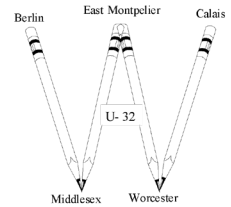


Washington Central Unified Union School District

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 Board Community Forum 12.4.24 6:15-9:15 PM Berlin Elementary School 372 Paine Turnpike North Berlin, VT

Board Members present: Flor Diaz Smith, Elizabeth Brown, Zach Sullivan, Daniel Keeney, Ursula Stanley, Chris McVeigh, Mckalyn Leclerc, Patrick Whelley, Natasha Eckart, Amelia Contrada, Michelle Ksepka, Kealy Sloan, Lei DeGroot, Julia Hewitt, Linnea Darrow

Administration: Superintendent Steven Dellinger-Pate, Principal Becca Taitistcheff, Jen Miller-Arsenault, Julia Pritchard, Susanne Gann, Celia Guggemos, Alicia Lyford, Jarrod Weiss, Karoline May, Lisa LaPlante, Gillian Fuqua

Others: April Davis, Noah Weinstein, Leigh Garrity, Allison Fayle, Amber Larrabee, Amy, Annie Ledue, Arlyn Bruccoli, David Hannigan, David Lawrence, Erica Zimmerman, Erin Mullaney, Honi Bean Barrett, Jen, Lauralea Curavoo, Larry Gilbert, Lila Richardson, Michael Sherwin, Robert M, Penny, Shelley Vermilya, Debra Bloom, ORCA Media

1. **Call to Order: Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:17 p.m.** She spoke about the shared responsibility of the board and she reviewed the core beliefs document that the board had created.
2. **Welcome**
 - 2.1. **Adjustments to the Agenda**
 - 2.2. **Reception of Guests**
 - 2.3. **Public Comments-Time limit strictly enforced, see note:** Honi Bean Barrett asked what increase in FTE for library and tech positions would be required to ensure that all students in WCUUSD are receiving equitable opportunities and programming, and so that teachers are provided equitable planning and professional development.

3. Presentations:

3.1. Math Program: Celia Guggemos presented a slide deck: *Focus on Mathematics, 2024-25, Berlin Elementary School*. She explained that, as last year the focus at each school was around presenting *Social Emotional Learning* to the board, this year the focus will be math. She invited questions or comments from the board.

Elizabeth Brown spoke about the discrepancy in outcomes for economically disadvantaged students as often they do not have their basic needs met. How are we sure their basic needs are met so that they can access the curriculum? She asked, looking at the discrepancy regarding gender, how does this change by grade level? She guesses that as they get older, the discrepancy might get wider, as STEM engagement overall is not as prevalent with females.

Zach Sullivan stated the math that our students are coming home with is different from what parents know. What are we doing to address this, so that parents understand how to help their students? Celia Guggemos spoke about parent information sessions such as open house/ info nights.

Chris McVeigh said it seems like economically disadvantaged students and special education students are performing equally. Is there some overlap in the population? He asked, what is the best resource that you have available that could have an exponential effect? Celia Guggemos answered the time for team meetings and professional development. She stated that intentionality about professional development as a district, and then investing in those resources, are important.

Linnea Darrow spoke, as a student, about the notion of time. She stated that the most helpful thing for her as a student has been to have the time to be able to talk with her teacher and ask for extra help.

Kealy Sloan stated that it is very helpful to see in the presentation the data that the district is specifically looking at. It helps with context for the larger picture, SU-wide.

3.2. Strategic Planning Update:

3.3. Superintendent Evaluation: Goals: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate had shared a written document with the board. He had indicated three goals within the Strategic Plan. He shared that, for each of the goals and action steps, he will track tasks within, and indicate when they are complete. He stated that his goals are the same as the goals within the Strategic Plan.

Linnea Darrow asked for specifics about how he intends to involve students in curriculum development. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate spoke about some of the student groups and opportunities to collaborate.

Daniel Keeney asked for a reminder of what the Curriculum Council does.

Jen Miller-Arsenault explained that this group does the bigger level curriculum work - currently the primary focus is supporting implementation of Act 173.

Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that he would like to have as much of the superintendent evaluation process in open session. He realizes there are things that will be discussed in Executive Session but he would like to limit that as much as possible.

4. Community Input/Dialogue

4.1. Budget Q & A: Flor Diaz Smith opened the floor to the public for a question and answer period around the budget.

Superintendent Dellinger-Pate explained that the ratio of services to students across our schools has been the starting point, for example, to address the concerns that were expressed earlier by Honi Bean Barrett. He stated that layers one and two of MTSS should be meeting approximately 80 per cent of student needs. Increasing our ability to provide this instruction means that we support more students. The additional supports are meant to support the 20% of students who are struggling. (These are general parameters: 80% general education; 20% special education)

Chris McVeigh asked, is there a safety valve for instances, for example, in a smaller school with smaller staff, when teachers do not have opportunities for teaming, professional development.

Lauralea Curavoo asked, with the budget starting from the ground up, how is this affecting current staffing and programming at each district. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate shared a document that showed proposed adjustments to FTE at each school.

Amber Larrabee expressed concerns about reducing school nurse positions. She shared the importance of the roles of school nurses.

Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that we continue to see a decline in enrollment in the schools and that the level of service that we are proposing will meet the needs of the students in each school. He stated that it is a very difficult balance. He shared that when there are students with significant health issues, the school nurse staffing pattern changes to accommodate them. He spoke about the idea of Community Schools - if we want our schools to be health centers, as well as schools with a school nurse, then that is a different structure and different budgeting consideration. He stated, for example, that could be a conversation with our towns or with outside agencies.

Amber Larrabee stated that allowing the school nurses to have a voice in the conversation would be helpful; this felt like a blindside.

Arlyn Bruccoli plans to share a letter with the board. She shared that what she believes is being lost for students is the technology integration position. She stated that considering one position that is called Librarian/ Tech Integrationist does not reflect that this position requires two separate endorsements. She stated that she believes we have more needs in our

schools despite declining enrollment. She stated that it would be hard to attract and retain qualified staff; she expressed concern that the students in our schools will not have the same opportunities that they have had in the past. In her letter, she shares some of the history, as she is not sure that everyone understands what is being lost. She stated that it helps if we are honest about what we are losing rather than taking the stance that we are making cuts but there will not be negative impacts/ losses.

Noah Weinstein spoke about the topic of board membership on the configuration committee. He reiterated his ask that the board members on the committee represent some diversity in perspective, and an open mind to looking at bigger and broader ideas.

Noah Weinstein asked for some specific information about where cuts were made to the budget draft. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate had shared a document in the board folder explaining reductions in FTE. Celia Guggemos also noted that at the district level, administrators were asked to take a close look at each budget line item, for example, supplies, field trips, etc., and make cuts where possible.

5. Board Operations

5.1. Board Learning: Improving School Board Effectiveness (Read Chapter 1): Flor Diaz Smith invited reflection from reading this chapter.

Daniel Keeney stated that he appreciates his role in committee work. For example, the work on the Ed Quality Committee.

Zach Sullivan stated that he struggled with the role of the board to request and study data in order to keep the administration accountable. How are board members to have the expertise to know what are appropriate goals regarding data?

Kealy Sloan stated that it is helpful for her to look at data at each school - this makes the data easier to digest and makes sense of the larger scope, WCUUSD-wide.

Elizabeth Brown stated that one of her learning styles is to gather information and get curious. She struggles with honoring her learning style without looking like she does not believe in or trust administrators. She is always trying to understand “why are we doing what we are doing?” and therefore asks questions out of curiosity. She reiterated Kealy Sloan’s statement that digesting data at the school level makes it easier to understand the larger picture data of WCUUSD-wide data.

Ursula Stanley stated that she believes as a board that there are times when we second-guess what the administration is bringing us, when they are bringing it based on our request. She believes we need to monitor ourselves, look to the administrators as experts, and consider their proposals.

Elizabeth Brown stated that it is our role to understand that. She values brainpower and thinks it is appropriate to ask, “Tell me more.” We are responsible for creating conditions for maximum learning, and part of that responsibility is asking questions for clarification.

Flor Diaz Smith asked board members to consider the table with information around balanced governance approach. Discussion followed as board members reflected on the topics and issues that arose from this reading.

- 5.2. Configuration Study Update and Next Steps:** Flor Diaz Smith explained that on December 18 the board would appoint Configuration Study members. Information has been shared on Front Porch Forum in the towns and community members are invited to express interest in being considered. Information will be shared with board members in advance of the December 18 meeting.

Natasha Eckart asked whether we know when the committee meetings will take place. This is unknown until the committee comes together, but a suggestion was made to inquire with people who express interest, what is their availability.

6. Consent Agenda

- 6.1. Approve Minutes of 11.20.24: Patrick Whelley moved to approve the minutes from November 20, 2024. Seconded by Kealy Sloan, this motion carried unanimously.**

7. Personnel

- 7.1. Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in FTE:**
(None tonight)

8. Future Agenda Items

- 8.1.** Flor Diaz Smith stated that the December 18 board meeting would likely be remote.
8.2. Jody Emerson (Central Vermont Career Center) - January meeting?
8.3. Patrick Whelley asked whether we could discuss as a board how to lobby our legislators about education-related issues. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate shared that the board typically invites legislators to attend a board meeting. Patrick Whelley suggested that we discuss in advance as a board some of the topics that we would like to discuss. Board members stated that having this meeting with legislators early - January or February - would be helpful.

- 9. Board Reflection:** Kealy Sloan stated that the open office hours at each of the schools are an amazing opportunity and she thanked Superintendent Dellinger-Pate for creating this opportunity. He noted that on the second round of open office hours, he would like to invite board members to attend as well. Daniel Keeney expressed disappointment that the board was not given an opportunity to engage in a budget discussion tonight.

- 10. Public Comment:** Lila Richardson expressed appreciation for the open office hour opportunities for community engagement. She also stated that having the Q&A period during the board meeting has been helpful and she feels that it makes the community feel more heard. She stated that she feels giving the meeting the title “Community Forum” was misleading, as there was a

short period of public comment/ Q&A, but there was other board business and overall this was not a community forum based on our previous experiences.

Debra Bloom asked for clarification around bus routes in Worcester. Flor Diaz Smith stated that we continue to add information to the Q&A document, which is an ongoing work in program.

11. Adjourn: Michelle Ksepka moved to adjourn at 9:02 p.m. Seconded by Ursula Stanley, this motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary