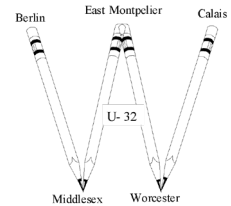


# Washington Central Unified Union School District

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

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## Washington Central Unified Union School District School Board Meeting 9.4.24 6:15-9:15 U-32 Rm 128/131 930 Gallison Hill Rd Montpelier, VT

**Board Members Present:** Flor Diaz Smith, Ursula Stanley, Chris McVeigh, Zach Sullivan, Kealy Sloan, Daniel Keeney, Amelia Contrada, Elizabeth Brown, Patrick Whelley, Michelle Ksepka, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Mckalyn Leclerc, Natasha Eckart, Julia Hewitt

**Others Present:** Superintendent Steven Dellinger-Pate, Susanne Gann, Jen Miller-Arsenault, Julia Pritchard, Alicia Lyford, Lila Richardson, Lisa Hanna, Caitlin Howansky, Noah Weinstein, Ryan Humke, David Delcore, Robert M, David Lawrence, Honi Bean Barrett, Allison Fayle, Andrew Callahan, Deborah Bloom, Dena Brown, Gillian Fuqua, Jane Dudley, J Campbell, Karoline May, Larraby Fellows, Michael Close, Michael Sherwin, ORCA Media, Shelley Vermilya, T Leibowitz, Toni Kaeding, Will Baker, Nat Shambaugh, Leigh Garrity, Bekah Mandel

**1. Call to Order: Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:16 p.m.**

### **2. Welcome**

**2.1. Adjustments to the Agenda:** Julia Hewitt asked to add to the agenda an action item, based on a public comment at the previous meeting, when Allen Gilbert had sent a letter (August 1) asking the board to consider affirming the Articles of Agreement related to the closure of schools. **Ursula Stanley moved to approve the agenda as amended. Seconded by Chris McVeigh. This motion carried unanimously.** Flor Diaz Smith noted that we would add this to the end of the agenda, before Public Comment.

**2.2. Reception of Guests:** Flor Diaz Smith spoke about board decision-making and board leadership.

**2.3. Public Comments-Time limit strictly enforced, see note:** Nat Shambaugh, Berlin, had sent an email to the board following the previous board meeting. He spoke about the concepts of fair, equitable and sustainable, to both students and the community. He feels that none of the proposals currently on the table meets those criteria. In his opinion, the only

solution that is fair, equitable and sustainable is to bring all of the students to the U-32 campus, thereby closing all of the elementary schools. He asked if there are any opportunities to consider other models besides the three that are currently on the table. Debra Bloom shared some data in graph form. She pointed out Doty students having the highest free and reduced lunch population. She stated that the proposal to move Worcester students to Middlesex is classist. She spoke about the difference between equity and equality. David Lawrence stated that it would be useful to have access to the transportation app/ platform that shows the location of the buses. He asked WCUUSD to consider enabling that. Lisa Hanna requested that the administration share the staffing data for all of the elementary schools. She stated that Doty is not fully staffed, and it would benefit the communities to understand the outcomes from the last round of Act 46 work, before considering this next round of consolidation. Noah Weinstein asked what research shows about closing the smallest schools; he shared some articles and research, which he had shared with the board, related to student outcomes and the negative impact of school closure. Lila Richardson read some comments from another Worcester resident, Marsha Hill. She had shared this document with the board. Caitlin Howansky shared that over a hundred community members had signed a letter in support of continuing Doty Elementary as a school building. She asked for clarification around the preschool program, for ages three and four, especially in light of Act 76. She asked for specific information about how all of the classrooms at Doty will be used. Ryan Humke stated that the town of Worcester has come together over the years to care for and maintain the school building of Doty. He spoke about Montpelier's vote to close Roxbury School. He expressed frustration with the consolidation of school boards under Act 46.

### 3. Board Operations

**3.1. Board Learning – Role of the Board:** Flor Diaz Smith shared a slide deck: *WCUUSD Board Orientation: The Role of the Board*. This had been included in the board packet. Flor Diaz Smith shared some other board training opportunities that are available. She invited questions from the board, following the slideshow. Natasha Eckart asked whether Flor could clarify, for the benefit of the community, what the protocol is when emails are sent to a board member and are not answered directly by that person. Flor Diaz Smith stated that the practice that this board follows is that emails are shared with the Board Chair and the chair, on behalf of the board, answers emails. She reviewed a chart for correspondence that has been created, and that the FAQ document is considered “live” and continues to be updated. Julia Hewitt asked whether letters that are sent to the board are considered public record. (they are.) Flor Diaz Smith stated that this communication (the chart referenced above) is going to be updated monthly and available on the website, including board answers to the letters. Chris McVeigh asked whether there is an awareness or a way to notify senders that correspondence to the board is considered public record.

**3.2. Finance/Configuration - Presentation:** Superintendent Dellinger-Pate thanked the Configuration Committee for their work. He shared that the committee had met last night and that the presentation tonight reflects some of the discussion/ questions that came from last night's meeting. He facilitated this slide deck presentation. Jen Miller-Arsenault spoke about curriculum, a topic included in the presentation. Some discussion followed around “Curriculum Camp.” Chris McVeigh asked whether Curriculum Camp is mandatory; it is not - teachers are invited to participate and are paid for their time. Elizabeth Brown asked

whether classroom configuration of students is related to staffing patterns or staffing shortages. Jen Miller-Arsenault stated that she is not aware of those decisions being made based on those factors; they are made based on what is in the best interest of the student population. Julia Pritchard shared information about special education, which was a topic included in the presentation. Elizabeth Brown asked how the ratio is determined, how many special educators per child in each school? Julia Pritchard spoke about caseload size for special educators; it varies by school, and for each special educator. Some discussion followed around EQS: this is considered a guideline. Natasha Eckart stated that it would be useful to know how many classrooms are in each building and what they are being used for. Some discussion followed around art, PE, health, library and music in each of the elementary schools. Daniel Keeney asked, according to the model (3 elementary schools) that is being considered, how will these programs be preserved or how will they be expanded? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that the first goal is to preserve programs that are in the schools and there is an assumption that more children attending each school will mean more interest in programs in each school (e.g. related to music programs such as band.) Chris McVeigh asked about logistics as to how and when students' interests are gauged. Amelia Contrada spoke about the benefit/ the opportunity for students to have a larger peer group, which might inspire students to try new things (such as band, or advanced placement courses). Much discussion followed around transportation routes and time spent on buses, and what these might look like under other circumstances. Some board members expressed surprise about some of the ridership (and route length) data, and that this had not been brought to their attention. Discussion followed about the role of the board in these types of logistics. Daniel Keeney: rec program at EMES - how do we handle equitable opportunity and fair budgeting if there is some reconfiguration. Diane Nichols-Fleming: re: art, music, etc. - if one of the outcomes we are looking for is an expansion of opportunities, what opportunities are we talking about, and when might they happen? We keep hearing about this from our communities - please share what the expanded opportunities are. Daniel Keeney: the most compelling space for expanded opportunity is longer school hours; not suggesting that teachers stay longer, suggesting that the building stay open longer - e.g. what would be the budget implications to have the building open, e.g. from 7:30 to 5:30. Chris McVeigh: is there an opportunity to expand time for art? Can we explore what would the implications be from adding a bus route to Doty (this year)? Patrick Whelley: brainstorm idea: rent building space in the summer for revenue? Elizabeth Brown: expansion can be expansion of equitable access to programs in place, or expansion: adding to what already exists. If we want to truly expand and add to what is in place, we need to consider extending the school day/ extending the hours. Also, why do middle school coming to U-32 (6th grade) and reconfiguration *have* to go together? They are two big changes. Can we take one at a time? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that it is a facilities issue. However, they are separate but linked issues. Ursula Stanley: expanded offerings, not just band and art. We had heard about expansion of flexibility and how special education services and interventions are delivered to students. Kealy Sloan: although we did not shrink art time for students, we heard from art teachers that by decreasing their time (e.g. planning time), they were not able to prepare to offer the same programming to students. Mckalyn Leclerc has heard from the community about foreign language. Would like to know specifically whether this is on the table. Would like to see floor plans for the buildings under these models. Asked for information about middle level endorsement for teachers.

Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that this is very teacher-driven; this has been discussed with the union and we are making room for teachers to acquire middle level endorsement. Amelia Contrada asked what services are we providing to mitigate some of the concerns around younger students joining the high school? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate spoke about how the spaces in the building are separate for middle and high school (upstairs and down). Amelia Contrada asked when can we expect to reap the benefits if we go forward with reconfiguration? (Through the lens of budget). Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that we are going to share more budget information at the next meeting. Natasha Eckart spoke regarding community schools - there are other funding sources available, and there would be funding opportunities coming into the district. Regarding expanding time outside of the teacher day: she spoke about a program at Northfield, "Bridges" which provided opportunities for students outside of the school day. Regarding science and global citizenship, she is disturbed that there are only 25 minutes a day allocated to global studies or science. Knowing that our fifth graders are assessed on science and only receiving 25 minutes of instruction, every other day. She spoke about her experience as a STEAM teacher and expressed that students are not receiving enough instruction in those areas. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that, regardless of reconfiguration, this is one of the topics of strategic planning. Flor Diaz Smith spoke about the need to consider before- and after-care. Also nursing time allocation. Also more information about athletic/ rec programs.

#### 4. Personnel

**4.1. Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in FTE; Michelle Ksepka moved to approve the following: Change in FTE: Kristina Snook (.3 Doty) for Library Media Specialist/Technology Integrationist, Marc Chamberlain (.2 Doty) for PE, Rick Agran (1.00 Berlin) for 5/6 classroom teacher; Long-Term Substitutes (24-25 School Year): Benton Larrow - covering the leave of an interventionist who will return to work in October; Change in Position (24-25): Jessie Dall (.8 Berlin/.2 Rumney) for Library Media Specialist/Technology Integrationist Seconded by Zach Sullivan, this motion carried unanimously.**

#### 5. Consent Agenda

**5.1. Approve Minutes of 8.21.24: Chris McVeigh moved to approve the minutes from August 21, 2024. Seconded by Mckalyn Leclerc. Discussion: Patrick Whelley pointed out that his comment was not included, about a variance in class sizes from year to year, causing the perceived enrollment to go down. He would like that reflected in the minutes. This motion carried unanimously, with noted amendment.**

#### 6. Future Agenda Items: September 16 - meeting, preceded by Configuration Committee meeting.

**6.1. Additional agenda item: (as discussed earlier) Response to request to affirm articles of agreement: Flor Diaz Smith stated that the articles of agreement bind us. We do not have to affirm them; they bind us. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that what she keeps hearing is the wish that we as a board would make a statement indicating that we are not in agreement with what is going forward in the legislature. Flor Diaz Smith stated that these are two separate issues. Chris McVeigh stated that there is a broader concern; a recent letter had**

asked that the board put forward to the community a proposed amendment to modify the Articles of Agreement so that one town cannot take a vote about closing a school, binding the entire district. He believes it is more of an ask that the board will assure that we will honor the articles of agreement. Michelle Ksepka stated that we are bound, if a petition comes to us, to consider it. Chris McVeigh stated that the board has the right to not consider such a petition. He stated that the Worcester residents are looking for assurance that the board will honor the Articles of Agreement around school closure. Ursula Stanley stated that there are many layers of protection before this (what some Worcester residents are anticipating from the board) were to happen. Patrick Whelley stated that it seems there is mistrust and that there is a perception, and a request that the board will assure that whatever is the outcome of this deliberation, if a school closure is decided and a town votes against the closure, then we do not intend to undermine the vote. Chris McVeigh suggested that the board discuss this further at the next board meeting, whether the board takes action on a resolution related to the assurance that has been requested above. He explained that a resolution is not a legally binding action.

7. **Public Comments – Time limit strictly enforced, see note:** Bekah Mandell asked, are there benefits, curriculum-wise, to keeping the current configuration. She would like to hear some of the “pros” of configuration as is, related to curriculum. She asked, we hear discussion about benefits that would come from reconfiguration; when will we realize these benefits. Would like to hear more specifics. She asked about certification/ endorsement for a library position. Leigh Garrity asked who is going to pay for middle school endorsement for teachers who seek this. How will you make that happen for people who may not have the time over the summer to do this? When hiring for the middle school positions, are the 6th grade teachers more likely to be reduced in force because it will likely take them longer to get middle school endorsement? Allen Gilbert stated that Chris McVeigh is correct in interpreting what he had asked in his letter to the board. He believes it would be a good idea that the board make a formal commitment to not attempt to override any town’s vote regarding the closure of a school. He stated that he believes there is a problem of mistrust and it would be important for the board to make this affirmation. Allen Gilbert spoke about some articles and research around school closures. He read a passage from one of the articles, describing some of the downsides of elementary school closures. Noah Weinstein reiterated that there is a feeling of mistrust, as residents in Worcester have indicated that, were the board to take action to reconfigure resulting in the closure of Doty School, they would not vote in favor. He feels it is important for the board to get ahead of that and affirm that they will honor the Articles of Agreement. Lisa Hanna asked if the board decides to move sixth graders to U-32 and Worcester votes to not close Doty, there would be a negative impact on the viability of Doty. She spoke about this through the lens of equity. She spoke about EQS and she has heard the board emphasize this at one point and then diminish it at another, depending on the intent of the board or administration. Caitlin Howansky asked the board to consider the impact on children and the ongoing upset of the idea of school closure, and she hopes that if the town of Worcester votes against school closure, that the board will honor the decision and let it lie and not continue to bring this to the table. Daniel Keeney thanked the administrators for taking this topic on and helping to lead this difficult conversation and work. He spoke about the semantics, using the word “reconfiguration” - can mean many things. Natasha Eckart stated that this is one of the better tones that this board has had around this conversation. She stated that, regarding trust in the community, she hopes that if the community

votes to not close their school that the board will remain committed to each community, to continue to support and provide resources, regardless of what the configuration looks like. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that his role as superintendent is to promise that every student at WCUUSD is the most important student. He thanked the board for bearing with him in his new tenure as superintendent, in these difficult conversations; he stated the importance that all of our voices are heard.

- 8. Adjourn: Chris McVeigh moved to adjourn at 9:20 p.m. Seconded by Julia Hewitt; the board adjourned.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary