

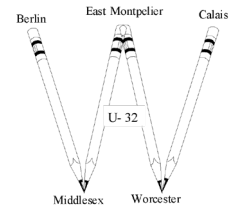
Washington Central UniUnion School District

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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Central Unified Union School District
School Board Meeting
U-32



930. Gallison Hill Rd. Montpelier, VT
1.17.24 6:15-9:30PM

Board Members: Flor Diaz Smith, Chris McVeigh, Kari Bradley, Maggie Weiss, Mckalyn Leclerc, Ursula Stanley, Daniel Keeney, Zach Sullivan, Kealy Sloan, Joshua Sevits, Natasha Eckart, Diane Nichols Fleming, Jonathan Goddard

Others: Superintendent Meagan Roy, Steven Dellinger-Pate, Jen Miller-Arsenault, ORCA Media, Celia Guggemos, Karoline May, Maria Melekos, Rubin Bennett, Amber Larrabee, Allison Fayle, Ben Larrow, Ainsley Burroughs, Lauralee Curavoo, Brian Fischer, Cheryl Ecklund, Christina, David Lawrence, David Hannigan, Debra Bloom, Heidi, Honi Bean Barrett, JBohn, Kathryn Biggam, Kristin, Lisa Hanna, Michael Sherwin, Tom Hamlin, Sonya Rhodes, Shelley Vermilya, Sammy, Veronica Eldred, TV, Lauren Chabot, Jen Donovan, Dena Brown, Jessica Abisla

1. Call to Order: Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.

2. Welcome: Flor Diaz Smith welcomed those present. She made an opening statement about the board's commitment to equity and creating a sustainable district.

2.1. Adjustments to the Agenda: (no adjustments)

2.2. Reception of Guests:

2.3. Public Comments: Rubin Bennett reviewed that this budget reflects an increase with declining student enrollment. He reminded the board that last year they made a promise that structural changes are coming this year; he does not see this reflected in the budget. He encouraged the board to follow the recommendations from administrators, reflecting staffing patterns that they believe meet the needs of students. Maria Melekos spoke to the board; she had shared documents with the board about staffing patterns for school nurses and around the topic of "delegation." She stated that she has concerns about equity and students who hypothetically come to the nurse delegate saying they do not feel well. A nurse delegate would be required to send the child home. She believes this will create attendance problems. Amber Larrabee shared a letter from providers at CVMC Pediatrics office, regarding school nurse staffing and their support for an increase in nurse staffing (from what is proposed in the budget). Jessica Abisla, former school nurse at Doty, spoke

about her role as a school nurse. She expressed concerns about not having a full-time school nurse on duty; she shared about an incident when a student had a health issue and an ambulance needed to be called. Ainsley Burroughs, Calais Elementary School teacher expressed concern about the proposal to merge preschool/ K programs between schools and other staffing reductions. She asked the board to consider using fund balance to cover some of these positions while a longer-term plan is made. Lauralee Curavoo expressed concern with reducing the school counselor position at Calais Elementary School. She spoke about “functional skills” as an adverse effect consideration for special education, and the value of having a school counselor to support with these skills.

3. Presentations

3.1. Final Budget Presentation: Superintendent Roy and Susanne Gann presented a slide deck explaining the current and final budget for FY25. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that it is important to understand as a board that all of us are keeping students at the forefront and that we are referencing standards, for example, around staff-to-student ratio.

3.2. Public Comment: Lauralee Curavoo asked for clarification about the fund balance, why it exists, and whether there is any way this can affect the budget. Superintendent Roy stated that fund balance is unspent money that is carried forward and that only the board can decide how to spend the fund balance. She explained that using fund balance is a short-term solution that puts the board at a disadvantage the following year (as we would be faced with making cuts). Ms. Curavoo asked Susanne Gann what is the current fund balance. (Answer: \$2.7 million) She asked, as the district is looking at reconfiguration regarding buildings and grades, if the plan is to make this happen, then can we “muddle through” in the meantime? Flor Diaz Smith stated that the board has created a culture of not using the fund balance to offset the taxes because it is a short-term solution that can create a problem in the following year. Lisa Hanna stated that when hearing from staff, teachers, counselors, and nurses, we are not hearing the same level of confidence around the staffing cuts as the board expresses confidence in the administration. She brought up the issue of equity when we consider, for example, providing preschool programs - when considering transportation for students, and families. She stated that it might be time for the board to “sound the alarm” to the public instead of assuring that everything is fine. A person from the audience asked whether we can consider a short-term solution, while we think about more long-term solutions and restructuring etc. Lauren Chabot spoke about concerns around not having a school nurse full-time (for example at Doty School.) She asked what is the impact of combining kindergarten on grades 1 & 2 at Doty. What is the “snowball” effect? She expressed that she would not vote in favor of a budget without having this information. Gillian Fuqua shared the class configuration at Doty this year. Next year: 20 or 21 students in grades 1 & 2. By Doty standards, that is a large class; by East Montpelier standards, that is an average-sized class.

4. Reports to The Board

- 4.1. **Student Report:** Student Representatives were not present tonight, but Flor Diaz Smith shared that board members visited U-32 last week, at the invitation of Linnea and Willow - it was a great experience for board members.
- 4.2. **Superintendent/Central Office Leadership Team (COLT) Report:** Superintendent Roy invited questions or comments from the board. Daniel Keeney asked for an update on the Human Resources Director position - he asked whether one of their areas of focus would be around securing a solid contingency of substitute teachers and staff. Superintendent Roy stated that this is one of her priorities. Diane Nichols-Fleming asked for follow-up information about the PCB results and related actions.
- 4.3. **Central Vermont Career Center Report:** A written report has been provided for the board's review.
- 4.4. **Principals' Report:** A written report has been provided. Ursula Stanley stated that she appreciates having Education Quality Committee priorities provided at the top of this report.
- 4.5. **VSBA Report:** A written report has been provided. Flor Diaz Smith shared that there is a webinar offered tomorrow around school budget issues.

5. Board Operations

- 5.1. **FY25 Budget Discussion & Adoption: Kari Bradley moved to approve the FY25 as presented and recommended. Seconded by Ursula Stanley.** Flor Diaz Smith asked board members to consider "Does this budget advance us to our desired state?" Maggie Weiss read a letter aloud from Danielle Barclay about the need for a full-time school nurse position at Calais Elementary. She also read a letter from Priscilla Gilbert, regarding the need for quality education in a sustainable model. Maggie Weiss stated that she is not in support of this budget; she is not comfortable with the reduction in staff positions in school counseling and school nursing. She does not feel that it is equitable. She asked the board to consider "excellence" versus "adequacy." Kealy Sloan asked, if we do not support the budget, are we able to share what would be needed for us to support it? If so, then what would happen at this stage in the process? Maggie Weiss stated that we had been assured that we would be able to have robust conversations/ discussions about the budget and she does not feel that we could do so. She challenged the administration's assertion that the proposed cuts in positions will not adversely affect student experiences. Kari Bradley stated that this has been a wild process - bewildering in fact - the factors that have made things challenging: local spending, new student count methodology, tax rates cap at 5%, projected property yield, and significant drops in CLA. This leaves us in a situation where we are asking our voters to support massive increases. We are always thinking about sustainability and quality education. This year we are thinking about sustainability and *life, as we know it* in WCUUSD. He stated that we need to approve a budget at the very lowest dollar amount that is realistic, we need to inform our communities, and then we need to get on with strategic planning and work toward reconfiguration; we do not have a choice at this

point. He supports the budget as it is. Jonathan Goddard stated that his concerns are that we are in a place where things are different, post-pandemic (e.g. mental health needs), so cuts specific to nursing and counseling are not something he can support. His suggestion would be to add those positions, and then he would need to reassess whether he supports the budget. He reiterated concerns about the status of mental health among young people today. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that we need to be aware of what is going on in the legislature. We need to be working with our communities and families so they know the tax abatement options that exist. She would like to pass at this time as far as rendering her opinion on the budget and come back later in the meeting after she has considered some data. Ursula Stanley stated that she supports the budget as it is presented. We have a fiscal responsibility to all of our community members and the tax increases are going to strain many of our families. She reviewed that the local elementary schools had hosted board meetings and had provided presentations to the board about how they address social and emotional learning. Mckalyn Leclerc stated that cutting nursing positions as Doty and Calais does not fit with the desire for equity in our communities. She stated that she has a hard time thinking five years into the future but she realizes that within the next couple of years, there will be sweeping changes (re: reconfiguration). In the meantime, this year she would like to keep the nursing and school counselor positions in the budget. She does not support this budget as it is presented. Natasha Eckart reiterated the previously stated sentiment that cutting school nurses and school counselors does not fit within the framework of equity. She shared that a former Doty student had told her recently that the school counselor saved their life in school. She asked, what would the impact be if these positions were *not* cut? Susanne Gann stated that the tax rate would not be impacted. Natasha Eckart replied, that if the tax rate would not be affected, why would she agree to the reductions in staffing? Under these circumstances, Susanne Gann explained that the 5% cap is the reason the tax rate would not be affected this year. Natasha Eckart stated that she is not in support of this budget. Daniel Keaney reviewed what both Rubin and Priscilla, both former board members, had asked the board: to stick to their word last year when the budget passed, promising to make changes this year. That being said, because we are planning forward with strategic planning and restructuring, he does not support, this year, making the cuts in nursing and counseling positions, given the mental health crisis, and given the concerns we have heard from staff. He does not support the budget at this time. Zach Sullivan stated that, overall, he would support this budget. He stated that the legislature has put us in a tough spot. He expressed concerns about part-time school nurse positions. Chris McVeigh asked some of the administrators about changes in positions, for example, drug and alcohol counselor, and board-certified behavior analyst, as school counselor positions are decreased. He expressed that there are no administrative cuts in the budget; he would like to reallocate resources in the budget so that the nurse and counseling positions are reinstated. He stated that he supports the dollar amount of the budget, but he does not support the allocation. Kealy Sloan stated that she has continued to say that student-to-staff ratios are not appropriate for school nurses when they indicate that a nurse is not in a

building, full-time. She would like to reinstate the nursing positions, with the caveat that next year we will be looking at reconfiguration. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that it is helpful for her to hear from all of the communities. She was reminded of the discussion about ESSER funds allowing for increasing nurse positions. She stated that she agrees with the dollar amount in the budget, but not in decreasing the nurse positions. She would require an allocation of the funds so that these positions can remain intact. Joshua Sevits stated that he approves the budget. He stated that when we are not following the advice and input from the administrators, it negatively impacts them and their schools. Flor Diaz Smith stated that Amelia Contrada had emailed to support the budget and would like her vote counted. Flor Diaz Smith expressed support for this budget as presented. She feels that we are undermining our administrators by not accepting their input into the process. She spoke about her fear of the budget being voted down. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that she takes exception to the statement that she is undermining administrators. All of the board members are looking through the lens of equity and through the parameters that were set, but each is an individual. Chris McVeigh stated that disagreeing with the recommendations of the administration is not undermining them. Natasha Eckart stated that in the spirit of transparency, administrators are saying that our student needs can be met, given the direction that they *had* to make cuts. Were they not told to find cuts to make, they might be supporting a different scenario. Ursula Stanley expressed concerns that we have not heard from all of our constituents - some are working at night, some are not able to access the meeting, and many voices are not at the table. She stated that we are on the path to costing people out of our communities - it becomes inequitable when people can't afford to live here. Zach Sullivan stated that he is losing faith in reconfiguration in the future, given what he is seeing happen now. We have a history of making a promise for the next year and then not coming through. Maggie Weiss stated that we have met the promise of allowing for more time for discussion, but we are ignoring the concerns that are expressed. Daniel Keeney stated that we had board meetings when we were given opportunities to adjust the parameters; it seems late in the process to be having this conversation. He does not agree with the idea of saying one approves of a dollar amount but not of the staffing pattern. Superintendent Roy stated that the administration continues to take the feedback and deliberates and continues to maintain that this is the best budget scenario. She asked the board, if you disagree with the recommendation, do not ask for another proposal, and tell us an acceptable bottom line dollar amount. Daniel Keeney stated that it is worth considering a one-time use of the fund balance. Zach Sullivan stated that he supports adding the nurse positions but does not approve using the fund balance. Chris McVeigh asked Susanne Gann to consider a new budget amount that would reinstate the school nurse and school counseling positions at Doty and Calais. **Zach Sullivan moved to amend the motion, to restore nurse positions at Doty and Calais for \$93,546. Seconded by Kealy Sloan.** Discussion: Kari Bradley stated that he would vote against that. He feels there is a

good chance that this budget would not pass with our public. Dan Keeney stated that there is a symbolic difference between using fund balance versus increasing the tax rate on the budget. A vote on the amendment was called: **nine in favor; this motion carried. Chris McVeigh moved to amend the motion to increase the budget by \$80,955 to restore counseling positions at Calais and Doty. Natasha Eckart seconded.** Discussion: Kealy Sloan stated that she would not vote in favor of this amendment when considering student to staff ratio with school counselors. She does not see this as much of a necessity as the school nurse position. Maggie Weiss stated that access to mental health counseling is very limited and if the school counselor position is the only access that students have to this resource, she is in favor of it. Kealy Sloan stated that increasing these particular school counselor positions would not be equitable across the board. A vote on the amendment was called: **seven in favor; this motion carried. A vote was called on the motion to approve the budget, (\$43,810,548 amount of budget with these amendments), with the two amendments as approved. This motion carried.**

- 5.2. **Approve Prequalified Contractors for 2024 Security System Project: Ursula Stanley moved to prequalify Local Electric, LLC, Safety Systems of Vermont and ENE Security, LLC as bidders for the WCUUSD 2024 Security System Projects. Seconded by Zach Sullivan, this motion carried unanimously.**
- 5.3. **Approve Budget Warning: Chris McVeigh moved to approve the budget warning. Seconded by Natasha Eckart, this motion carried unanimously.**
- 5.4. **Budget Communication:** Flor Diaz Smith shared that the trifold has been finalized and will be mailed; the steering committee will bring information to the board regarding budget communication

6. Policy Committee

- 6.1. **Second reading for Policy to be Adopted on January 17, 2024: F26 Security Cameras: Chris McVeigh moved to approve this policy. Seconded by Kealy Sloan; this motion carried unanimously**

7. Personnel

- 7.1. **Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in FTE: Zach Sullivan moved to approve the following: Extended Leave of Absence Request: Christine McGrath – 2/20/24-5/28/24; Long-Term Substitutes (23-24 School Year) Patty Gaston – LT Sub for EMES; Change in Position (23-24) Carrie Fitz-Interventionist to Special Educator-EMES. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously.**
- 7.2. **Superintendent Search: Ursula Stanley moved to accept the resignation of Meaghan Roy, Superintendent, with much gratitude. Seconded by Diane Nichols-Fleming.** Discussion: Flor Diaz Smith read a statement on behalf of the board: We are both pleased and saddened to announce that our Superintendent, Meaghan Roy, has been offered

and has accepted an opportunity at St Michael's College beginning July 1. We are excited for her and for the opportunities, this position will provide to her; and we are grateful for her work in our district over the past couple of years. Over the coming six months, working collaboratively, we will complete our strategic planning process; continue our efforts to bring greater equity into our schools; prepare a fair and responsible budget; and position ourselves for the challenges that lie ahead. Thanks to her hard work and vision, we feel confident in our district's ability to continue to move forward while maintaining our values, sense of community, and positive student outcomes. Thank you, Meagan, for the time, expertise, and deep care you shared with our communities. We wish you the best in your new endeavors and are excited about the impact you will have on future generations of educators. **This motion carried unanimously. Kari Bradley moved to approve Deweese & Deweese, LLC to consult with the WCUUSD Superintendent search. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously.**

8. Consent Agenda

8.1. Approve Minutes of 1.3.24: Ursula Stanley moved to approve the minutes of January 3, 2024. Seconded by Natasha Eckart, this motion carried unanimously.

8.2. Approve Board Orders: Chris McVeigh moved to approve the board orders for \$8,030,381.41. Seconded by Daniel Keaney, this motion carried unanimously.

9. Future Agenda Items

9.1. 2023-2024 Board Work Plan

9.2. Next meeting will be hosted by U-32 on 2.7.24

10. Board Reflection

11. Executive Session: Student Residency Request: At 9:10, Zach Sullivan moved to go into Executive Session and to include Superintendent Roy, to consider a Student Residency Request as authorized by 21 V.S.A. Section 313(a) (7). Seconded by Daniel Keeney, this motion carried unanimously. At 9:28 p.m., Joshua Sevits moved to leave Executive Session. Seconded by Zach Sullivan, this motion carried unanimously. Due to the timing of the start of the second semester, Joshua Sevits moved to grant the residency requisition through the end of the 2023-24 school year. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously.

12. Adjourn: Diane Nichols-Fleming moved to adjourn at 9:30. Seconded by Ursula Stanley, this motion carried and the board adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary