

# Washington Central Unified Union School District

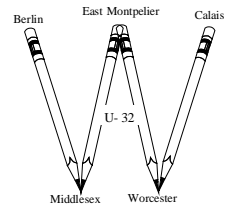
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*WCUUSD exists to nurture and inspire in all students the passion, creativity and power to contribute to their local and global communities.*

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Bryan Olkowski  
Superintendent



## Washington Central Unified Union School District Board Meeting Minutes Approved 4.28.21 6:00-9:00 PM

**Board Members:** Flor Diaz Smith, Lindy Johnson, Scott Thompson, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Kari Bradley, Jonas Eno-Van Fleet, Karoline May, Dorothy Naylor, Christina Pollard, Vera Frazier, Christopher McVeigh, Jill Olson, Jonathan Goddard

**Administrators:** Superintendent Bryan Olkowski, Human Resources Director Carla Messier, Principal Steven Dellinger Pate, Director of Student Affairs Amy Molina, Interim Technology Director James Garrity, Principal Aaron Boynton, Principal Alicia Lyford, Principal Cat Fair, Principal Gillian Fuqua, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Jennifer Miller-Arsenault, Associate Principal Jody Emerson, Special Education Coordinator Julia Pritchard, Director of Special Services Kelly Bushey, Director of Student Services, Lisa LaPlante, Business Administrator, Lori Bibeau,

**Others/Public:** Amy Young, Lisa Wilson, ORCA Media, Allison Levin, Ben Weiss, C.G., Christina George, David Powelson, Diana, Elizabeth Wirth, Ellen Dorsey, Ester Heinz, Jess, Kate Liptak, Madeleine Dougherty, Townes DeGroot, Tyler Smith, Brian Fischer, Alan Hefferon, David Delcore, Jess Abisla, Lisa Hannah, Maria Melekos, Sonya Rhodes, Virginia Breer, Tyler Smith, Chris Winters

**1. Call to Order: Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.**

**2. Executive Session – Legal, Negotiations, Personnel:**

Karoline May noted that the Superintendent Evaluation discussion should occur during Executive Session. **Karoline May moved to enter Executive Session at 6:02 for the purpose of discussing Legal Issues, Negotiations, Personnel, and Superintendent Evaluation, and to invite Dan Richardson to join Executive Session. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously. At 7:20, Jonas Eno-Van Fleet moved; Chris McVeigh seconded, to return to Open Session from Executive Session. This motion carried unanimously.**

**Jonas Eno-Van Fleet moved to approve additional compensation in the amount of \$1000 beyond budgeted expenses to each current contractual staff for additional duties performed during the COVID-19 pandemic outside normal expectations per Operations. Seconded by Karoline May, this motion carried unanimously.**

**Chris McVeigh moved that the District hire Daniel Richardson, a Montpelier attorney, to provide legal consultation for the District's consideration for the Town of Berlin's request to transfer ownership of land where the Berlin School is located. Seconded by Jonas Eno-Van Fleet, this motion carried unanimously**

Diane - would like to note for the record: Our schools and all staff have worked hard to provide for the social emotional development and learning of all students during this time of incredible change and stress. The connections could not have happened without the dedication and care of all staff. Thank you are two very simple words for the life changing work that you do but they carry our enormous wishes of gratitude and appreciation. **Diane Nichols-Fleming moved to approve spending up to \$1000 for items for staff appreciation. Seconded by Karoline May, this motion carried unanimously.**

### 3. Welcome:

#### 3.1. Reception of Guests

**3.2. Agenda Revisions:** Chris McVeigh would like to add “public comments” to the discussion agenda tonight. Flor Diaz Smith also noted that she would like to add item 4.2.7 to Superintendent’s report.

### 4. Reports:

**4.1. Student Reports:** Townes DeGroot and Anna Farber shared some of the activities as students begin the end-of-the-year push, with seven weeks remaining. Scott Thompson thanked Anna and Townes for the profile they had created in the Chronicle. Anna invited any school board members who would like to be profiled in the newspaper to contact her!

#### 4.2. Superintendent:

**4.2.1. COVID -19 Update:** Elizabeth Wirth provided an update. She shared that we will begin surveillance testing of students in the near future. We are no longer going to do surveillance testing of staff, as a great deal of them are vaccinated. She noted that we are getting updates around guidance for outdoor gatherings and we are hoping, by June 1st, to be able to gather outdoors for some of the end of the year celebrations. Superintendent Olkowski thanked the administrators, staff, including Elizabeth Wirth, for the work that they have done throughout the pandemic, above and beyond, to support our students and families.

**4.2.2. FY 21-22 School Calendar:** Superintendent Olkowski had shared the proposed FY 21-22 School Calendar. He recommended that the board accept the calendar, as is annual practice. **Jonas Eno-Van Fleet moved to accept the calendar as presented by the Superintendent. Seconded by Diane Nichols-Fleming, this motion carried unanimously.**

**4.2.3. Last day of School FY 20-21:** Superintendent Olkowski asked the school board to consider, given the extenuating circumstances from this year, to forgive one day of school at the end of the school year. **Dorothy Naylor moved for the school board to forgive one (1) day so that the last day of school for students is a half day on June 17, 2021 and the last day for school year staff is June 18, 2021. The last day for ESP staff will be a half day on June 18, 2021. Seconded by Jonas Eno-Van Fleet, this motion carried unanimously.**

**4.2.4. Recovery Plan:** Superintendent Olkowski thanked Jen Miller-Arsenault for her continued leadership. She shared the WCUUSD Plan for Moving Forward, which focuses on: Social Emotional Learning, Mental Health, and Well-Being, Engagement/ Truancy, and Academic Achievement and Success, as indicated by AOE. She had shared a memo with the board, dated April 19, 2021, explaining this process. She invited others to participate in the Phase 2 planning process. Lindy Johnson asked whether meetings will be during the day or after school hours. Karoline May offered to participate as well, however, evening availability is limited.

- 4.2.5. AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) Grant:** Kelly Bushey shared that we have received many applicants and are moving forward with this endeavor. She had provided a memo dated April 5, 2021, updating the board. Scott Thompson and Flor Diaz Smith thanked her for this creative partnership.
- 4.2.6. Staff Leave:** Superintendent Olkowski had provided a memo to explain this proposal. **Scott Thompson moved to approve to voluntarily extend benefits of the FFCRA and CAA to include benefits as defined in the American Rescue Plan for qualifying reasons for the period of April 1, 2021 through September 30, 2021. Seconded by Chris McVeigh. This motion carried unanimously.**
- 4.2.7.** Bryan Olkowski shared that the leadership team has come together to discuss the concerns that had been shared regarding allied arts, specifically music and art. Aaron Boynton responded to the letter that was shared with the board on April 5, 2021. He stated that the professional learning community values the arts and understands the importance of well - rounded education which includes the arts. He noted that this year has been challenging, but our music and allied arts teachers have exceeded expectations in adjusting teaching during the pandemic. He spoke about student enrollment and the implications on staffing and he stated that students will be receiving general music classes across the board. The topic of instrumental music - specifically, band and chorus - continues to be discussed. Aaron Boynton spoke about the background history over the past few years related to allied arts education. He stated that the focus this year on “equity” across the schools made differences in student offerings across the buildings apparent. Diane Nichols-Fleming asked, re: COVID’s impact on the arts - when a schedule was considered, was the schedule reflective of a year under COVID conditions? Aaron Boynton - no, we did not plan around a “COVID” year. Diane Nichols-Fleming asked, what would the schedule look like for a staff position that is shared? Alicia Lyford shared how East Montpelier and Calais, and East Montpelier and Rumney, have shared staff. The building principals’ work together to create a schedule where the majority of the day, if not the entire day, can be spent in one building. Vera Frazier asked, are band lessons going to continue for 5th and 6th grade students, along with whole band lessons during preparation for concerts? Aaron Boynton stated that these aspects will continue, but will be reduced compared to past years. Vera asked whether the leadership team has representation from any of the allied arts. Superintendent Olkowski stated that the leadership team is comprised of building administrators who represent their staff as a whole, but does not have a representation from allied arts. Vera asked, over the last five years, what has been student enrollment? What is projected for next year? Flor Diaz Smith stated that we will have those numbers for the next meeting. Chris McVeigh asked whether the leadership team knew that there was going to be a recommendation to reduce teachers when they met in November to prepare the budget. Steven Dellinger Pate stated that there were no discussions about specific staff cuts in November. Chris McVeigh asked when was it known that there would be cuts proposed? Superintendent Olkowski noted that in the December 20th meeting, the board was apprised of proposed cuts when the budget was discussed. Chris McVeigh asked, does equity mean that some of the schools will have a lesser program? He spoke about the concept of “race to the median.” Superintendent Olkowski spoke about the challenge to make the most of limited resources and within limited scheduling opportunities; however he does not see it as a “race to the median.” He spoke about future the work of the

Strategic Plan. Chris McVeigh asked whether the music teaching staff was included in the discussions about these changes? Superintendent Olkowski spoke about following the guidance from the collective bargaining document, regarding reductions in force. Lindy Johnson stated that a budget was presented that was lower than the board had asked for. She noted that we will be getting quite a bit of grants around COVID, and she wonders whether this can be used toward the arts. She feels this should have been more thought out and a more long term vision. She stated that if she were a staff member that was impacted, she would have wanted to know in January versus 15 days before contractual deadlines. She would like to have a more long term vision of the impact. Jonas Eno-Van Fleet reviewed the minutes from the December board meeting. He also reviewed a memo from the Superintendent at the time. He does not recall that the board had an opportunity to discuss possible reductions in force. He stated that the indications were that no RIFs would be needed with the budget. He stated that he did not have an inkling about reductions in force and he does not think that other board members did. Superintendent Olkowski replied that discussion and agreement should follow about when is it appropriate to notify school board about RIFs/ transfers - when is it appropriate to notify staff; when is it appropriate to notify families? He noted that he has followed the collective bargaining agreement but that he is hearing that the communication needs to be fine - tuned. Lori Bibeau shared that, in March, when we were analyzing contracts in greater detail, we began to realize that some reductions in forces would be needed rather than temporary contracts that would not be renewed. Scott Thompson reiterated Aaron Boynton's statement about the need to look at the music program in a more comprehensive way. He recalled that time and scheduling has been a big factor in the discussion. He believes that we have the capacity now to look at the program more globally. Vera Frazier stated that for 13 years the Berlin board had worked continuously to increase music and arts programs for the children. She understands equity across the district, but she would like to consider ways to keep the music programs at Berlin at the same level that they were pre-COVID.

Chris McVeigh stated that he thinks we should restore the cuts and then, as Scott Thompson had indicated, look at the program more globally. Flor Diaz Smith stated that the administrators have indicated that the changes are intentional. However, we need to do better in the next budget season with transparency and communication. She does not think that the board should go backward in this process; we as a board should respect the expertise of the administration. Chris McVeigh stated again that "equity" should not be a race to the median. He thinks that we need to have more discussions about the meaning of equity, and that it should not mean cutting opportunities for students.

Jonathan Goddard stated that he did not have an understanding in the fall that there would be RIFs. He does not support cutting the arts, particularly in the middle of a pandemic. He feels that it is very important that we look at this carefully and support the arts across the schools. Lindy Johnson stated that the board was not informed properly. She feels that it should be an action item; if the board has the money, the positions should be reinstated and then we should systematically consider this issue. She stated that she is upset that we are not listening to our constituents, and she does not think that the leadership team feels comfortable speaking out. Flor Diaz Smith asked for a straw poll from the board to show support to the changes that are recommended. Kari Bradley reframed the question: does the board want to revisit this? Five board members indicated with thumbs up that they would like to revisit this.

Karoline May - supports that the administration revisit and come back with a recommendation; however, recognizing that the recommendation may be to keep the current plan. Flor Diaz Smith took a straw poll which resulted in a tie vote; she asked that the Superintendent and leadership team come back to the next board meeting with a recommendation. Diane Nichols Fleming thanked the board and the administration for allowing for this very important discussion/conversation.

#### **4.3. Education Quality:**

**4.3.1. Discussion of WCUUSD Science Student Learning Outcomes:** Kari Bradley previewed that the committee had shared information related to Science for the board's review. He shared that we have new standards in science that allow more flexibility in learning. Hands-on learning is an engaging science activity. Proficiency levels are at or above state averages in science, however there are some differences in proficiency levels amongst groups of students. The question for the board: What information from this review should be carried forward to strategic planning? Scott Thompson: Are student learning outcomes more "pre-outcomes" - e.g., what is it that students want to do with this learning? As well as the idea of breaking down boundaries between subject - e.g., math and science woven together. Flor Diaz Smith - how are we addressing, from Pre-K through grade 12, the achievement gap in science? Kari Bradley reminded the board that next week the committee will look at Health and Physical Education, and in June, will look at post-graduation plans.

#### **4.4. Finance Committee:**

- 4.4.1. Authorize the District to Accept, all Federal and State Grants; to Administer and Act as the Representative of the School District: Scott Thompson moved to authorize the Superintendent to submit consolidated Federal Program Grants and to receive and expend Federal funds. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously.**
- 4.4.2. Audit Report FY 20: Scott Thompson moved to accept and approve the Audit Report as presented in the board packet. Seconded by Diane Nichols-Fleming.** Kari Bradley noted that this year was extremely complex, with the pandemic, and he commends Lori Bibeau and her team. Lori Bibeau explained that she will be seeking bids for audit firms, for the board's consideration at the May board meeting. **This motion carried unanimously.**
- 4.4.3. Berlin Storm Water Bid:** Flor Diaz Smith reviewed the Finance Committee's decision to go with Dubois Construction for this project. Vera Frazier asked specifically where the storm water pond will be located.
- 4.4.4. Update Electric Vehicle Charger at Rumney:** Flor Diaz Smith asked for board input about this. A memo had been provided to explain the options. Chris McVeigh suggested that we leave it in place as it is, with no additional investments. **Chris McVeigh moved to leave the charger at Rumney School in place, and make no further changes to it. Seconded by Jonas Eno-Van Fleet.** Discussion: James Garrity explained that, regardless, the unit should be checked once a year for safety assurances. **This motion carried unanimously.**
- 4.4.5. Annual Fiscal Management Questionnaire:** Lori Bibeau had prepared this document, which is an annual practice. **Scott Thompson moved to authorize the board chair to sign the financial management questionnaire on behalf of the board. Seconded by Lindy Johnson, this motion carried unanimously.**
- 4.4.6. Financial Update & ESSER Grants:** Lori Bibeau had prepared a memo dated April 14th to explain the updated status of the fund balance and ESSER grant monies.

**4.4.7. Rumney ERV Bid:** Flor Diaz Smith explained this project. A memo had been shared dated April 13, 2021, to explain this upgrade. The Finance Committee had awarded the bid to E.F. Wall, Thomas Mechanical, and Temperature Controls of Vermont.

**4.4.8. U-32 Social Studies Position: Scott Thompson moved to approve a Social Studies position, not previously in the budget. Seconded by Chris McVeigh.** Discussion: Jonas Eno-Van Fleet asked Principal Dellinger Pate to explain some of the moving around of staff that he is envisioning for this position. He briefly explained, part of which included reorganizing middle school staffing configuration. **This motion carried unanimously.**

**4.5. Policy Committee:** Chris McVeigh explained that James Garrity and the Policy Committee have done a lot of work around these policies. He would like to have the first reading policies moved as a slate, to second reading. **Scott Thompson moved that the following list of policies go forward from first reading to second. Seconded by Lindy Johnson.**

**4.5.1. First Reading for policy to be Adopted on 5.19.21:** F40 Change Management and F43 Backups, D3 District Take Home Device & Personal Device, F47 Electronic Mail, F48 Incident Response Policy & Plan, , C5 Weapons and Firearms, C2 Student Alcohol & Drugs

**4.5.2. Second Reading for Policy to be Adopted:** F46 Flag Raising Policy: **Scott Thompson moved to adopt F46: Flag Raising Policy. Seconded by Jonas Eno-Van Fleet. This motion carried unanimously.**

## **5. Board Operations:**

**5.1. Curriculum Management Report:** Superintendent Olkowski shared that we are expecting to receive the report sometime in May. He asked the board to consider the work of how to use the report, how to understand it, how to link it to strategic planning?

**5.2. Superintendent Evaluation:** Karoline May indicated that the board had discussed this during the Executive Session.

**5.3. Staff Appreciation:** This had been discussed during Executive Session

**5.4. Appointment of new board members:** Flor Diaz Smith shared the intent to receive letters by May 12; appoint new board members during the May meeting, including interviewing candidates during that meeting.

**5.5. Public Comment:** Scott Thompson shared the previous discussion and options around public comment. Vera Frazier stated that she supports either a separate public forum meeting, or adding public comment at the beginning of the board meeting, even if it means creating 15 minutes before the usual start of the meeting. Chris McVeigh stated that, in order to encourage public participation, we should move public comment back to the beginning of board meetings, even if it means starting board meetings 15 minutes earlier. Kari Bradley stated that he would like to see a calendar with, e.g., 4 forums scheduled over the course of the year and inviting public participation in a forum. Lindy Johnson stated that issues come up and they might not align with forums. She feels that it is rude to ask people to wait during long meetings, until the end, to share comments. Jonas Eno-Van Fleet stated that he agrees with Lindy. Karoline May asked whether there would be opposition to asking people to sign up ahead of time so that the board could plan the time component and have some idea of the topics of public comment. Chris McVeigh stated that Karoline's suggestion would be helpful as a supplement, but not as a prerequisite to be able to speak publicly. In other words, not to create a gateway to say that if you haven't signed up ahead of time,

you can't comment. Flor Diaz Smith stated that she supports having public forum meetings scheduled, but that she hears the board's feedback and proposes experimenting with moving public comments to the beginning of the board meeting, and beginning the meeting 15 minutes earlier than usual. Jill Olson stated that it is important to keep to the time limit of 15 minutes, and to not allow public comment at the beginning of the meeting throw off the agenda of the board. The board has a slate of business to conduct at each meeting; the agendas are full; the meetings are long.

**6. Consent Agenda:**

**6.1. Approve Minutes of 3.17.21, 3.29.21, 4.7.21, and 4.14.21: Jonas Eno-Van Fleet moved to approve the minutes of 3.17.21, 3.29.21, 4.7.21, and 4.14.21. Seconded by Diane Nichols-Fleming. Lindy Johnson pointed out an edit for correction. This motion carried unanimously.**

**6.2. Approve Board Orders: Scott Thompson moved to approve the board orders in the amount of \$995,236.29. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously.**

**7. Personnel :**

**7.1. Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Retirements, Leave of Absence and Changes in FTE: Lindy Johnson moved to approve: New Teacher Nominations (for 21-22 school year): Kevin Richards - U-32 Social Studies Teacher, Alan Hefferon – U-32 Social Studies Teacher, Sandra Wetzal – WCUUSD Special Education Teacher . Seconded by Karoline May, this motion carried. Scott Thompson noted that he hopes we can develop school exchanges, for example, with China. Lindy Johnson moved to accept: Resignations Kelly MacMartin – Calais Elementary School Classroom Teacher, Hunter Hedenberg – U-32 Physical Education Teacher, Kelly Bushey - Director of Special Services, Jody Emerson – U-32 Associate Principal, Lynn Spencer – Berlin Art Teacher, Casey Provost – Rumney Principal. Seconded by Diane Nichols-Fleming with words of gratitude and sadness for losing long time colleagues. Board members agreed and expressed their gratitude. Chris McVeigh thanked Casey Provost for his work at Rumney. This motion carried unanimously. Flor Diaz Smith stated that she looks forward to continuing to work with Jody Emerson at the Career Center. Lindy Johnson moved to approve the following changes in FTE: Patty Abraham –Berlin PE/Health .8 to 1.0 FTE, David Mathies – EMES .5 to 1.0 FTE, Jessica Abisla – Doty Nurse .5 Grant Funded. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously. Lindy Johnson moved to approve the following hires: Maria Melekos- Covid-19 Coordinator (from Nurse position), Mahala Largent – U-32 School Nurse. Seconded by Diane Nichols-Fleming, this motion carried unanimously.**

**8. Public Comments:**

Matt Levin stated that he would share his statement by email but he is hoping that the board will consider using ESSER funds to reinstate the allied arts positions as discussed tonight, and to allow for more discussion and a more global strategy around equity.

Chris Winters expressed his concern around the lack of information and transparency with this issue. He stated that what is being characterized as a scheduling issue is a much bigger issue. Does the board want to do its work with or without adequate public vetting, discussion and participation? The issue of removing something from one school in the name of equity is one of the core issues that was at the root of the consolidation debates that went on for years at Washington Central. He spoke about removing decision making

from local discussion and having it go behind closed doors to a central office. He urged the board to have a community wide discussion around the topic of equity. He stated that program reductions were not apparent in the budget vote. He asked the board to “press pause” and reconsider. He noted that it takes courage and wisdom and it shows responsiveness, to reconsider and admit a mistake; it does not set a bad precedent. He hopes that the admin will publicly disclose the rationale around these decisions, and he urges the board to hold firm with the status quo until more discussion including the public has taken place. David Lawrence stated that he is very much in favor of giving the public an opportunity to participate earlier in the board meetings. He does not support requiring people to register to speak at a board meeting, and he does not think that quarterly public forums will serve the same purpose of allowing public comment in an ongoing way. Flor Diaz Smith read a letter that had been asked to be read from a member of the public. The topic of the letter was around gender neutral restrooms. The letter asked that a summer committee be formed to address issues around discrimination, including transgender students. This topic was added to future agenda items.

**9. Future Agenda Items:**

**9.1.** WCUUSD Name

**9.2.** Assessment Needs for building Bright Futures

**9.3.** Diversifying Educator Workforce

**9.4.** Net Metering Proposal

**9.5.** Strategic Planning

**9.6.** Board Governance Goals/Retreat/reflection on the Year/Board Self Evaluation

**9.7.** Superintendent Responsibilities/Board Roles and Responsibilities

**9.8.** U-32 Restroom(Gender Neutral and related topics)

10. **Board Reflection:** Scott Thompson indicated that much of the stress and anxiety is related to difficulty adjusting to what it means to be consolidated. We still have some way to go before we are wrapped around what it means to us. Perhaps we should plan on some time in future meetings to create a clear sense among the board. Jonas Eno-Van Fleet shared that the operational and communication-related aspects of the conversation are equally important. Flor Diaz Smith noted that we are still trying to create systems so that we are more pro-active rather than reactive in governing as a board. Working together with the administration and the communities in a transparent way is important. She agreed that we as a board can work on the goal of governance. Vera Frazier had shared her reflection by email, in light of the late hour.

- 11. Adjourn: Scott Thompson moved to adjourn at 10:11 p.m. Seconded by Jonas Eno-Van Fleet, this motion carried unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Lisa Stoudt, Board Recording Secretary