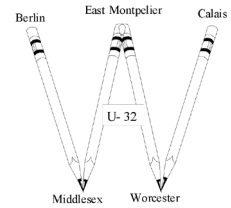


Washington Central Unified Union School District

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 9.25.24 5:15-6:30 PM In-Person/Virtual U-32 Rm 128/131 930 Gallison Hill Rd Montpelier, VT

Present: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate, Flor Diaz Smith, Ursula Stanley, Natasha Eckart, Chris McVeigh, Julia Hewitt, A, Elizabeth Brown, Jonathan Goddard, Jeanie Phillips, Daniel Keeney, Zach Sullivan, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Patrick Whelley, Chani Waterhouse, Amelia Contrada, Rachel S, Alex Wheeler, Ainsley, Alena Berube, Amy, Andrea Tucker, Austin Cate, Bekah Mandell, Buffy Langlois, Carrie Fitz, Chelsea, David Delcore, David Lawrence, Ellen Knoedler, Emilia Harlow, Emily A, Felicia Weeks, Hilary Paquet, Honi Bean Barrett, Isla Stalburg, Jeff Dean, K Joy, Laura Giammusso, Dell Waterhouse, Caitlin Howansky, Lila Richardson, Lisa Hanna, M McLane, M Purchase, Robert M, Trina, Adrian Wade-Keeney

1. **Call to Order: Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.** She introduced Jeannie Phillips, from Great Schools Partnership, who is going to facilitate tonight's meeting. Ms. Phillips reviewed norms for considering data; she framed what work has been done to date around this. She shared the criteria table that has been developed by the Configuration Committee and adopted by the board. This criterion was created with input from the community and is aligned with the core beliefs and Strategic Plan of the WCUUSD Board. Flor Diaz Smith provided a welcome greeting to the group. Jeannie Phillips pointed out the survey that is available for people to provide feedback online if preferred; the other options being chart paper in the room, to write on, and speaking publicly during this forum. She invited participation from the group.
2. **Community Forum: Configuration:** Andy Shapiro asked the board to consider a broader solution at the same time as considering WCUUSD's currently proposed reconfiguration options; he would like to think about the larger system, e.g. the Montpelier area. Bekah Mandell stated that the data is interesting and she was wondering whether there is the means to ask follow up

questions via email to the board. Jeannie noted that there is a survey to provide feedback. Honi Bean Barrett asked, who would make the decision about what to do with the Doty School building should the residents of Worcester vote to not close the school. Flor Diaz Smith stated that the administration would make the decision about how to utilize the building using the usual budgetary process. Honi Bean asked, for clarification, a vote to not close the school building does not guarantee that the current student population will remain at Doty School. Flor Diaz Smith - that is correct. Dell Waterhouse asked, if ballots were being mailed this week from town clerk offices, how would a ballot on this issue be included? Steven Dellinger Pate indicated that a separate ballot would have to be created; we are still within the timeframe to do so. Rachel Seelig stated that there are 122 signers to the letter that had been submitted in the past (in support of keeping the Calais building open). She also stated that Vermont is having a housing crisis. She spoke about Washington County's need for homes. She noted that each town plan needs to account for housing needs; she spoke about how this will affect longer term planning for the school building needs. She asked about the impact on staff turnover. She asked whether this issue would exacerbate the problem. She spoke about the Vermont Public article today regarding Act 46 outcomes. She would like a better understanding about why we believe closing schools will result in financial savings. She shared by reading aloud comments from other people who have not come to the meetings. Felicia Weeks (Calais) - is there somewhere that shows a financial breakdown regarding how financial savings will result from reconfiguration. She spoke about staffing shortages even at this time. She asked why we are not considering other solutions. Why is closing schools the only option we are considering? She spoke about research that indicates that smaller classes can be beneficial to students. Dell Waterhouse spoke about a recording from the Worcester Historical Society, with alums from Doty School over the years. She encouraged people to listen to understand the special value of small school experiences. Worcester Vermont Historical Society offers a series of videos. She spoke about "Curriculum of Place." She acknowledged that there is a point when schools are "too small," but the approximately 70 students at Doty have been the perfect size. She spoke about the value of multi-age classroom configuration. She disagrees with the stance in favor of single grade classrooms and she has never known the school board to take that stance. She stated that her biggest hope is that we can slow down, and not feel that this decision has to be made this year. She appreciates the work of the board; however, she feels that we need to slow down and consider other possibilities, e.g. the concept of "community schools." She stated that it is amazing how much the people of Worcester are coming together around this; she feels that people in the towns are just now beginning to understand what we are facing; we need more time. Lisa Hanna would have hoped that the questions being asked at this forum would be more specific. It would feel as if we are being heard if the questions had more specificity as the process moves along. Alena Berube, a resident of Calais, indicated that the resources in the town are limited when compared to neighboring towns, for example, childcare, transportation, high cost of living. Ainsley had concerns last year and continues to have the same, a year later. There is not a lot of information about cost savings, about what the configuration will look like. She spoke about the difficulty of moving staff around due to configuration. She expressed concerns around the timeframe. Could we allow more time; could this be more a thing of celebration and have time to process, and have time for grieving before making these big changes? She feels that this plan is short sighted and we should consider a more long-term plan. She stated, with the board as stewards of the community, would the board support putting a survey to the community and honor the input. Jeff Dean stated it seems like a lot of time has gone by with questions/

comments going in, but how are they taken account of, and how are they factored into the decision-making? He stated that though some of the comments are around “feelings,” some of the questions are around things that should have actual data to answer (e.g. cost savings, transportation, staffing/ retention, multi-age classroom efficacy). He stated that there seems to be a lot of rehashing things without coming back with answers. Bekah Mandell asked where to find the data. Flor Diaz Smith is going to paste the link into the chat from WCUUSD website. Honi Bean Barrett stated that it is scary right now to be a teacher in the towns where the schools may be closed. She stated that she read “Never Enough” about the importance of teaching kids their value in their community. She feels this is something that Doty does really well. She wants the Doty students to be more than a number. It is a lot for the students to have to handle. She stated that there is a known discrepancy between the elementary schools going to U-32. She stated there is some work to be done to focus on cost savings at U-32, especially in grades 11 and 12 where the enrollment at the school is declining due to other opportunities for students, rather than shifting the burden to our youngest. Noah Weinstein asked if either Worcester or Calais vote to keep their schools open, are there other towns in the district that would offer to close their schools instead. He stated that, when considering the data, there are other types of configurations. Does it feel different if it is your town with its school “on the chopping block”? Regarding the idea of “for the good of the whole,” are there other towns that are willing to consider this for the good of the whole? He spoke about vision: when we talk about expanded enrichment opportunities, beyond band, chorus, possible increase in language, what is the vision of how we will benefit from this proposed reconfiguration? Does not get a sense that this will be better for his child. Trina expressed concern about the group of fifth grade students that will possibly be moved to U-32 in the fall. She does not feel that this fifth grade group has had time to be prepared, emotionally and all around. For example, they are not aware that this Friday might be their last all-school hike at EMES. This particular class has had a rough school experience, partially due to COVID-19. Alex Wheeler stated as a parent of a child in the district, he feels that the board does not seem to have the best interest of our children in mind. He stated that Berlin Elementary has a great deal of issues; his child now attends EMES. He reiterated the difficulty of this cohort of students (again partially due to the experience of COVID-19). He asked the board to slow down. He stated that he was on a committee at Berlin before pandemic where students voted to have a new playground, which never came to fruition. He stated that he feels that the board is not listening to the concerns of parents, of staff, of the students who will be impacted. He stated that he and other parents have sent emails and asked questions and expressed concerns but not heard any responses. Again, he asked the board to slow down. Dell Waterhouse spoke regarding the concept of “vision.” In the early 80s, U-32 had a preschool program where high school students participated. She stated that this would be a great use of space at U-32 that would benefit families. She stated that it is important that we have early childhood opportunities available in each town. Lisa Hanna asked follow up questions from the data. Where will this be posted? Can there be clarification around “light blue” coding versus empty boxes (in the criteria table). Steven Dellinger Pate stated that we would work on the table to designate where data is not available versus where we do not have enough data. David Lawrence recognized that this is very difficult for everyone. Despite being from Middlesex, he would vote against the plan because it feels that it is moving too quickly. Let us take more time to slow it down and examine the problem and the financial implications more carefully. He noted that skyrocketing health care costs are significant. Chani Waterhouse: asked where to find the data? It is not on the webpage. This will be updated tomorrow. Caitlin Howansky echoed

that this feels like it is moving too quickly. There is a wealth of knowledge and ability on the board and in the administration and she believes we can come up with creative configurations across all of our schools that would enrich the full K-12 experience for all of our students. Central Vermont is a wonderful place to be, but we are not going to continue to attract families if we do not look far into the future. We owe it to our children to do our best for them and to create better for them, not to react. She stated that it is hard to think of children as connected to dollar amounts. Michelle Salvador had sent a letter to the board. There has been research around equity in school closures. (This data is recent as of June 2024). She stated that equity needs to be at the top of the conversation. While you might be reducing a budgetary burden, there are impacts on families where both parents work, families that are on the side of lower income. We are being short sided and shifting the impact and stress over to these families. She reiterated the desire to slow down the process. She spoke about the health values around the issue of “connectedness.” Noah Weinstein suggested, when you make three elementary school option “green” across the board, it seems dishonest. He feels that some of those should be “yellow” to be more realistic. He stated that all of the options have pros and cons. Honi Bean Barrett stated that the idea of having early childhood center at Berlin was very forward thinking. What if we considered a birth-3 space in all of our schools? That is community based and is solving a problem that we know exists. She clarified whether sixth grade moving to U-32 would be on the ballot. No - this would not be. Jeff Dean stated there are other reasons that the consolidation might be better, or not. It is very hard to make a decision right now with anything other than “intuition.” He would like to have solid data and cogent reasoning. Even though he is sympathetic to the idea of closing schools, he would need much more information before deciding. Again, he urged the board to slow down. Rachel noted that folks have asked many questions. She has not yet heard any answers. Does not feel prepared to vote because she has not felt that answers have been provided. She stated that there is usually some level of summary response when questions arise and she feels that this board has not offered that. She feels that the board is asking voters to vote blind (without data and without answers.) Flor Diaz Smith noted that the October 1 WCUUSD Board meeting will be held at Calais Elementary School (this location had been decided at the beginning of the year as part of a regular schedule of rotation among the schools) - and this is the meeting during which the board expects to take action. She thanked everyone for attending, and for his or her input. She shared that the survey is posted on the website and in the chat for tonight.

3. Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 6:29 by consensus.

Respectfully submitted, Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary

NOTE: To ensure the board has time to conduct its business, the board will adhere to a strict 1.5-minute public comment time limit per person. Microphones will be muted when time is up. If there is not enough time on the agenda for all members of the public wishing to comment at the beginning of the meeting, there is additional public comment at the end of the meeting.

WCUUSD Board Norms - Adopted November 18, 2020

- **Public input** –Notify the community about public forums and opportunities for public comment at board meetings.
- **Community involvement during regular meetings of the board** – Every meeting will include at least one opportunity for public comment. Public comment is an opportunity for board members to listen and ask clarifying questions. If a board member feels a concern raised in public comment warrants further board discussion, they may request that the issue be added to a future agenda.
- **Community dialogue** – The board may periodically schedule community forums that allow for dialogue, questions and answers from the board or the district leadership team.
- **Stay on time** – Start and end on time. The chair may appoint a timekeeper.
- **All voices will be heard** – Every board member gets a chance to speak. Some topics warrant having each board member speak in turn to ensure full representation.
- **Reflection** –To allow time for reflection, the chair and agenda steering committee will plan time for complex or contentious issues to be discussed at more than one meeting before the board votes, except where a decision is urgent.
- **Announcements in reports** – Announcements from the administration will appear in the reports and not as discussion items.
- **Role of the board** – At the end of each board meeting reflect on whether the board remained focused on its policy-making and oversight role during the meeting, rather than operational details that are the responsibility of leadership team.
- **Respect each other** – Listen, allow others to be heard, share concerns, assume positive intentions, be present, and celebrate successes.

AGENDA KEY

Agenda Section	Examples	Role/ Responsibility	Description
Call to Order	n/a	Board Chair or designee	Formal opening to meeting. Superintendent calls to order during annual reorganization
Public Comment			Opportunity for public comment on items not on the agenda. Board will adhere to a strict 1.5-minute public comment time limit per person. Microphones will be muted when time is up. If there is not enough time on the agenda for all members of the public wishing to comment at the beginning of the meeting, there is additional public comment at the end of the meeting.
Executive Session	Personnel Student Matter Negotiations		Only for discussion of items covered in VSA §313. Formal actions not taken in Executive Session
Reports to the Board	Superintendent/ COLT Student Report	Administration	Both regular/recurring reports and one-time reports happen here. One-time reports are determined by the Board work plan or requested by the will of the Board. Generally, reports invite clarifying questions but not formal discussion/action
Committee Reports	Finance Policy Education Quality	Board	Chair of the committee reports on substance of most recent committee meeting. Generally, reports invite clarifying questions; any discussion or action items would be listed in the respective section of the agenda
Discussion Items		Board with input from administration	Items on the agenda specifically for discussion of the Board. Chair can seek input from audience during discussions. Generally not intended for action (although nothing prevents the Board from taking an action)
Action Items	Personnel approvals	Board	Items formally on the agenda for Board action. Discussion can occur after a motion is on the table
Consent Agenda	Board Orders Minutes	Board	Designed for items that need proforma approval and/or are routine. Board acts on all items in the Consent agenda and does not discuss any item unless it is pulled out during Agenda Adjustments

