

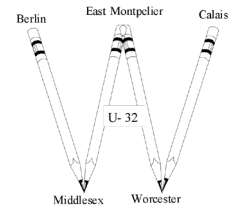
# Washington Central UniUnion School District

*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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Meagan Roy Ed.D.  
Superintendent



## Washington Central Unified Union School District School Board Meeting U-32 930 Gallison Hill Rd, Montpelier, VT 3.13.24 In- Person /Virtual

**Board Members Present:** Flor Diaz Smith, Ursula Stanley, Jonathan Goddard, Mckalyn Leclerc, Chris McVeigh, Joshua Sevits, Zach Sullivan, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Kealy Sloan, Daniel Keeney, Natasha Eckart, Michelle Ksepka, Willow Mashkuri, Linnea Darrow

**Others Present:** Superintendent Meagan Roy, Susanne Gann, Jen Miller-Arsenault, Principal Steven Dellinger-Pate, ORCA Media, Celia Guggemos, Cat Fair, Amy Molina, Jes Wills, Kerra Holden, Scott Hess, Brian, Daniel Velez, David Delcore, David Hannigan, Erin Mullaney, Hollis St. Peter, Jane Dudley, Jen Donovan, Jill, Julia Pritchard, Lisa Hanna, Lisa LaPlante, Maria Melekos, Michael Sherwin, Tom Hamlin, Veronica Eldred, Jessica Fecura, John, Jane Dudley, Larry Gilbert, Tracy Liebowitz, Ainsley Burroughs, Allison Fayle, Ben, Beth Parker, Brian Albee, Brigitte Kalat, Brittany Perry, Cindy G, Daisy Scarzello, Denise Roy, Don, MMcglynn, MMclane, Samantha Jackson, Elizabeth Marks, Ella, Erin Mooney, Hannah Brown, Heather Clark-Warner, (several iphones), Jenn Ingersoll, Jessica Fecura, Kathryn Biggam, Laura Giammusso, Lisa Gariboldi, Lauren Chabot, Sarah Snow, Aanika Devries, Adrian Wade-Keeney, Annie Ledue, April Davis, Denise Roy, Tony Snow, Tyler Smith, Tamara Joslyn, Leigh Garrity, Carl Parton, Steven Ushakov, Carrie, Sarah Lund, Samantha Jackson, Heidi Dimick

- 1. Call to Order: Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:15.**
- 2. Welcome:** Flor Diaz Smith welcomed those present and spoke about new beginnings and the importance of working toward a positive future.
  - 2.1. Adjustments to the Agenda:** none
  - 2.2. Reception of Guests:** Flor Diaz Smith thanked all of those who attended.
  - 2.3. Public Comments:** Larry Gilbert (East Montpelier): Thanked the board for its hard work. Stated that there is much to the budget that he does not understand. What parts of the budget are non-discretionary, which parts are discretionary? Short term- how to create a budget that will pass - longer term - how do we create a budget that will pass in coming

years? He noted the Career Center budget - this passed separately from our WCUUSD budget so we have no opportunity to go back to that budget. What are the long-term opportunities with Vermont legislators? So many Vermont school districts in this same position ought to create some momentum. Traci Leibowitz (Middlesex): spoke about her family being impacted by the proposal to combine Doty and Rumney pre-K and kindergarten. Families need to know what is coming/ what is likely. Bekah Mandell: Do we know the number of people who pay based on income versus pay based on property value? To get a sense of what is the cost for people and how it is shared amongst people. Another neighboring Vermont district had provided this information to voters. As we lose enrollment, is it time to take a hard look at administrative staff, versus the folks that work directly with our students every day? Could this offer some cost savings? Flor Diaz Smith thanked the public for their comments. She noted that some of the questions raised would be addressed during the board discussion.

### 3. Reports to The Board

**3.1. Student Report:** Student representatives spoke about student happenings including the sports banquet and student activities and resources around Sexual Awareness Week. The Pep Squad is planning Winter Wellness activities. Diane Nichols-Fleming asked how student morale is. Willow Mashkuri stated that students are stressed out, some sicknesses are going around, and projects are due, but there is some positive energy around the change in weather and spring on the horizon.

**3.2. Superintendent/Central Office Leadership Team (COLT) Report:** Superintendent Roy provided a written report. Kerra Holden shared about CPI training around de-escalation for students and a preventive approach, before escalating behaviors. She shared some data regarding a decrease in student behaviors.

### 4. Board Operations: Board members introduced themselves. Michelle Ksepka is a new board member!

**4.1. Budget Revote Discussion:** Superintendent Roy had shared an outline for the board to consider, going forward. Flor Diaz Smith, Susanne Gann, and Superintendent Roy provided a memo: *Budget Revote Discussion*. She shared the proposed timeline:

- Adopt revised budget April 3, begin warning and printing ballots
- April 17 Board Meeting (informational mtg.)
- April 30 or May 7 vote (depending on whether ballots will be mailed)

We are not required to mail ballots but voters are allowed to request an absentee ballot by mail. Flor Diaz Smith stated that we have consulted with legal counsel about these proposed dates and the mail-in ballot issue. Joshua Sevits asked whether there is anything on the horizon with the legislature around budget timing, mailing, and printing that might change. Superintendent Roy stated that she senses that the legislature has turned their

attention to the next steps after the budget revote, and she does not believe there will be changes in the information that has been provided around the timeline, mailing, etc. for revote for the large number of failed budgets. Flor Diaz Smith asked board members whether they were comfortable with the timeline that has been presented. Chris McVeigh suggested that we have another board meeting between tonight's and the April 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting. Superintendent Roy suggested that if the board wants to schedule another board meeting, it would not be feasible to take place before April 3<sup>rd</sup>. Chris McVeigh stated that there may be a need for further consideration of the next budget draft that will be proposed. Flor Diaz Smith shared that the Steering Committee had met yesterday and would like to use the April 3 meeting to start the conversation early about moving forward to the future regarding configuration, and then share the proposed budget as well as what, for instance, a budget at 87% of this year's current budget would look like (for instance, if we do not pass a budget before the state's deadline), and/ or other budget scenarios such as tax rate percentage. Superintendent Roy stated that the starting place for the administration's work on the next budget draft would be based on conversations in the past regarding reductions during the budget development process. Joshua Sevits stated that we need to give the administration guidance and then they will decide based on the "Three Lenses" as guidance. He cautioned the board against indicating our preferences as to what is cut and urged the board to proceed with faith in the administration's decisions. The three considerations, as agreed earlier in the budget development process:

- Ed Quality
- Student Need
- Equitable Distribution of Resources

Diane Nichols-Fleming suggested answering the question of what is discretionary versus non-discretionary. She wonders whether we can get to a conversation about what percentage we are going to look at, based on discretionary pieces of the budget.

Superintendent Roy stated that it is not judicious for the board to tell the administration specifically which functional areas to cut. However, she stated that it would be important for the administration to know if there are absolute deal-breaker areas - e.g. if they were cut, the board would not approve the budget. What would be useful would be a percentage rate. It will be difficult in our current structure, and yet we understand that we need to make cuts and feel that we can in a way that meets student needs. Daniel Keeney stated regarding the Capital Plan that he is pleased that we have created a Capital Plan and have kept up with it. He asked, though, whether some things in the Capital Plan could be moved to a later year. He stated that we had a discussion earlier this year about appropriate staffing in the central office. He would like to understand some comparisons with similar-sized districts regarding central office staff. He asked the board to consider whether we would like to use any of the fund balance. Flor Diaz Smith stated that she does not think, with the facilities configuration we currently have, that we can go backward in the Capital Plan; it has taken a long time for us to get to a place where we are being proactive and preventive and not "putting out fires." Joshua Sevits stated that we could consider the same regarding the central

Office staffing patterns. We do not want to be “putting out fires” with central office staff working beyond their capacity, and therefore losing staff and retraining new hires. Natasha Eckart stated that it sounds like the only option is to reduce staff. If that were the only option then she would like to know that as a board, to prepare to consider the next draft. Superintendent Roy stated that 80% of our budget is staffing and the only way that she can see reducing the budget is by reducing staff. Ursula Stanley stated that we have discussed this budget for three years and each year we push it a year away. We need to remember beyond each meeting all of the information that is brought to us. Taking money from the Capital fund or the General fund (fund balance) would be a one-time solution and would not help us going forward. Mckalyn LeClerc stated that we are in an exceptional situation and it might be something that we have to consider (Capital fund or fund balance.) If we are considering reducing staff, what positions are currently open? Can we consider not filling those vacancies, or creatively filling those vacancies from within? She stated that, personally, “just cutting teaching positions” would not be acceptable to her. Can we look at other staffing solutions, such as sharing administrators? Chris McVeigh stated if staff is 80% of our budget, all staff should be created equal. When we have staff cuts, it has always been teachers, counselors, or nurses. He stated that he agrees that we will likely have to reduce staff - maybe through attrition but he would like to consider reducing staff equally across the board. He agrees that we should not dip into the fund balance. Zach Sullivan stated that the fund balance has built up because we have planned for more than we have needed to spend, and it would make sense that some of the fund balance should go back to the taxpayers if we have “overshot,” especially under these conditions. Ursula Stanley stated that some of the fund balance is due to not being able to fill vacant positions. Daniel Keeney stated that in light of the information about PCBs, he would like to reserve more of the Capital fund than he had originally thought coming into tonight’s meeting. Still, he thinks it is wise to consider it and the fund balance to some degree. Joshua Sevits stated that the board having the privilege of being able to hold the fund balance versus return it to the taxpayers each year is unique, and it behooves us to preserve that. Flor Diaz Smith stated that for three years we have known that this fiscal cliff is coming. We need to make progress as a team. Susanne Gann stated that we need some guidance around dollars so that we know what to come back with; what she is hearing is that the board would like the administration to consider the fund balance and the Capital fund. Give the administration a target. Flor Diaz Smith suggested that we provide a target, e.g. 10%, and allow and trust the administration to make the decisions about how to meet the target. Natasha Eckart stated that none of us are saying that we do not trust our administration; she would like to take that out of the conversation, as she does not believe any of us are coming from that place. For staffing considerations, we have never been brought reductions besides teachers, counselors, nurses, and paras; she would like as staffing reductions are brought for consideration, of the proposal to be broader than teachers, counselors, nurses, and paras. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that she does not feel comfortable saying, for example, “Yes, 12% and whatever you bring on April 3rd will be

ok.” Willow Mashkuri stated that the behavioral and emotional needs of students now are very different than in years past and she sees the administrative positions as being critical. Michelle Ksepka stated that we need to give the administration a target. Without a starting place, they will be having an exercise in futility. Ursula Stanley stated that if we ask for a budget draft and upon receiving it, respond with “we don’t like this, try something else,” the administration does not appreciate the exercise, and we do not have the time for the back and forth. She agrees that we need to provide a target. Mckalyn Leclerc asked for clarification: who is on the leadership team? Superintendent Roy clarified central office administration, licensed administrative staff, and building principals. Chris McVeigh suggested that if we had some guidance around what percentage of staff are in each staffing category, then we could consider reductions with more information. Superintendent Roy stated that we have one big unknown cost, an unplanned expense, around PCBs in one of our buildings. Steven Dellinger Pate shared that we have a preliminary report but we do not know the whole picture yet. Susanne Gann reviewed the memo, explaining Local Education Spending Models, and Tax Rate Projections by Town. Zach Sullivan stated that he is not comfortable going above 10%. Staying below 10% puts all of our towns’ increases at less than 20%. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that there is a “sticker shock” factor and she would like to put together an information sheet understanding the economics in our communities, and she would like to know which parts of the budget could not change. Susanne Gann: things that cannot change for example the Tech Center. We could potentially look at the inflationary percentage for fuel, for the supplies for pupils (in other words adjust the inflationary assumptions that are built into the budget). Some discussion followed around estimating costs for the work related to PCBs. The state has not allotted any money for the remediation of PCBs. We do not know the scope of the project yet. Kealy Sloan stated that it would be helpful when this budget comes back to include an explanation: a comparison from the previous budget (that failed) and this updated draft of a proposed budget. Larry Gilbert: it would be very unfortunate to go back to the voters and have them refuse the next proposal. He stated that he would need a really good explanation as to why 10% is as low as you can go. He stated that it is not his purview to speak to the specifics of the budget; however, he believes 10% might not be low enough. Leigh Garrity encouraged the board to consider the discussions that have taken place with the public about the issues that they hold near and dear - for example, all of the conversations around school nurse positions and school counselor positions. She hates to see the board rehash issues that have already been put to bed. Traci Leibowitz: When we go to vote, the tax increase is stated clearly; that is the sticker shock. She stated that, in Middlesex, seeing 21% was shocking. She stated that the chart included in the memo is hard to understand. Carl Parton (Berlin): Suggested, for example, 6%, 8%, and 10% options that the board can consider. Lisa Hanna stated that it is unsettling that it is clear that school staffing will be cut; she feels that this has not been explicitly stated. She stated that when we cut 10% of our budget by reducing staff that is student-facing, it would most certainly have an impact on our students, and we need to be transparent about that. Lauren Chabot stated that the teachers and staff at Doty School are

amazing and integral to our students. She would like for the school board and the administration to acknowledge how difficult this is for the staff. She asks that the administration be clear with staff so that they have some understanding of what is happening; she feels that communication has been “lacking” around this issue. She asked, have administrative contracts been signed at this point? She appreciates the board’s willingness to consider administrative positions. Shannon Miller stated that this budget is no one’s goal. It is an unfortunate situation. She expressed support for the administrative team. To insinuate that they are not “student-facing” is not accurate. She understands the position that we are in; nobody is taking these decisions lightly; there is not one person on the staff list that anyone is excited to reduce. Our role is to protect students; she is hoping for the best for our kids. Hannah Brown thanked the board for their unenviable job. She reiterated Natasha Eckart’s statement that disagreeing does not indicate a lack of trust. She stated that over the past few years, there have not been as many administrative reductions as there have been teaching position reductions. She stated that regarding what is happening with Rumney and Doty preschool, and kindergarten, she would like to have this talked about more “out loud.” She shared that this is what people are whispering about at the bus stops. Is Doty going to close? Is Calais going to close? She would like more clarity around that. Flor Diaz Smith asked board members to consider a parameter for the administration. Ursula Stanley asked, if we could ask the administration to come back to us with some ideas about reconfiguration. Superintendent Roy reminded the board that the Articles of Agreement indicate that there can be no closure of a school building without a vote of the electorate. This is not something that would happen for this budget.

**6, 8, and 10% possibilities:** Joshua Sevits suggested looking at the 6th grade students moving to 7th grade, and what might be the budget implications. Diane Nichols-Fleming reiterated that when we are considering reconfiguration we are considering more than cost savings, we are trying to consider all of the aspects including opportunities for students. Timeline: April 3: presentation of 6, 8, and 10% budgets. The board could consider those and act; or, the board could decide to schedule another meeting on April 10 to take action. This would have May 7 as the revote date and this would allow for an additional vote if needed. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that this timeline does not provide opportunities for community input. Superintendent Roy stated that the Finance Committee had considered sending a survey to the community - a post-budget vote survey, asking, for example, what was your vote? What do you want the administration to know? She stated that we should begin to get information out that the vote date will be scheduled for May 7. **Chris McVeigh moved that we do not mail ballots for this round of the budget vote. Seconded by Mckalyn Leclerc.** Discussion: Flor Diaz Smith clarified that this would still allow people to ask for absentee ballots. **This motion carried unanimously.**

**5. Finance Committee**

**5.1. Approve Physical Security Systems Project Bid: Daniel Keeney moved that the Board approve awarding the WCUUSD 2024 Security System Project contract to Safety Systems of Vermont in an amount not to exceed \$430,531. Seconded by Zach Sullivan, this motion carried unanimously.**

**6. Personnel**

**6.1. Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in FTE: Kealy Sloan moved to approve the resignation of David Mathies – EMES School Nurse. Seconded by Michelle Ksepka. Discussion: Flor Diaz Smith noted, with thanks and regret. This motion carried unanimously.**

**6.2. Superintendent Search Update: Flor Diaz Smith shared that the interview questions have been finalized, the committee has reviewed applicants, and we are on track according to the timeline that had been created.**

**7. Consent Agenda**

**7.1. Approve Minutes of 2.21.24: Michelle Ksepka moved to approve the minutes of February 21, 2024. Seconded by Chris McVeigh; this motion carried unanimously.**

**7.2. Approve Board Orders: Diane Nichols-Fleming moved to approve the board orders for \$400,726.79. Seconded by Ursula Stanley, this motion carried unanimously.**

Honi Bean Barrett formally requested clear communication, which includes a timeline for RIF: Reduction in Force notices. Leigh Garrity shared that in the past - having a meeting in each of the towns helped reach people and outreach to the community. She encouraged the board to consider that, even within this timeframe. Traci Leibowitz stated that making the change for 6th grade would be hard for students and families at this late date.

**8. Future Agenda Items**

**8.1. 2023 -2024 Board Work Plan**

**9. Executive Session: At 8:18 p.m., Michelle Ksepka moved to go into Executive Session to discuss personnel issues, and to include Superintendent Roy. Seconded by Mckalyn Leclerc, this motion carried unanimously. At 8:34, the board came out of Executive Session.**

**10. Adjourn: At 8:34, the board adjourned by consensus.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary