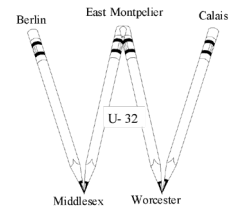


Washington Central Unified Union School District

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



Washington Central Unified Union School District School Board Meeting 4.10.24 6:15-8:15 PM Calais Elementary School 321 Lightening Ridge Rd. Plainfield, VT

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

Others Present: Superintendent Meagan Roy, Susanne Gann, Jen Miller-Arsenault, Principal Steven Dellinger-Pate, ORCA Media, Celia Guggemos, Karoline May, Cat Fair, Jes Wills, Kerra Holden, Daniel Velez, David Delcore, David Hannigan, April Davis, Alden Bird, Alicia Lyford, Allen Gilbert, Aly Mahoney, Amy Young, Kara Rosenberg, Kathryn Dodge, Maggie McGlynn, Penny, Shelley Vermilya, Sonya Rhodes, Susanne Gann, Brigitte Kalat, Carl P, Carrie Fitz, Cheryl Ecklund, David Lawrence, Derek Dunning, Elizabeth Marks, Erin Mooney, Erin Mullaney, Anne Decker, Ben and Krista Larrow, Ben Weiss, Beth Parker, Blakely Gilmore, Brian Albee, Dena Brown, Denise Roy, Don, Eanna, Elizabeth Brown, Ella Lyford, Ellen Dorsey, Gus, Hannah O'Brien, Hollis St Peter, Honi Bean Barrett, Jen Campbell, Jen Donovan, Jes Wills, Jessica Heinz, Jill Abair, John Riley, Julie Arms, Kathryn Biggam, Lauren, Lisa Hanna, LP, Lynn Wagner, Mallory Russell, Maria Melekos, Mark Brown, Matt Davide, Meg Allison, Megan McLane, Megan Mitchell, Nate Lovitz, Nathaniel Schwartz, RTerri, Samantha Jackson, Scott Hess, Spencer, Talitha Landis-Marinello, Tony Snow, Tyler Smith, Veronica Eldred

1. **Call to Order: Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:19 p.m.**
2. **Welcome**
 - 2.1. **Adjustments to the Agenda:** Flor Diaz Smith suggested adding 4.2 Communication plan for budget and 4.3 Appoint board member to superintendent search committee. **Ursula Stanley moved to approve the adjustments to the agenda. Seconded by Michelle Ksepka, this motion carried unanimously.**
 - 2.2. **Reception of Guests:** Flor Diaz Smith shared some effective school board characteristics to set the tone for the work of the board.
 - 2.3. **Public Comments-Time limit strictly enforced, see note:** A person spoke about concerns around proposed cuts to the arts programs. The proposed cut of 0.8 FTE will damage the arts programs. She suggested no more than 0.4 FTE reduction to maintain a high quality art program for students. Larry Gilbert asked the board to consider a 5% version of the

budget: (1) too high of tax burden (2) doesn't want to be in the same position in 5 weeks, another revote, (3) hopeful for a community wide discussion around reconfiguration; he does not believe the public will be in favor of reconfiguration unless they feel that the board has done everything in its power to reduce the budget. He stated that he feels the board could have communicated better to the public about board meetings/ budget discussion. He stated that the budget draft that is presented tonight does not give specifics around the salary line. Aly Mahoney expressed concerns with reductions to the library positions and the impact this will have on the library programs. Kyle Landis-Marinello stated that he is surprised with the proposed cuts after all of the public input in the past about positions such as library, arts, guidance, school nurse. He stated that he would expect the board to consider "a la carte" options as discussed at the previous meeting. Honi Bean Barrett asked whether the board continues to stand by the need for full time school nurse positions for each school. She stated that the format for sharing with the board is difficult, when she prepares something to say and then board members nod and do not reply; she would like to have more back and forth conversation. Dena Brown expressed concerns with the quality of care that students will get. She stated that she feels it is up to the board to think more creatively, with their hearts, about what is best for students. Kathryn Dodge (student) spoke about how students rely on school counselors, nurses and the art teachers. Mayla Landis-Marinello (student) spoke about the importance of library positions and she shared an experience today at U-32, a statewide library event. Ainsley referred to allied arts, Rumney Spanish, and school counselor positions - all of these positions the community has spoken their opinions against reducing these positions. She stated that education quality would be affected by these proposals. She spoke about the concept of "equity" particularly she expressed a belief that the central office budget as opposed to the budget items for the schools is inequitable. Callie Weller spoke to the proposed 1.0 teaching position at Calais - she spoke about the ramifications of the decrease, which will require a combination of kindergarten and first grade. She spoke about the differences in the development of kindergarten and first-grade children. Traci Leibowitz expressed concerns about combining Rumney and Doty Pre-K and kindergarten classrooms. She expressed concerns that this seems like an arrangement that lacks stability for children at that age. The long-term plan for those students is unclear; she would like to hear more information. Rivers expressed concern with the proposed budgets that take from the fund balance; he feels that this is misleading to taxpayers. He suggested that the board, to be honest with taxpayers, consider reductions actual spending reductions as opposed to drawing it down from the fund balance. Be honest with the voters about what you are spending. Jen Campbell expressed concerns with the reduction in art education positions. She spoke about the logistics of students passing in classes, and that teacher planning time, which will be affected. Talitha Landis-Marinello spoke about concerns with the proposed decrease in teaching positions; she spoke about the challenge of an aging population and that younger families do not choose to settle in the smaller schools. She stated that they moved to Middlesex after careful consideration and that the school was a factor; at this point, she stated that she would not recommend to friends to move to the town.

3. **Presentation: Social Emotional Learning: Calais Elementary:** Cat Fair presented a slide deck about Social Emotional Learning at Calais Elementary.

4. Board Operations

4.1. Approve Revised FY25 Budget: Flor Diaz Smith invited clarifying questions from board members. Chris McVeigh stated that he would like to consider an a la carte version of the budget. He shared some ideas about this type of model budget. Diane Nichols-Fleming asked for clarification about the idea of equitable distribution of resources. Superintendent Roy stated that this refers to personnel in buildings; it is a rough calculation of the percentage of students in the building to personnel in the building. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that it would be important to explain this clearly to the public, as this is difficult to understand. Ms. Nichols-Fleming asked for clarification around tax increase impacts per town; Susanne Gann shared a slide to explain this. Kealy Sloan asked, if there is a zero percent increase in education spending, what is the tax rate increase? She feels it is helpful to show this. Susanne Gann shared a per-pupil spending chart, for consideration of percentage increases for the budget drafts as presented. Natasha Eckart asked about resignations in the board packet tonight; she asked whether there is consideration for not filling the positions. Steven Dellinger-Pate spoke about the Assistant Principal position at U-32. He spoke about the role of supervision/ evaluation in that position and that eliminating that position does not seem prudent. Flor Diaz Smith spoke about the board's role in guiding the administration. The board's role is to monitor, create goals, to set parameters; she stated that it is important for the board to honor the expertise of the administrative staff that we have hired to make decisions that are not within the purview of the board. Chris McVeigh stated that we represent the community as a whole. The proposed cuts are almost exclusively positions that provide direct services to students. Superintendent Roy explained the justification for the administration to propose the budget drafts as presented. Chris McVeigh asked Cat Fair to speak to proposed cuts in light of the presentation she provided tonight. Kealy Sloan stated that there are some cuts proposed to U-32 staff; she does not want the messaging to be that the staffing cuts are only in the elementary schools. Zach Sullivan read a letter from an East Montpelier community member expressing that the board is considering creating an "a la carte" model despite the work, expertise, and consideration that the administration put into the budget drafts. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that board members who voted in favor of the budget last year have known that this is coming this year. This creates a ripple. She stated that asking questions, as a board member does not indicate that she does not trust the administration. She needs to ask questions to understand the bigger picture. We are trying to figure out our role as board members representing our community, and have an understanding of the ripple effect. She stated that at this time she is not sure what her final decision is about the proposed budgets. Kealy Sloan stated that we need to balance what we hear from the people in the room, with what he heard from the voters a few weeks ago (in a failed budget vote.) She stated that she is leaning toward the 8% budget version. Ursula Stanley stated that given what we have heard from community members about the tax impact, and the very thoughtful process of the administration, she would support the 6% or 8% budget. Zach Sullivan stated that our responsibility is to be sure to pass a budget that can support our students. He is not comfortable in gambling on a tax increase that is so high, the budget fails again. He stated that we have received a lot of feedback from the community and from the people who are directly affected. It is our responsibility as a board to recognize that this is not necessarily representative of the community at large. Jonathan Goddard stated that he feels that we have to make the best decision we can with the information we currently have. Michelle Ksepka stated that she does not agree with using fund balance. Daniel Keeney stated that he is interested in

exploring creative ways of covering a shortage of nursing staffing, for example, using tele-health. He would like to be not as focused on the proportionality of resources in the schools. He expressed concerns with reductions in art teaching positions and other allied arts positions. He stated that he is frustrated with our continued focus on education quality standards. He would like to consider looking through WCUUSD's education quality standards. He rejects the notion that a statewide Ed quality standard is going to apply to WCUUSD. He stated that at this time he supports the 8% version. Natasha Eckart stated that these cuts are going to affect students in all three of the pillars that we have established. She has heard from the community that there is a want and a need for all of the positions to remain intact. She stated that she struggles to weigh the tax impact on our community with these concerns. She stated that education costs money; she does not think we have done a good job of communicating with our constituents about the nuances of education spending/ funding/ costs. Mckalyn Leclerc stated that she had fought to keep positions in the budget, but it has failed; it breaks her heart to have to shave away at some of the positions as proposed; however, she feels that we are in a position that we have to pass a budget. She would opt for the 6% version. If we were discussing “a la carte”, she would opt for 6% and add in the positions of nursing and art. Chris McVeigh stated that he is supportive of the 8% version of the budget, but not with the configuration of resources; he does not feel that it is disrespectful for the board to ask these questions/ considerations. Amelia Contrada expressed concerns that if the budget fails, we are faced with a dire situation. Beginning with the end in mind, she agrees with going with the 6% version but not use the fund balance, with a vision of a sustainable solution through reconfiguration. **Ursula Stanley moved to accept the 8% budget increase version, as presented tonight. Seconded by Zach Sullivan. Discussion:** Superintendent Roy and Steven Dellinger-Pate spoke about the impetus for creating the various versions of budget drafts. Daniel Keeney reiterated that the use of the fund balance gives him pause. He stated that he supports the reduction to 8% spending increase but he is not endorsing this particular list of cuts. Chris McVeigh stated that if we vote on this motion as stated, we do not have an opportunity to come back and ask for any reallocation of positions. Ursula Stanley clarified that we are approving the amount in the budget; we are not indicating precisely how positions are allocated. Mckalyn Leclerc stated that she is concerned with landing on 8%, as she fears it will not please anyway; by landing in the middle, we might lose people on both sides. Zach Sullivan stated that we have heard comments that we need to do a better job of communicating budget information to our community. Flor Diaz Smith stated that if we are able to approve the budget, we could work together, forward, to communicate and outreach about the budget. **Chris moved to amend the current pending motion to accept the cuts in the 6% budget but restore nursing and counseling in Doty and Calais. Seconded by Mckalyn Leclerc.** Discussion: Susanne Gann clarified that this results in \$41,640,348. (7.76% increase). Some discussion followed to clarify some of the details of this proposed version of the budget. **Chris McVeigh moved to amend the motion to add 0.2 nurse position to Rumney. Seconded by Natasha Eckart. Discussion: This reflects a 7.83% local education spending increase \$41,662,364** Joshua Sevits called the vote. **Roll call vote: The motion to amend carried. Roll call for the amended motion: This motion carried.** Flor Diaz Smith clarified that this vote approves the warning, with update information as per details in the budget draft.

4.2 Budget Communication: Flor Diaz Smith stated that the Finance Committee had met to discuss communication for this budget. Superintendent Roy suggested a list of FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) to post on the website; she invited board input. Discussion followed around details for FAQ and for info to be included in the mailer. Board discussion ensued about budget communication. Some discussion followed about communication on Front Porch Forum and Facebook.

4.3. Michelle Ksepka and Amelia Contrada and Diane Nichols-Fleming expressed interest in participating on the principal search committee. Some discussion followed around logistics and a time commitment for this process. **Diane Nichols-Fleming/ Ursula - appoint Michelle Ksepka to the Principal search committee. Seconded by Ursula Stanley, this motion carried unanimously.**

5. Personnel

5.1. Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in FTE: Ursula Stanley moved to accept the resignations of Jes Wills and Kerra Holden, with many thanks for their services. **Seconded by Natasha Eckart, this motion carried.**

6. Consent Agenda:

6.1. Approve Minutes of 3.11.24, 3.13.24, 4.3.24: Chris McVeigh moved to approve the minutes of March 11 & 13, 2024, and April 3, 2024. **Seconded by Mckalyn Leclerc, this motion carried unanimously.**

7. Future Agenda Items

7.1. 2023-2024 Board Work Plan

8. Adjourn: Daniel Keeney moved to adjourn at 8:55. **Seconded by Natasha Eckart, this motion carried unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary