SHS Spanish Teacher), Lauren Paulsen (BTMES 1st Grade Teacher), Robert Pettis (BCEMS Elementary Music Teacher), Brandon Walker (BCEMS Middle School PE Teacher), and Derek Cipriano (SHS Athletic Director) were distributed.

Mr. Hennessey provided an overview of the candidates and answered questions from community members and the Board.

On a motion by Ms. Parker, seconded by Mrs. Pregent, the Board unanimously voted to approve the hiring of Liliya Meadows, Mary (Vika) Simons, Lauren Paulsen, Robert Pettis, Brandon Walker, and Derek Cipriano.

6.2 RAN Comparison Approval

A copy of the FY23 Revenue Anticipation Note Comparison (05/27/22) was distributed.

Mr. Hennessey, Mrs. Spaulding, and Mrs. Pregent provided a brief overview of the RAN (which is necessary to cover cash flow issues until State funding is received) and answered questions from the Board. Mr. Malone also provided answers to the Board.

On a motion by Mrs. Pregent, seconded by Mrs. Leclerc, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Superintendent's recommendation to contract with Community Bank, N.A., for the FY 2023 Revenue Anticipation Note, with the stated rates as included in the Board packet, and authorized the Board Chair to sign the required documents.

6.3 VSBA Vision

A document titled 'It's Resolution season !' was distributed.

A document titled 'VSBA Vision' was distributed.

Mrs. Spaulding advised that the document included in the Addendum is the document to be utilized during this discussion.

Mrs. Spaulding apologized for the short notice, advising that comments are due tomorrow (05/27/22). Mrs. Spaulding read from the survey document and polled the Board regarding their thoughts for input to VSBA. The Board provided feedback and concern was voiced that the Board did not have enough time to put thought into this matter. Mrs. Spaulding will forward feedback to the VSBA.

7. Old Business

None.

8. Reports

8.1 Superintendent Report

A copy of the Superintendent's Report (dated 05/20/22) was distributed.

A copy of the addendum to the Superintendent's Report (dated 05/25/22) was distributed.

Mr. Hennessey advised he has nothing to add to the report, and highlighted information relating to resignations, noting that the document was meant to be a public document and viewing restrictions have been removed. Mr. Hennessey reiterated the tight job market, noting that it is difficult to fill positions. Mr. Hennessey reminded the Board and community members of the upcoming job fair (06/01/22). In response to a query regarding reasons for resignations, Mr. Hennessey advised that a report will be presented in June. A community member queried regarding steps being taken to retain employees and what is being done during the year to gauge staff satisfaction/needs. Mr. Hennessey advised that retention is important and the District is doing all that it can to retain employees. Mr. Hennessey advised that he and administrators are checking in with employees constantly. Mr. Hennessey advised that there is no formal procedure for employees to provide feedback, but feedback is welcomed all year. A community member queried regarding sharing resignation letters with the Board. Mrs. Spaulding advised that exit survey information will be provided in June. Mrs. Leclerc, referring to an article in the Times Argus, asked what, specifically the Board and community members can do to 'step up' support of the District. Mr. Hennessey advised that he is trying to change the narrative relating to some negativity that is being expressed, noting that some of the publicity, including social media, unfairly criticizes what is going on in the District. Mr. Hennessey would like individuals to openly, publicly, and loudly promote the good things going on in the schools. Promotion will be occurring at the job fair and via the weekly videos. Mrs. Leclerc queried regarding specific ways in which the Board can better support the District. Mr. Hennessey advised that the Board needs to be very aware of how they are projecting the District, noting that he has heard negative feedback regarding the tone and nature of Board meetings. Mr. Reil expressed concern that a negative narrative is consistently being expressed, and queried regarding the goal of addressing complaints/issues from the public and staff (who he believes do support the District), and expressed his belief that individuals who ask opposing questions or are a bit critical on some issues, are asking these questions in an effort to improve the District. Mr. Hennessey advised that the District is not closed off to tough questions or criticism, but noted that much of the negativity expressed on social media has not been expressed to administrators to allow them time to resolve concerns. Mrs. Farrell asked the Superintendent to share some of the negative feedback he is receiving. Mr. Hennessey advised regarding a Facebook post showing the list of employees who are resigning, noting that the document was meant to be public and was erroneously posted as private. Mr. Hennessey noted that on various platforms, there are accusations that the District is being secretive and not sharing information, criticizing leadership. Mr. Hennessey advised that he had not received any calls or e-mails regarding this issue and he is not aware that any Board Members received complaints regarding the inaccessible document. Ms. Parker believes it would be more supportive for individuals to think 'good intent' prior 'blasting' negativity. Mrs. Spaulding advised she was taking Board input and would not receive input from the public, and expressed that she would like to move on with questions pertaining to other portions of the report. Mrs. Farrell encouraged individuals to review the AOE Annual Snapshot Press Release, which includes some very positive information on the District (highly qualified teachers, attendance etc.). Mr. Reil is encouraged to see that the District is planning to perform more bold and timely action. Mr. Reil believes that test score data, should not be the sole steering mechanism for improvement, but noted that it is important and suggested that pre-COVID data should also be factored in. Mr. Reil queried regarding some specifics for the plan to acquiring substitutes. Mr. Hennessey advised that it is very beneficial to have permanent substitutes on staff. In response to a query regarding dealing with homelessness, and providing more social services, Mr. Hennessey advised that it is important to see that the schools are fully staffed and providing social and emotional learning in addition to academics. Mr. Reil noted the success of hiring 48 staff members since Board reorganization. Mr. Reil noted that 68 resignations is a concerning number and believes that the Board should spend some time to look into the reasons why employees are resigning. Mrs. Leclerc noted that the Barre community is very supportive, and she believes that if community members know specifically what is needed, they will provide the support. Ms. Parker reported that numerous staff members have expressed appreciation to the Board for serving breakfast on Teacher Appreciation Week, and she encourages all Board Members to visit all of the schools and show support to staff, including attendance at sports events, plays, graduation, etc. Ms. Parker would like Board and community members to highlight positives at each meeting. Mrs. Pregent advised that Step-up information needs to be corrected. BTMES Step-up is Thursday, 06/16/22, and BCEMS is holding Step-up celebrations over two days; Wednesday, 06/15/22 and Thursday, 06/16/22.

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

Copies of the SHS, CVCC, and BTMES Building Reports were distributed.

Mr. Coon read a prepared statement (see Attachment A) regarding the cherished time he has spent in the District, and an overview of challenges he believes the District is facing. In response to a query, Mr. Coon shared his reasons for resigning from the District, and advised that he will begin working as a high school principal in Woodsville, NH. In response to a query, Mr. Coon provided additional information regarding the homeless student population, noting that Dawn Poitras is the homeless student coordinator. In response to a query, Mr. Coon advised regarding the compounding issues facing staff members, many of which are the result of the schools being understaffed, which also has a negative impact on students. Mr. Boltin thanked Mr. Coon for his comments, advising that hearing this type of information from administrators is valuable. Mr. Coon advised regarding contracted services (WCMH), noting that WCMH is also experiencing difficulty hiring employees, and is unable to fill all of the positions it has in the past.

Mr. Coon noted that Restorative Programs at BCEMS has resulted in the need for fewer behavioral interventionists. It was noted that cases are reported to DCF on a daily basis, but they are not responding to/investigating the cases as they did in the past. It is believed that the failure to investigate is the result of staffing issues. In response to a query regarding the status of students who excel, Mr. Coon reported that students who excel have access to high achiever programs, including: Renaissance Readers High Achiever Program, a High Achievers Math Program, and Girls on the Run. Mr. Coon advised that all students, regardless of achievement level are experiencing mental health issues as a result of the pandemic. Mrs. Pregent highlighted the volunteer graduation requirement, and the number of hours students have volunteered this year.

In response to a prior Board request, Mr. Hennessey advised that a SEA Building Report will be added to Building Reports beginning in June 2022. It was also agreed that a Central Vermont Career Center School District Report should also be provided.

8.3 Finance Committee

The Committee met May 24, 2022. Discussion included; implementation of a new financial accounting system (07/2023), adding the 5-year Capital Plan document to the District's website, a salary breakage report, an update on amended pupil weighting legislation, and summer projects. EEI will present to the Board on 06/09/22 (regarding upgrades to HVAC systems using ESSER funds). The deadline for use of ESSER funds may very likely be changed to 2026. The projected surplus for FY22 is approximately \$2,000,000. In response to a query, it was noted that the contract for a new financial accounting system will be presented to the Board at the 06/09/22 meeting.

The next meeting is Thursday, June 21, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. in the Spaulding High School Library and via video conference.

8.4 Facilities & Transportation Committee

Minutes from the May 9, 2022 meeting were distributed.

The next meeting is Monday, June 13, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. in the Spaulding High School Library and via video conference.

8.5 Policy Committee

Minutes from the May 16, 2022 meeting were distributed.

Ms. Parker noted that the Board Meeting, Agenda Preparation & Distribution Policy (A20) is being revised to include the SEA Building in the rotation for Board Meetings. An amended policy will be presented to the Board for a First Reading.

Mrs. Leclerc noted that the Policy Committee has cancelled their June and July meetings and expressed concern that there may be some new or amended policies that are not in effect when school starts at the end of August (given the length of time it takes for policies to go from Committee to Board adoption). Ms. Parker advised that there were scheduling issues and the Committee agreed to postpone until August. Mr. Hennessey advised that he believes there will not be any issues with required policies not being in place. Ms. Parker does not believe that any missing required policies will impact the way schools open or the way students are educated.

The next meeting is Monday, August 15, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. in the Spaulding High School Library and via video conference.

8.6 Curriculum Committee

Minutes from the May 5, 2022 meeting were distributed.

The Thursday, June 2, 2022 meeting has been rescheduled.

The next meeting is Thursday, July 7, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. in the Spaulding High School Library and via video conference.

8.7 Negotiations Committee

Minutes from the May 10, 2022 meeting were distributed.

It was noted that the draft minutes need to be amended to include: the location of the meeting, the time the Committee entered Executive Session, the name of the individual who wrote the minutes, and the word "DRAFT" in text (for ADA compliance).

The next meeting is June 1, 2022.

9. Other Business/Round Table

Mr. Boltin noted that it has been suggested to Board Members, that District staff be able to submit questions and concerns anonymously and further advised that there are a few individuals who have offered to fund such an effort if there is any cost associated with it. Mr. Boltin would like the Board to discuss such an initiative. Mr. Hennessey advised that the administrative team is looking for different ways to receive meaningful feedback, including the idea that Mr. Boltin presented.

Mrs. Farrell queried regarding a way to inform Board Members, community members and local businesses regarding a list of things the schools need (as a way to invite individuals/businesses to help). Mrs. Pregent advised that a number of BCEMS teaching staff have a 'wish list' on 'Donors Choose' (a vetted website).

In response to a query from Mrs. Leclerc, Mr. Hennessey advised that the organizational chart is currently available on the District's website. In response to a query from Mrs. Leclerc, Mr. Hennessey advised that a report from the Great Schools' Partnership will be included in the June Superintendent's report. Mr. Hennessey noted that the work with GSP is funded through the CFP Grant. Mrs. Leclerc requested to see a report regarding statistics for the percentage of students who graduate and the percentage of students who drop out. It was clarified that trying to deduce the percentage of students who drop out based on the percentage that graduate, does not result in accurate data on the number of students who have dropped out of school.

Ms. Parker congratulated BTMES for the Musical Review, and suggested that the Donors Choose option be added to the website.

Regarding the Donors Choose website, Mrs. Prgent noted that some corporations match donations. Matching donations is a great way to contribute more to the schools.

Mrs. Spaulding attended and very much enjoyed the presentation of Amélie: Teen Version by the SHS Drama Club.

Mrs. Spaulding also advised that she went to the SHS Art Show and viewed a lot of great pieces. The Art Show will be on display until the end of the school year. Mrs. Spaulding encourages all Board Members to attend the SHS Graduation Ceremony.

10. Future Agenda Items

- Committee Charge – 06/09/22
- Educational Performance Update – 06/09/22
- Financial Accounting Software Contract – 06/09/22
- EEI Presentation to the Board (HVAC Upgrades) – 06/09/22
- New Hires – 06/09/22
- RAN Clarification – 06/09/22
- Electric Bus Issues Update – 06/09/22
- Salary Metrix Points – 06/09/22
- Independent Fund Raising Within Buildings Discussion – 06/09/22

- Policies – 06/23/22
- Board Procedures and Engagement – 06/23/22
- Review of Exit Survey Information – 06/23/22
- Review Board Meeting Start Time – 06/23/22

- Revisit Decision Regarding Staff Resignation Letters – TBD

- Strategic Plan Updates (addition of the 'how' to accomplish goals & additional information for Community Engagement) – Early Fall - TBD

11. Next Meeting Dates

Regular Board Meeting - Thursday, June 9, 2022 at BCEMS in the James Taffel Library and via video conference.

Regular Board Meeting - Thursday, June 23, 2022 at BCEMS in the James Taffel Library and via video conference.

Mrs. Spaulding requested that Board Members give some thought to holding just one meeting in July.

12. Executive Session as Needed

12.1 Board Training (Pietro Lynn) - Deleted – kept as a place holder.

No items were proposed for discussion in Executive Session.

Pietro Lynn joined the meeting to provide clarity regarding training sessions (public vs private). Mr. Lynn advised that trainings are not subject to open meeting laws. If the Board wants to discuss items specific to Board business, the meeting would need to be held in open session. Mr. Lynn advised that he will be giving a general presentation on the Board's roles, rights, and responsibilities.

Mr. Lynn advised that it is important for the Board to meet with him outside of a public meeting because he may be giving the Board legal advice regarding how they should be operating. The Board may have questions that they ask that solicit legal advice. Legal advice is privileged. If the Board needs to change the way it is doing things because the Board is not doing things the way they ought to be done, meeting in public removes the ability to be candid about issues that may have existed. Mr. Lynn believes individuals are more candid when they are not in public meetings. District counsel, Mr. Lynn advised that it is the Board's decision whether to hold the meeting in public or private, though Mr. Lynn encourages the Board to meet in private, as he feels private training is more effective and Board Members feel they can speak freely about issues and concerns they may have. In response to a query, it was clarified that the training is exempt from Open Meeting Laws and are not subject to Open Meeting Law. The rules that apply to Open Meetings do not apply to training. Jeff Blow queried regarding how the item of Board Training was added to the Agenda. Mrs.

Spaulding advised that discussion of that matter was held at the beginning of the meeting and she advised Mr. Blow to review the video of that portion of the meeting.

13. Adjournment

On a motion by Mrs. Pregent, seconded by Ms. Parker, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn at 8:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrea Poulin

ATTACHMENT A

Good Evening,

First, thank you to the board for allowing me to serve in the role of Elementary School Principal at BCEMS for the past four years. I want you to know that I have cherished every day of this opportunity.

In the spring of 2018, I was hired as the principal of Barre City Elementary School. Starting as early as my initial interview, trauma in students was a major concern. Fast forward to today, 4 years and 1 pandemic later, the mental health needs of our community have grown at a scale factor of 10, and are having an enormous impact on our young learners.

We are seeing more and more students showing signs of mental health needs; depression, self harm, poor attendance along with reactive behaviors such as elopement and violence. We are seeing these needs in all of our students, but especially for those who are having adverse childhood experiences. Our staffing challenges this year have only compounded these needs.

The reality is our community is facing a lot of major challenges. The lack of affordable housing, mental health needs, rising living costs, combined with domestic violence, crime and narcotics are taxing our school support systems. Our local support agencies such as wcmh and dcf are equally understaffed. This leaves school staff overwhelmed, exhausted and burned out from trying to meet students' needs in the classroom; and failing. But these needs are far beyond what a classroom or school can provide. Our local service providers are at capacity and have up to year long waitlists for outplacement programs for students in crisis.

Currently, there are 67 students identified as homeless at bcems, which is approximately 8% of the student body. This number is just a number, it doesn't describe the lack of basic needs such as food, running water or the simple routines all children need. Our school provides food, clothing, hygiene products, access to a dentist, access to medical care, on top of a rock solid education.

Yesterday, Jen Carbonneau admin assistant purchased towels for students to be able to shower at school.

On average this school year, BCEMS has 21 staff absences per day. On weeks following vacations or big outbreaks, this number is 45-50. This doesn't include the 12 currently unfilled student support positions in our building.

These absences mean students don't have consistency, spend more time with substitutes, or lose vital services such as reading, math and speech or behavior check ins.

This lack of support and services are having a detrimental impact on all of our learners and especially those from historically marginalized groups. In fact, 78% of our students who were suspended from school this year were either on an iep, in state custody, or homeless under the mckinney vento act.. That means 4 out of 5 students who are suspended are because we do not have the staffing needed to safely support them and the other children.

It is for these reasons that I am proud to address you tonight to say "we have had school everyday."

It has not been easy. and it has taken the entire team, elementary, middle, paras, teachers, behavior and support staff, maintenance and admin together to make it work. We have amaazing people! People like Kirsten Evans who has not missed a single day from her second grade classroom this year. And Tyler Watkins who volunteers daily distributing lunches. Or Mariah Jacobs who works around the clock to help students and teachers to be successful.

Our staff routinely are called upon during their lunch time to cover recess, or asked to double up classes to make the ends meet for the day. I believe our whole staff should be celebrated for this feat, in a year when schools around us had days and weeks of closures due to Covid or staffing issues.

At the same time, BCEMS continues to have the lowest turnover rate in the district.

Since school re-opened in August 2020 60% of bcems staff have tested positive for Covid 19. This is triple the infection rate for the state of Vermont. Teachers and staff have routinely put themselves at risk for the betterment of our students and community. I want to thank everyone that has served in our school and all schools for their work this year.

As my time at BC comes to an end, I have had many people ask me what I think is the answer to our challenges. I am not sure I have the answers, but here are a few thoughts:

- Expand the Restorative Program
 1. The restorative Program shown improved student outcomes in math literacy attendance and mental health
 2. Save millions of dollars versus outplacing students
 3. Requires a lower staff ratio than a 1:1 model.

- Focus more resources on mental health needs
 1. Consider social emotional learning coach and coordinator
 2. Train teachers to better support all students mental health needs

- Places the Board Can help us:
 1. More advocacy at the local and state level to bring more resources to Barre
 2. Advocate to Expand dcf, housing expansion, mental health supports
 3. Graduation rate. The graduation rate is the best measure of a successful school system, especially in economically disadvantaged areas. Having a high graduation rate is the best way to end the generational poverty cycle.

Thank you all for your work for the students of Barre and I am happy to answer any questions from the board, and if allowed, the public.

-Hayden

Ps. We are having field day on June 14. There's an inflatable pirate slide, snow cone machine and I'll be in the dunk tank :)