

# Washington Central Unified Union School District

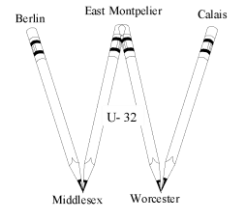
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*WCUUSD exists to nurture and inspire in all students the passion, creativity and power to contribute to their local and global communities.*

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Bryan Olkowski  
Superintendent



## Washington Central Unified Union School District Board Meeting Minutes - Approved September 16, 2020

### Present by Teleconference\*:

**Board Members:** Flor Diaz Smith, Lindy Johnson, Scott Thompson, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Dorothy Naylor, Stephen Looke, Chris McVeigh, Kari Bradley, Jonas Eno-Van Fleet, Jaiel Pulskamp, George Gross, Jonathan Goddard, Karoline May, Jill Olson

**Administrators:** Superintendent Bryan Olkowski, Technology Director Keith MacMartin, Principal Cat Fair, Business Administrator Lori Bibeau, Principal Alicia Lyford, Curriculum Director Jen Miller-Arsenault, Principal Gillian Fuqua, Student Services Director Kelly Bushey, Principal Cat Fair, Principal Casey Provost, Associate Principal Jody Emerson, Principal Aaron Boynton, Student Affairs Director Amy Molina

**Others/Public:** Alden Bird, David Lawrence, ORCA Media, Corinne Stridsberg, Drew Junkins, Julie Kiefer, Brennan Lynch, Brian Albee, Caitlyn Usticke, Caroline Grace, Cathy Guiffre, Cheryl Ecklund, Christine Fitch, Daniel Diddlemeyer, Deanna Murphy, D Hann, D Lane, Erin Mooney, Erin Mullaney, Hollis St. Peter, Holly, J.A., Jenn Nance, Meg Allison, Meg Falby, Sage Kennedy, Steven Ushakov, Sue Pryce, Julia Pritchard, Karen Lieberman, Lesley Fitch, Lisa Hanna, L. Levangie, Jes Wills

**1. Call to Order:** Scott Thompson called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

### 2. Welcome:

#### 2.1. Reception of Guests

**2.2. Public Comments:** Scott Thompson invited public comments.

Drew Junkins spoke on behalf of the math department. He spoke about a staff member who had to choose between teaching in person or taking long term leave of absence. He indicated that this has alienated a beloved member of the U32 staff community.

Julie Kiefer spoke on behalf of the math department as well, in support of the colleague who was asked to choose between teaching in person or taking long term leave of absence.

Madeleine Dougherty spoke as well in solidarity with the other two staff

members. She indicated that the right thing for the administration to do would have been to offer the opportunity to teach remotely through VTVLC.

Kara Rosenberg also spoke to express solidarity with colleagues. She noted that staff morale is impacted, and she wonders what is the advantage of not allowing this opportunity. She also wonders what message we are giving to students.

Daniel Diddlemeyer spoke to express solidarity with colleagues as well; and he invited the board to use his classroom for board meetings.

Lindy Johnson indicated that, for example, tonight there are over 70 people present at the meeting. It would not be possible to meet in person yet, due to COVID19 and distancing requirements.

**2.3. Agenda Revisions:** Jonas Eno-Van Fleet suggested adding discussion to Executive Session to follow up from the comments that were made during public comment. Scott Thompson reminded him that the board cannot take action tonight, as it is not on the agenda. The board will discuss this during Executive Session.

**2.4. Student Reports:** Townes DeGroot shared some of the back-to-school activities. He stated that the transition back to school has been an easier transition than he was expecting, and he has heard the same from other students. He indicated that there are still some safety concerns among students but that overall they are happy to be back together.

Scott Thompson asked him how the transition between virtual and in-person learning has felt, from the students' perspectives. Townes stated that some teachers are more adept with using Canvas than others but that overall he feels that the transition between virtual and in-person has gone well.

Scott Thompson asked Principal Dellinger-Pate whether there is another student in place for Representative to the Board. Principal Dellinger-Pate stated that he expects a student to be in place in time for the next board meeting.

### 3. Reports

#### 3.1. Superintendent

**3.1.1. School Opening:** Superintendent Olkowski reported that the transition back to school has gone smoothly, and that overall attendance is over 97%.

**3.1.2. Class Size:** Superintendent Olkowski shared some challenges with staffing currently, as class sizes, in person versus remote, vary. He indicated that he has received some concerns from parents as well as staff around class sizes in the remote learning environments. He feels that we are still working with a "moving target," and he would like to see how things flesh out in the next few weeks regarding classroom configuration and class sizes.

Karoline May asked whether there is any data about the impact of class size on student learning in the remote environment. Superintendent Olkowski stated that smaller class size is not necessarily better. He referred to Malcom Gladwell's work. Chris McVeigh asked more specifically what were some of the concerns from parents. Superintendent Olkowski stated that some of the concerns are around class size and around "equity" for students in such a large group. He indicated that one of the teachers, too, had expressed that the

larger class size in remote learning is a challenge.

Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that if we had a physical class size of 31 students we would be looking creatively at how to possibly reduce the size. She would like to use that same consideration for remote classrooms. Some discussion followed around the challenge of remote teaching being new for teachers, regardless of class size.

Lindy Johnson indicated that parents are involved as well, so it is important to consider the factor of managing parent communication in a larger class size. She stated that we may have to think creatively.

Superintendent Olkwoski stated that a committee meets weekly to address remote learning, and he would like to give some time before taking action (for example to hire another teacher).

Jill Olson asked whether Superintendent Olkwoski has considered some possible creative solutions to these issues. She indicated that the legislature seems to be moving quickly around budget issues so she thinks we can make decisions around the budget based on what we know.

Superintendent Olkwoski stated that he sees the options as:

- (1) hire
- (2) reconfigure classrooms to redistribute students
- (3) wait to see how things settle over the next couple of weeks and then proceed accordingly.

Flor Diaz Smith stated that she would like to know more about the student needs in the classroom. She asked whether the teacher would feel comfortable checking in with the board and sharing experiences from the first couple of weeks.

Katrina Rob shared that the students are wonderful but that this is a puzzle like nothing she has faced yet. She noted, for example, technology challenges. She stated that there is much more to the number (e.g. 30 students) - some days she feels like a one-room schoolhouse. She does not have a lot of support in the classroom, and again she noted technology challenges that she has to troubleshoot on the spot.

Jonas Eno-Van Fleet shared that his son is in the large classroom under discussion. He applauded Katrina Rob's management of the class; he asked whether the classroom size affects the technology challenges. She stated that it does. She noted that class size and technology issues are the two biggest challenges right now.

Dorothy Naylor asked whether the ratio of struggling students to non-struggling students is approximately the same as usual - she wondered whether this might be making the situation more challenging. Kelly Bushey indicated that about five percent of remote students are on IEPs.

Jaiel Pulskamp asked - are all students provided computer access? Gillian Fuqua stated that all families were provided the opportunity to pick up a school device. She also shared that there have been some challenges with tablets; however, Keith MacMartin has been working to solve this.

Lisa Hanna shared her perspective as a teacher of remote learners. She noted that there have been celebrations as well as challenges. She shared that a struggle is providing developmentally appropriate teaching practice to students while troubleshooting tech issues. She noted that we are asking a lot of students re: executive functioning, for example, planning and selective attention. She reminded the board that there is a written statement from the collective body of remote classroom teachers.

Jill Olson asked, is there a sense of an appropriate class size; she is hearing the 31 may be too large - what is the right number?

Superintendent Olkowski again expressed that he believes we need to wait to see how the numbers “shake out” before taking action such as hiring new staff or reconfiguring.

Gillian Fuqua stated that we don’t really know what is the “sweet spot” as far as class size, since the remote learning endeavor is new to everyone. She stated that we don’t yet know research around what are the right numbers.

Katrina Rob shared that she has 45% more students in her class than any of the other teachers (except for Lisa Hanna who is also teaching remotely.) Lisa Hanna shared that the Vermont Quality Standards indicate a class size below 25. She suggests that we use that number as a guideline.

Alicia Lyford shared that in typical years, careful attention is given to classroom configuration in the spring. That has not been able to happen under these circumstances.

Stephen Looke shared that historically the boards have never gotten anywhere with discussions around class sizes. He stated that 29 or 30 students in a class is too large. He is not comfortable with that. He would like to hear from administration in two weeks that classroom sizes have been reduced to closer to 25, or what is the plan, or options for the board to consider, for making that happen.

Diane Nichols-Fleming reminded the board that context is important. For example, 30 is one third of the remote learners, and Doty School has fifty-some in-person learners.

Superintendent Olkowski stated that he believes it is important also to consider “minimum” class size. If “the sweet spot” according to Malcom Gladwell is 18-24 students, then we should consider that many classrooms currently are comprised of less than 18 students. He referred to the Class Size Policy, noting that there have not been conversations to date about minimum or maximum class sizes.

Chris McVeigh asked, and Lisa Hanna shared, what the statement had been from the remote teacher cohort. She shared that the teachers during in-service had expressed some considerations via email, and a willingness to problem solve around the challenges that were expected, while considering and preparing for remote learning.

Chris McVeigh asked whether some of the support that teachers are requesting could be provided by someone other than teaching staff.

Katrina Robb described the challenge of troubleshooting tech issues in the moment versus problem solving after the school day ends. There is much “on the fly” support that is needed.

Gillian Fuqua shared that working remotely with students is challenging in that teachers can’t walk over to a student and see what they are doing on screen or show them which keys to push to help with technical issues.

Flor Diaz Smith suggested that we not wait until the legislature makes decisions about next year’s budget; she feels that we need to problem solve in the moment. However, she noted that we will not be able to solve this issue tonight, and the agenda is full.

Lindy Johnson shared that teachers can’t create break out rooms for small group work, without another adult to manage the break out group.

**3.1.3. Staffing:** Superintendent Olkowski shared that there has been some transferring of positions in the custodial staff and they are currently seeking to hire. He spoke briefly about the challenge of hiring Behavior Interventionist positions. He thanked Kelly Bushey for her leadership. He stated that there may be a need to hire a middle school math position, and this will be discussed in Executive Session.

Superintendent Olkowski shared some other staffing/ hiring endeavors.

**3.1.4. Early Retirement:** Superintendent Olkowski shared that of 55 offerings, 15 staff (7 professional/ 8 esp) accepted an early retirement offer. Lori Bibeau shared that she does not yet have an idea, financially, of how this will play out. The numbers were just finalized yesterday. She is currently working on projecting three years out to see the financial impact.

**3.1.5. Entry Plan Update:** Superintendent Olkowsky shared that he continues to meet with staff and board members, as part of his Entry Plan.

## **3.2. Finance Committee**

**3.2.1. Financial Report:** Flor Diaz Smith thanked Lori Bibeau and the Business Office staff for creating the report.

**3.2.1.1. COVID Cares Relief Funds:** Lori Bibeau reviewed that we have received some Cares Relief Funds; have applied for more, and funds are still coming in. Flor Diaz Smith shared that we are applying for more relief funds for the coming year. Lori Bibeau had prepared a summary document for the board’s consideration: *Financial Report & COVID 19 Update, September 11, 2020.*

**3.2.1.2. Financial Update FY 21:** Lori Bibeau reviewed the Financial Update, *Fund Balance Summary, Fiscal Year 2020-21.* She stated that in the next couple of months she would like the board to consider a variety of fund balances to make determinations about possibly moving funds, as is within the board’s purview.

**3.2.2. Health Reimbursement and Flex Spending Budget:**

**Chris McVeigh moved to approve the Health Reimbursement and Flexible Spending Accounts Budget for FY 2021-22. Seconded by Jonas Eno-Van Fleet. Lori Bibeau explained this action. This motion carried**

**unanimously.**

**3.2.3. Dental Insurance: Flor Diaz Smith moved to set the Calendar Year 2021 Dental Insurance Rates as follows: Single Plan \$552; 2-Person Plan \$1018; Family Plan \$1512. Seconded by Jonas Eno-Van Fleet. This motion carried unanimously.**

**3.2.4. Budget Process:** Lori Bibeau shared the budget process as it has occurred in past years, and provided an outline of the process for FY 21-22.

**3.2.5. Budget Timeline Draft #1:** The board considered this draft timeline, similar to years past. Chris McVeigh stated that he would like to move the timeline up by a week or two, to allow for more time to discuss the budget. Stephen Looke agreed that if we are to begin with a level service budget, it would be good to start considering it a week or two ahead of what is indicated on this timeline. He suggested, for example, would it be possible to consider a level service budget as well as a 10% lower than level fund budget, at the earlier date. Flor Diaz Smith stated that she would like to maintain the commitment to MTSS. Diane Nichols-Fleming reiterated Flor's desire to see a budget created around the current needs and priorities. She reviewed some of the discussion from the board retreat around budget development.

Kari Bradley indicated that the board will need some work around identifying priorities related to board goals and the superintendent entry plan, for budget planning. Stephen Looke again suggested requesting a level service budget approximately two weeks before indicated on the budget timeline draft 1 - by November 4th.

## **4. Board Operations**

### **4.1. Board Retreat Follow-up**

**4.1.1. Review of Goals:** Flor Diaz Smith shared some of the outcomes from the board retreat around the work to indicate board goals: audit curriculum, define equity, improve student achievement, closing the gap.

Board members discussed goals from the retreat and agreed that the goal of closing the achievement gap is appropriate for the Education Quality Committee to address. The agenda committee meets next Wednesday. Jonas Eno-Van Fleet suggested that the committee use part of its meeting to begin discussions around a "deeper dive" into the book study that had begun last year. Jill Olson asked to get agenda committee meetings on the calendar. Discussion followed around the topic of COVID19 and what is the board's responsibility around the challenges related to COVID19.

### **4.1.2. Next Steps**

## **5. Consent Agenda**

**5.1. Approve Minutes 8.26.20 and 9.2.20: Jonas Eno-Van Fleet moved to approve the minutes of 8-26-20 and 9-20-20. Seconded by Flor Diaz Smith. Some corrections were noted:  
correction: Bryan Olkowski's name is misspelled**

**Dorothy Naylor - re: VSBA - use the word “installments,” not “installations.”**  
**Scott Thompson - re: VSBA - “board interests.” not “interest based bargaining.”**

**This motion carried with suggested edits.**

**5.2. Approve Board Orders: Lindy Johnson moved to approve board orders in the following amounts: \$424,937.87; \$795,396.35. Seconded by Flor Diaz Smith, this motion carried unanimously.**

## **6. Personnel**

**6.1. Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Retirements, Leave of Absence and Changes in FTE:**

**Lindy Johnson moved to accept the following hire:**

**Honi Bean Barrett, long term sub. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously.**

**Chris McVeigh moved to accept the following retirements:**

**Janice Hood, Jane Boucher, Lori Garand, Vicki Cook. Seconded by Diane Nichols-Fleming, this motion carried unanimously.**

**Chris McVeigh moved to accept Keith MacMartin’s resignation. Seconded by Lindy Johnson.** Superintendent Olkowski thanked Mr. MacMartin for his work over the summer and at the start of the school year, in facing the challenges that remote learning has posed. This motion carried unanimously.

## **7. Public Comments:**

Corinne Stridsberg reminded the board to keep in mind the feedback from the previous town meeting about the desire for information to be made available to the public. She noted that U32 opened in 1971 and graduated its first class in 1972. She would like the board to recognize the occasion.

Lindy Johnson reminded the board (regarding Corinne’s first comment) that last year, because of the merge, some information including specific financial reports, had not been included in the annual town reports, in advance of town meeting, and at town meeting. She has received feedback from the community that this information is desired. Superintendent Olkowski asked for more specifics about this information. Lori Bibeau suggested that the Finance Committee consider these reports as part of the budget process.

Dorothy Naylor stated that the current Calais Elementary School building housed its first classes in September 1971 as well.

Jonas Eno-Van Fleet stated that, regarding the town meeting annual reports, the communities are accustomed to receiving documents with data as opposed to glossy brochure-type documents, and that we should provide the financial reporting data to respond to the communities’ requests.

## **8. Executive Session for a student matter:**

**At 9:01, Chris McVeigh moved to go into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing a student matter and a personnel matter, and to invite Superintendent Olkowksi. Seconded by Jonas Eno-Van Fleet.**

Some discussion followed around whether the board can invite others into Executive Session, for example, Principal Dellinger-Pate. Scott Thompson suggested to the board that they invite the superintendent only into Executive Session, initially. This motion carried unanimously.

**At 9:48, Jill Olson moved to come out of Executive Session. Jonathan Goddard seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.**

The Board took no action after Executive Session.

## **9. Future Agenda Items**

- 9.1. Business Administrator Succession
- 9.2. Technology Manager Succession
- 9.3. Energy Project Consultant

**10. Adjourn:** The board adjourned by consensus at 9:52 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lisa Stoudt, Board Recording Secretary  
and Jonas Eno-Van Fleet, Board Clerk