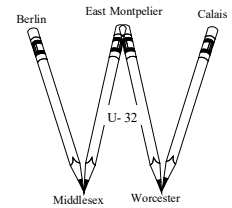


Washington Central Unified Union School District

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

1130 Gallison Hill Road
Montpelier, VT 05602
Phone (802) 229-0553
Fax (802) 229-2761

Meagan Roy Ed.D.
Superintendent



**Washington Central Unified Union School District
Community Forum
(IN-PERSON w/ Virtual Option)
East Montpelier Elementary School
665 Vincent Flats Rd
East Montpelier, VT
Gymnasium
1.18.23 6:15-8:00 PM**

Board Members Present: Jonathan Goddard, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Natasha Eckart Baning, Mckalyn Leclerc, Jonas Eno-Van Fleet, Chris McVeigh, Lindy Johnson, Maggie Weiss, Ursula Stanley, Kari Bradley, Daniel Keeney, Joshua Sevits, Eric Andersen, Flor Diaz Smith

Administrators Present: Susanne Gann, Mark Kline, Karoline May, Kerra Holden, Gillian Fuqua, Aaron Boynton, Steven Dellinger-Pate, Cat Fair, Amy Molina, Julia Pritchard, Lisa LaPlante, Superintendent Meagan Roy

Others Present: Michelle Ksepka, Michael Duane, Ruben Bennett, Beth Parker, Carla Messier, Anne Carter, Jenn Ingersoll, Christina Pollard, Allison Fayle, Honi Bean Barrett, Ellen Knoedler, Zach Sullivan, Kristin Freeman, Julie Moore, Bekah Mandell, Jen Campbell, Aly Mahony, Amber Larrabee, Anya Farland (Anya and Matthew), April Davis, Ashley Ballard, Krista Larrow, Beth Stern, Bonnie Gadapee, Callie, Carrie Fitz, Chani Waterhouse, Cheryl Ecklund, Danielle Laquerre, David Charles Lawrence, David Delcore, David Bennett, Deborah Bloom, Ella Lyford, Gary Parker, George Cook, Heather Clark-Warner, Jamie Bohn, Jane Coffey, Jen Frantz, Jennifer Chambers, Jes Wills, Jess Abisla, Jesse Frank, Jill Abair, John and Emily, Justin Redmond, Lafaille Family, Laura Giammusso, Lauren Chabot, Leigh Garrity, Lisa Wilson, Mark Brown, Mary Redmond, Matt Pelkey, Meg Allison, Megan Mclane, Michael Close, Michael Sherwin, Michael Sutherby, Nicolle Schaeffer, Noah Weinstein, ORCA Media, Rupp Family, Sarah Callahan, Scott Hess, Shelby Quinn, Sonya Rhodes, Talitha Landis-Marinello, Tony Snow, Tyler Smith, Veronica Eldred, Will Baker

- 1. Call to Order:** Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:19 p.m.
- 2. Welcome:** Alicia Lyford welcomed everyone to East Montpelier Elementary School!

- 2.1. Adjustments to the Agenda:** Flor Diaz Smith proposed that the agenda be adjusted to allow for a presentation of the budget and allow public comments after. She also noted that the list of board minutes that are listed on the agenda for approval tonight are not accurate, so the action will be adjusted.
- 2.2. Reception of Guests:** Flor Diaz Smith welcomed everyone in attendance.
- 2.3. Public Comments** – Time limit strictly enforced, see note: (This occurred after the budget presentation. Please see below.)

3. Board Operations

3.1. Budget FY 23-24: Superintendent Meagan Roy presented a slide deck: *Budget Building FY24; Draft #4 for Adoption*. She stated that the board packet has more detailed information, and that the slides will be posted to the website. Meagan Roy reiterated the talking point from last week, that there is opportunity to provide a wealth of services to students in WCUUSD if we are to consider “scaling” the system across the district. She spoke about the impact of a failed budget. Having to administer Reductions in Force - that has a very significant impact on the staff. A failed budget can foster mistrust in the community - do they trust the first rendition of the budget? The job is to bring forward a budget that will deliver what our kids need, at a price tag that people can afford. She noted that there are people in our communities that also support education but have a different experience about tax impact than those who advocated for higher taxes to support the budget. She stated that the three lenses that influence budget consideration:

- education quality standards (the metrics in Vermont)
- equitable distribution of resources
- student need

She spoke again about student enrollment decline. Superintendent Roy explained that version 4A preserves the reductions that were proposed at the December meeting, without restructuring; keeps all schools within EQS (Education Quality Standards); moves toward more consistent staffing; minimizes cross-building program changes. Susanne Gann reviewed the comparative versions of the proposed budget drafts, as presented in the board packet. She explained that legislation is currently underway that might result in a change in the required language on the budget warning. Flor Diaz Smith stated: if the pandemic taught us anything, it taught us that we can do hard things. If we trust each other, trust our administrators, trust the data. If we do not make these hard decisions now, when and how? She stated that the board is working toward greater public engagement. Flor Diaz Smith invited public comments. She asked people who had had an opportunity to provide a comment at a past meeting, or who had provided an email, to please allow others to comment first.

John and Emily: (Middlesex) What is the dynamic for people who feel that they will be very burdened by a few hundred additional dollars per year of property tax? What is the opportunity for assistance from the state? What is the population? What is the real need of the people who are affected by the proposed increase?

David Lawrence: Thanked the board for their service. It is a thankless job and the board does it very well, trying to represent all of the community with civility.

Talitha Marinello-Landis: Expressed her support for a level service budget. She appreciates all of the involvement from the community; she would like to continue these conversations throughout the year. She expressed her concern that the changes that were proposed in the budget came as a surprise; she asked for more communication and community engagement.

Sonya Rhodes: offered her services on a committee to continue discussion about creative solutions. She stated that COVID-19 has made it difficult to settle into the merge that came from Act 46. She asked that we wait with regard to nursing positions, until we have a cogent plan in place. She stated that in her role as a teacher she is sometimes asked to stand in as school nurse and she is not equipped for that role.

Rubin Bennett: acknowledged the work that goes into budget development. Is CLA still on a 3 year rolling average? He noted that we will continue to feel “property tax pain.” He stated that there is a tax tsunami coming our way that will make this year look easy in retrospect. As painful as it is, we need to think forward to that. If the budget goes down, we have no idea why - all we have is a failed budget. He asked the board, once you have settled on a budget, you need to be active advocates. Please explore combined services. It is a huge opportunity and it will alleviate some of the pain that is coming our way. He stated that we saw, because of COVID-19, some of the combined services that are possible.

Kristen Freeman: supports taking more time to consider the combined services idea. Cutting Spanish feels like a “race to the bottom.” She expressed the importance of teaching students a second language at the time when their brains benefit. She would like to see Spanish expanded to the other schools. Our Spanish teacher is incredibly talented; it is heartbreaking to think about cutting the most talented and dedicated teachers. We cannot afford to feed our students less or lower quality food. She understands cuts are needed; consolidation is needed; would like to take more time. These cuts will not serve the long term problem. We need more time to think of a bigger picture plan.

Julie Moore: her experience as a school board chair- a failed budget vote leaves the board with no information as to why. The student enrollment numbers seem to be a trend. We have hard decisions to make; it is only going to get harder as time goes on. Failing to make hard choices this year will result in a cliff in a year or two to come.

Beth Parker: (WCUUSD teacher of 20 years) Worries very much about the impact of a failed budget. COVID-19 has created a lot of new challenges for people; we really need to think about the whole community and be very careful with this budget.

Bekah Mandell: expressed her support for a level service budget this year and have a larger conversation about structural changes next year. Questions: Why does there seem to be an opinion that a level service budget will get voted down? Why does there seem to be an opinion that one version will pass and one will fail? She noted that she has sent an email but hasn't received a response; just wants to be sure the email has been received. When will the

process begin when we talk about structural changes going forward; how will people find out; how can people get involved?

Jen Campbell: Schools need robust, well rounded programs. That includes world language. Rumney has a very strong world language program and she believes it should be an opportunity for all of the students in all of the WCUUSD schools.

Honi Bean Barrett: Has been proud to be part of the district, as a parent and a staff member. The programs at the schools are not equal or equitable. Should we look at a program that can offer more equitable programs to all students? She indicated that she is concerned about job security; please remember what incredibly valuable staff members you have right now and please do all that you can to keep them.

Flor Diaz Smith asked board members to in a round robin style respond with their preferences of which budget draft. Meagan Roy addressed some of the questions that were asked by the community. Chris McVeigh asked, regarding Education Quality Standards - is this the template that explains staff to student ratio? Superintendent Roy stated that they are. Chris McVeigh asked for follow up about the Rumney food service program. How does a reduction in staff not have an impact on the food service program? Chris McVeigh noted that he is in favor of a level service budget. He asked, anecdotally, has there been communication from the community about concerns with a level service budget? He stated that he would support that budget, that does not result in reducing direct services to students. Eric Andersen expressed support for level service budget. He stated that more of the feedback that we have heard is not in support of cutting services. He spoke about concerns around the budget failing. He stated that the biggest issue will be how we present the budget that we approve and that we feel it provides the best for our students. Equality comes by bringing services/ adding services. Equality does not come by taking services away. He would like to see world language in all of the schools, and band or orchestra in all of the schools. Would like to consider combining services thoughtfully in a longer term process. To the benefit of students, to the benefit of the services they will receive, for example if combining services will result in meaning we can offer something (world language) to all of the schools. He stated that, regarding EQS, there is a difference between what numbers are indicated regarding ratios and what the people with "boots on the ground" feel is adequate. He stated that we have heard from the people with boots on the ground. Jonas Eno-Van Fleet stated that he feels both budgets are defensible and responsible. They are proposals that were put together by people with good faith. He stated that there are some voices and some people who are not represented here. He feels that Budget 4B is appropriate. In terms of trust of the community regarding a failed budget, he believes there will be some damage to the trust of the community if positions are cut. He stated that he hopes when we get down to the business of talking about planning forward, people will engage in the conversation. We all support what foreign language offers; we all support the arts. These proposals do not indicate that we do not support these programs. He reiterated that he supports 4B; he is not comfortable cutting services without a much longer conversation. Mckalyn Leclerc indicated that she supports a level service budget and she appreciates all of the hard work that has gone into this budget. She doesn't feel that the

financial difference is big enough to warrant cutting services. She looks forward to conversations and discussions in the future to consider long term plans. She stated it will be important to work toward an equitable solution to offering full time preschool.

Natasha Eckart Baning stated that if we do not pass a level service budget then we are not supporting the three principles that Flor Diaz Smith had presented to begin this round robin process. She feels strongly that making cuts to any of the services at this time is in direct opposition to the three guiding principles. With the changes that are coming to Ed Quality Standards through Act 1, she does not think we will be in a position to meet those standards if we cut services. She understands that there will be some changes that we have to make in the future. This is our chance to think outside of the box and think creatively. Taking the time to reach out to all of our stakeholders and think about where we can take our district. Let's fund what we have and take the time to think about where to take our district; not make the changes on the backs of our staff.

Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that she supports 4B. She worries about the lack of diversity of voices at the table. The caring about community doesn't start and stop at budget time. She stated that we need to engage with our community. She realizes that we need to have some hard conversations; starting now. We have an opportunity to be creative together; we can start now so that when we get to Fall 2023 we will have an understanding of how we arrive at a FY25 budget. Not everyone will be happy with the outcome but everyone will have had the opportunity to engage in the conversation. We know what our community can and can't afford but we also know what our children need. She asked for more time to engage in the conversation that is needed.

Jonathan Goddard supports a level service budget. Reflecting back on the past two years, conversations that we have had, it is remarkable how our district has come through the pandemic. He is so proud of the teachers, the support staff, the administrators. If he had his way we would have more nurses, more art, more theater. So the ones that we have, we need to keep. They are critically important. He stated that children and staff have suffered the effects of the pandemic and they are going to need support.

Joshua Sevits stated that he supports option "A". He stated that both options fulfill the parameters; he does not think Option "B" will pass, combined with other tax increases that are coming. He stated that he looks forward to visionary conversations in the future. If the board votes in support of Budget 4B, he will support it of course because he does not want the budget to fail. Daniel Keeney: Thinking about strategic planning - he thinks we are going to have to dive deep and fast and get to work, thinking forward. He expressed skepticism about meeting the EQS in WCUUSD. He expressed support for option "B." He stated that making cuts as presented would feel counterintuitive to strategic planning. He is going into this with eyes wide open, knowing that big changes will be coming soon.

Kari Bradley asked, how do we get the most learning for the buck, that our tax payers can afford? He asked the board to consider the long term trajectory. He stated that the enrollment projections at each school are shocking. We are likely to have three schools with 90 students or less. He stated, regarding strategic planning, given the future that we are facing, he does not see a way to avoid staff reductions. He supports 4A; he noted that the

reductions that are proposed are through the lens of the experts in education that are assuring us that the proposed educational model is appropriate for our children.

Ursula Stanley stated that some of our leadership team have raised kids and live in our communities. She stated that she supports the version "A". The cliff isn't getting any smaller. We can come up with all of the creative ideas possible and we will still be facing staff reductions. She noted that not all of our community are present and have a voice at the table; she has concerns about their ability to meet an increase in tax. Maggie Weiss supports version "B" but also feels that version "A" is defensible and responsible.

Lindy Johnson: Regarding the comments and the emails that we have received: stated that board members are not allowed to reply as individuals. She explained that the administration had prepared the budget drafts as the board had asked, the drafts were presented to the board on the board meeting day; it was not meant to be a "gotcha," it was meant to be a draft based on board input, and for board and community discussion/ feedback at the meeting. She spoke about consolidation and the inevitability in the future. She stated that she supports either draft of the budget. Flor Diaz Smith thanked the superintendent and administration for their work on this budget. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that while she realizes the recommendation from the leadership was version "A," the majority of the board supports version "B." We have heard everything, reflected, and feel it is important to move forward with the level service budget and thinking creatively going forward. Meagan Roy thanked the board for commitment to the conversation. She stated that the administration is very excited about strategic planning. She expressed that she is excited to hear a desire to be engaged in the process.

- 3.2. Budget Communications:** Kari Bradley stated that at this time we are in "campaign mode" the next time the board meets we will have a better idea of what channels we will use to communicate the budget; we will have some written pieces; we will likely have some video clips. He stated though at this point there is no reason that the board should not start communicating the budget in our own communities at this time. Maggie Weiss suggested that Flor Diaz Smith go on WDEV and reach out. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that it would be useful to hear from the administrators how they like to communicate with families and community. Jonas Eno-Van Fleet suggested a QR code that would link to budget information and could be placed on signage throughout the community.
- 3.3. Budget Warning Language Draft # 2:** Jonas moved to approve the warning as printed with the following as Article 6: *Shall the voters of the Washington Central Unified Union School District approve the school board to expend \$38,921,331 which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? It is estimated that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in education spending of \$22,268 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is 12.86 %*

higher than spending for the current year. **Seconded by Mckalyn Leclerc. This motion carried: roll call: Josh, Kari, Ursula, Flor vote “no;” everyone else voted in favor.** Chris McVeigh stated that incorporating and engaging the community in the strategic planning work from the beginning of the process will be critical. Meagan Roy stated that she has had an eye on deep community engagement as she puts into place the strategic planning. Board members signed the budget warning.

4. Reports to the Board

4.1. Student Report: (no students tonight.)

4.2. Principal Report: Ursula Stanley noted that she really appreciates the format of the written report; very predictable and readable. Board members indicated that they appreciate that each principal has a different “flavor” to their report. Mckalyn Leclerc stated that Doty had a blood drive today that was very well attended! Superintendent Roy explained the resource “My Path.”

4.3. Central Vermont Career Center Report: Flor Diaz Smith provided an overview from the written report. She invited questions or comments from board members.

5. Finance Committee: Jonas Eno-Van Fleet moved that the Board authorize the allocation of \$69,747 additional capital reserve funds to the completion of the 2023 Mechanical Projects. Seconded by Ursula Stanley, this motion carried unanimously.

5.1. Award Bid for Energy Recovery Unit (ERU) Project: Ursula Stanley moved The Board approve awarding the 2023 Mechanical Projects contract to Thomas Mechanical, Inc. in an amount not to exceed \$1,181,712 (this includes the 5% contingency). Seconded by Eric Andersen. Discussion: Ursula Stanley asked whether Chris is comfortable with this bid award. Susanne Gann stated that he is; they had gone through a pre-qualification process so they feel very confident. **This motion carried unanimously.**

6. Policy Committee

6.1. Second Reading for Policy to be Adopted on January 18, 2023: C13 Homeless Students: Chris McVeigh moved to approve this policy. Seconded by Jonas Eno-Van Fleet; this motion carried unanimously.

6.2. Second Reading for Policy to be Adopted on January 18, 2023: C5 Weapons & Firearms: Chris McVeigh moved to approve this policy. Seconded by Daniel Keeney. Discussion: Maggie Weiss asked for clarification around the language regarding the possession of a knife at school. Superintendent Roy explained: It is still against policy to possess a weapon; however, in the case of some, the administration has discretion to not have a board hearing. **Chris McVeigh moved to amend to add a quarterly reporting requirement within the policy so that the board is informed of how the administration responded to situations.** Kari Bradley suggested that this policy go back to the

committee. Diane Nichols-Fleming suggested that we consider policy C20 at the same time. Ursula Stanley asked to receive red-lined copies of edited policies. **Chris McVeigh withdrew the motion.** This will come to the board after the Policy Committee has reconsidered it.

6.3. Second Reading for Policy to be Adopted on January 18, 2023 A1 Board Conflict of Interest: Chris McVeigh moved to approve this policy. Seconded by Jonas Eno-Van Fleet; this motion carried unanimously.

7. Consent Agenda

7.1. Approve Minutes of 12.21.22, 1.4.23, 1.12.23: Jonas Eno-Van Fleet moved to approve the minutes from Jan 4, 2023 and Jan 12, 2023 as presented. Seconded by Natasha Eckart Baning; this motion carried unanimously. Minutes from 12.21.22 had been approved at a prior meeting.

7.2. Approve Board Orders: Lindy Johnson moved to approve the board orders from 12-22-22, to 1-18-23, in the amount of \$793,896.53. Seconded by Ursula Stanley, this motion carried unanimously.

8. Personnel

8.1. Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in FTE: Lindy Johnson moved to approve Samantha Mishkin - Music Teacher (Rumney/East Montpelier) request to extend medical leave with a return date of 5.22.23. Seconded by Ursula Stanley, this motion carried unanimously. Lindy Johnson moved to approve a change in FTE: Mary Carpenter – (Calais Elementary Interventionist) to decrease from 1.0 FTE to .50 FTE for the remainder of FY 22-23. Seconded by Ursula Stanley, this motion carried unanimously.

8.2. Update on Vacancies: Superintendent Roy stated that we continue to have persistent unfilled positions in the custodial and foodservice staff, and special educator position.

9. Future Agenda Items

9.1. Board Goals and Calendar

9.2. Plan for Legislative Meeting (plan for February 1)

9.3. Superintendent Performance Evaluation

10. Board Reflection: Jonas Eno-Van Fleet stated that so much energy went into the budget over the past few months and we have come back to square one with the first draft. He stated that we learned so much through the process and it was a worthwhile endeavor. He feels that the process was handled very well, board, administrators, finance committee, great job all. Kari Bradley stated - let's think about the parameters that we set as a board for the administration, because we didn't follow two of them. Lindy Johnson stated - as we talk about getting the budget passed, we need to be clear that the Career Center budget is built into our budget; people will need some clarification on that. Flor Diaz Smith reminded board members to take care of what is needed for running for the board on Town Meeting Day.

11. Public Comment

12. Adjourn: The board adjourned by consensus at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary