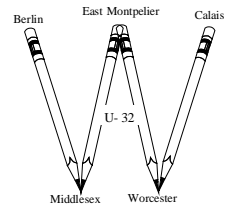


# Washington Central Unified Union School District

*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 Retreat Meeting Minutes Approved 4.7.21 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

**Present:** Bryan Olkowski, Superintendent; Chris McVeigh, Susan Holson, Nicholas Fischer, Alaria Doane, Allison Levin, Amy Young, Christina Pollard, Christine Babcock, Dani, Daniel Diddlemeyer, David Lawrence, David Powelson, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Dorothy Naylor, Eli Levin, Erin Mooney, Flor Diaz Smith, Jamie Bohn, Jane Boucher, Jennifer Campbell, Jennifer Donovan, Jessica Heinz, Jill Abair, Jill Olson, Jonas Eno-Van Fleet, Kara Rosenberg, Kari Bradley, Karoline May, Kate Liptak, Kate McCann, Lindy Johnson, Lisa Wilson, Lynn Spencer, Mary Bove, Michael Spencer, Mike Sutherby, ORCA Media, Roger Grow, Scott Thompson, Smishkin, Sonya Rhodes, Stephen Looke, Steven Ushakov, Tyler Smith, Vera Frazier

- 1. Call to Order: Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.**  
She noted that she is changing the agenda to add public comments at the end of the meeting, as public comments were not on the agenda and there are members of the public present.
- 2. Executive Session for Student Matter: Scott Thompson moved to go into Executive Session at 6:04 for the purpose of discussing a student matter. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously. At 6:15 the board came out of Executive Session. Lindy Johnson moved to accept the Superintendent's recommendation regarding a student matter. Seconded by Karoline May, this motion carried unanimously.**
- 3. Personnel:**  
**Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Retirements, Leave of Absence and Changes in FTE: Lindy Johnson moved to approve the following hires: Matthew Pelkey, Rumney Math Interventionist and Carrie Fitz EMES Math Interventionist. Seconded by Kari Bradley, this motion carried unanimously. Lindy Johnson moved to accept the following retirement: Chip Hedler. Seconded by Jonas Eno-Van Fleet, this motion carried unanimously. Lindy Johnson moved to accept the following resignation: Alaria Doane. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously.**  
Bryan Olkowski expressed his gratitude for Chip Hedler's long service in the district. Jonas Eno-Van Fleet said it was great to work with Chip Hedler. Chris McVeigh said Chip Hedler was the guardian angel of Rumney for at least a decade, completely reliable, and a resource for everyone in the Rumney community.

**4. Introductions:** (Listen to each other, assume good intentions and be curious.)

Nicholas Fischer provided an introduction about active listening norms for the board retreat. He stated that the board will need to think about what the role of the board is, and about student outcomes. Board members introduced and welcomed each other. Susan Holson introduced herself and explained her role in the retreat tonight.

**5. Essential Work of the School Board:** Susan Holson provided a presentation that explained the role of the school board, using the VSBA's framework from the publication: *Essential Work of the School Board*. She explained that while there are six domains in the VSBA's framework, (Engage the Community & Establish a Vision, Adopt Policy, Develop a Budget & Assure Financial Oversight, Monitor Progress, Effective and Ethical Operations, Board & Superintendent Partnership), she would like to focus on Board and Superintendent Partnership.

**5.1.** What is the role of the School Board?

**5.2.** Superintendent and School Board Partnership

**6. Reflect on what we heard**

(Have an ongoing conversation on what is the role of the Board.)

She invited school board members to respond to the presentation, and asked whether it was consistent with how they thought about the role of the board and its relationship with superintendent.

- Kari Bradley stated that he believes the board has a good sense about what they expect from the superintendent but not so solid on how to measure.
- Chris McVeigh: feels that the way it is spelled out in this presentation is more rigid than the practice that our board has engaged in. He spoke about the board and the superintendent's authority around hiring practice.
- Scott Thompson stated that WCUUSD has been transformed and that the consolidated board now works with the superintendent in the same way local school boards worked with their building principals. He stated that the superintendent is the only way that the board can get things done.
- Jonas Eno-Van Fleet: thanked Scott Thompson for his description and noted that he himself came onto WCUUSD board after the unification, so he had not experienced the previous dynamic. Some discussion followed around the difference between the WCSU board structure(s) and the current WCUUSD board.
- Vera Frazier stated that each town still seeks its own individuality, and this is a challenge with the unified board - how to work together as one board but still allow for the individuality at each school?
- Karoline May indicated that, the superintendent being the sole employee of the board, this is a huge responsibility. Board members have an obligation to their communities.
- Jill Olson - trust and communication are critical - she reiterated the importance that while the superintendent is an employee of the board, the board is obligated to reflect the values of their communities.
- Lindy Johnson reiterated the importance of trust and communication, especially when we have come from several local school boards to one unified board. She stated that the board also has the interest of the staff at heart too. She stated again that she would like to have public comment at the beginning of the board meeting.
- Diane Nichols-Fleming: communication, trust, and accountability.
- Dorothy Naylor - one thing we haven't figured out how to do is to transfer the trust that used to go directly to the building principals - to the superintendent (any superintendent, not a specific person). She reminded the board members that we should think of the five towns together as "our community." She stated that she had wanted to

visit each local school, before COVID19 struck - she would like all of the board members to think of themselves as representing all five towns. Nicholas Fischer stated that the discussion helped illustrate the importance of knowing where we are starting. The board will need to get into specifics of “what does a high quality education for each student look like”? What does “trust” look like? What do you do when there has been a breach of trust? What does safety look like? How to talk about “accountability”? What does it look like, for whom, and at what level?

## **7. Board Goals:**

### **7.1. Reaffirm Existing Goals Board Governance Goals:**

- Dorothy Naylor: Board members need to realize that staffing can now be more easily distributed in the five towns.
- Diane Nichols-Fleming: will be important: knowing what the governance roles are and being able to give the “elevator talk” about roles would be an indicator that the governance goals are met.
- Board members expressed support for the board governance goals as presented.
- Kari Bradley would like to include in governance goals: (1) recruitment (2) orientation system (3) board calendar which includes system of reporting over the year (4) superintendent evaluation (5) communication and community engagement. Would like to systematize so that future boards can build off of the work that we do.
- Jill Olson: reiterated what Kari had stated, would support a sub-committee to work on fleshing out some of these goals.
- Stephen Looke: does not feel that the board has made goals a priority, specifically, Goal #1: superintendent evaluation.
- Jonas Eno-Van Fleet: agrees that a goal around communication is important. Agrees with Scott’s statement that “the best way to govern better is to govern.” He added, “The lift is getting bigger and the ask is getting larger.”
- Chris McVeigh - would like to have a sub group work on governance goals. He spoke about the book study that the board did. Would we like to re-engage with that work?
- Flor Diaz Smith - would like to commit to a board calendar, system of reporting, clear communication between superintendent and board. Agrees with Jonas that she does not want board members to feel overwhelmed; hopes that the once monthly board meetings will help with that and will allow time to address some of these other issues. Also would like to create a subcommittee with a clear charge.

### **Student Achievement Goal:**

- Dorothy Naylor: Would like to keep this goal, hopes that the Curriculum audit will help inform work toward this goal.
- Diane Nichols-Fleming: appreciates the work of the Ed Quality Committee to be able to look more in depth at student achievement.
- Christina Pollard: would like for the board to have more time to work on this goal across the entire five towns.
- Lindy Johnson: would like to have time to hear input from building administrators around the student achievement goal.
- Vera Frazier asked - what is the status of the first goal? Kari Bradley explained the work of the Education Quality Committee and the system of sharing with the WCUUSD board. Vera would like to have a living document that would keep track of the work of the Education Quality and the WCUUSD board around student achievement. Nicholas Fischer suggested that Vera might be willing to draft a template for the “living document.” She agreed.
- Scott Thompson - are things getting better? Are they getting worse? Would like to be able to continue to look at student achievement over time.

- Karoline May: Every time she engages in a presentation about student achievement, she wishes she had time to go deeper. Wishes there was more time to look more deeply. Wants to be able to follow up a few months down the road, rather than waiting for a full year. Nicholas Fischer suggested, for instance, having an hour over coffee, whatever board members choose to attend, having an opportunity to dive deeply into student achievement data on a given subject.
- Jill Olson: ask ourselves “and what do we do about student performance?” Where will the curriculum audit work fit into this goal? Will it help connect the dots between some of the questions/ issues that are brought up tonight?
- Stephen Looke thinks that the work of the board is visionary - would like for the review and analysis of student achievement to have some context - what are our student achievement goals? How do we analyze student outcomes if we haven’t stated goals?
- Jonas Eno-Van Fleet feels that we do need student achievement goals; referring to Stephen’s comment - our goal can be to see improvement. He spoke about the curriculum audit - how will the information that comes from it create change in our district, and how will we measure change?
- Chris McVeigh: reiterated Nicholas’s suggestion of asking students after they have left high school: what did you learn? What do you wish you had learned? Chris asked, why wouldn’t we be doing this every year? Nicholas suggested also, giving teachers an opportunity to ask, e.g., a third grade cohort asking the fourth grade cohort what do you see as gaps when the students come to you. Along those lines. Chris McVeigh suggested looking at past audits - what was the action step that came from them? Did it have an effect on student outcomes?
- Kari Bradley: working from the information that we get from the curriculum audit; informing the strategic planning - goal of having strategic plan is that we have alignment about how we are going to have better student outcomes over the next five years. We need to have defined measures of success. What is our system of measuring success? Nicholas asked the board to consider: who are you sharing data with? What is it they want to know about student achievement?
- Flor Diaz Smith: Agrees that we need to set more specific goals so that we can more closely monitor. Also thinks it is important for the board to ask are we fostering lifelong learners? How are students doing four years after graduation? How do we ensure equity across our schools? The strategic plan will be the most important road map for the next five years. How do we involve the community in the strategic plan so that we are reflecting what their values are and what they want to see in the portrait of a graduate?

## **7.2. Clarify what we broadly defined last summer.**

**7.2.1.** What will it look like when achieved? What will success look like?

**7.2.2.** Define Key Data Points

**7.2.3.** Work on a Board Calendar

## **8. What did you learn today?**

Board members reflected on the work today. Karoline May reflected that there are some differences around the “how” to get to our goals. Jill Olson reflected that the board has much in common as far as overarching vision. Chris McVeigh: there is a hunger for measurable specifics in what we do. We have a need to define goals and have the discipline to stay focused on them.

**9. Public Comments:**

Flor Diaz Smith invited input from community.

- Roger Grow read a letter (April 5, 2021) from the music department asking for clarification about proposed decreases in FTE positions.
- Lynn Spencer, Art teacher at Berlin School, spoke about her concerns with cuts and changes in the arts program at Berlin School. She encouraged the board to embrace open communication and provide an opportunity for all interested parties to share.
- Daniel Diddlemeyer expressed concern and asked the board to reconsider how to create success and how to create community - specifically through music and the arts.
- Kate McCann expressed concern and shared that there is a rising level of distrust as voices are silenced.
- A parent, Allison Levin, expressed her appreciation for the music and arts programs.
- Jessica Heinz posed some questions for the board to consider, regarding scaling back the music and arts programs.

Flor Diaz Smith thanked them for their input and thanked them for participating indirectly in the board retreat tonight. She encouraged them to reach out directly to their building principals and to the superintendent.

**10. Adjourn: Christopher McVeigh moved to adjourn at 9:08. Seconded by Jonas Eno-Van Fleet, this motion carried unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Lisa Stoudt, Board Recording Secretary