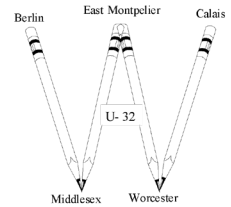


Washington Central Unified Union School District

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 Meeting
12.18.24 6:15-9:15 PM
(Virtual Only)
Central Office
1130 Gallison Hill Rd
Montpelier, VT**

Present: Board Members: Flor Diaz Smith, Elizabeth Brown, Zach Sullivan, Daniel Keeney, Ursula Stanley, Chris McVeigh, Mckalyn Leclerc, Patrick Whelley, Natasha Eckart, Michelle Ksepka, Lei DeGroot (Student Rep.), Julia Hewitt, Linnea Darrow (Student Rep.), Jonathan Goddard, Amelia Contrada

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

Others: April Davis, Allison Fayle, David Lawrence, Erin Mullaney, Honi Bean Barrett, Lila Richardson, Robert M, ORCA Media, Adam Rosen, Anya Skibbie, Caitlin Howansky, Deb Bloom, Matt Degroot, Ellen Knoedler, Michael Duane, Noah Weinstein, Dell Waterhouse, Jody Emerson

- 1. Call to Order: Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:18 p.m.**
- 2. Welcome:** Flor Diaz Smith welcomed everyone who was present and thanked them for their engagement in the budget discussions.
 - 2.1. Adjustments to the Agenda: (none)**
 - 2.2. Reception of Guests:**
 - 2.3. Public Comments-Time limit strictly enforced, see note :**
- 3. Presentation**
 - 3.1. CVCC Budget Presentation (Jody Emerson):** (please see below: 5.4)
 - 3.2. Budget Presentation:** Superintendent Dellinger-Pate and Business Manager Susanne Gann presented a slide deck overview of this iteration of the budget draft.
 - 3.2.1. Budget Survey Feedback:** Questions about staffing schools were addressed in this budget presentation; this was a question that came up in the community survey.

Superintendent Dellinger-Pate also spoke about staffing at Central Office, in response to questions in the survey. He stated that the greatest reduction in personnel is in para-educator services. He spoke about attrition contributing to this, as well as some variation in the provision of services to students based on student needs and systems of support in the schools. Special education spending increased to the same degree that overall spending increased. Flor Diaz Smith spoke about multiple pathways for students, and trade centers being part of that offering.

3.2.2. Community Q & A:

Deborah Bloom (Worcester) expressed appreciation for the superintendent's statement about nursing in the schools - his openness to ask how to structure this differently; look outside for more resources. She stated that we live in a community full of resources. How do we integrate those systems as well? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that we continue to find the balance of what we can afford with what we need.

Noah Weinstein (Worcester) stated that he appreciates how this new budget is structured. He asked about CLA (Common Level of Appraisal) and why is it projected that the tax rate for some towns will go up so significantly. This is outside of the purview of the board. Our communities need to understand this. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that Vermont Public had created a video: "How does Vermont fund its schools?" This is a helpful resource to help explain.

Zach Sullivan stated that because property taxes go into one pool that is shared, it is critical that properties are appraised fairly and accurately. He spoke about the difference between appraisals before COVID-19 and now - and the lag in property appraisals. He spoke about the adjustment of the entire grand list. He spoke about the town of Worcester having fewer properties and being less stable because, for example, one property can have an appraisal of a million dollars, which affects the entire town list.

Deborah Bloom asked for clarification around when we look at the fluctuation of the tax rate, does that not account for income adjustments? Susanne Gann stated that there is not income sensitivity wrapped into this factor.

Zach Sullivan stated that the reappraisal would have a big impact on published tax rate. The real value of homes is significantly higher than the old appraisals. The actual number of dollars is unlikely to change a great deal. This is because the CLA is a factor.

Flor Diaz Smith shared an overview from the data from surveys. She had used AI to help create this document. She invited questions or feedback from board members. She spoke about the themes of quality, equity, and sustainability through the lens of the data that surveys provided.

Zach stated there were comments about wanting to understand classroom configurations, nursing, counseling, minutes of instruction, etc. He stated that it is important to communicate regarding the education that we provide based on the budget. What does this actually look like to students? Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that this is why it is important to continue to talk about our framework - e.g., class size, EQS (Education Quality Standards) etc.

3.2.3. Board Feedback on FY 26 Budget Draft: Chris McVeigh expressed his concern that we are cutting positions that are crucial for support and have an exponential impact on students and staff. He asked about other support services that have not been cut: the board (an increase of \$77K in the purchase of professional services). This amount has not been the norm; he advocated for reducing that. What is the cost of the Equity Scholar in Residence contract? This has become part of the budget over the years and the board has not had a voice in it from year to year. Steven Dellinger Pate spoke about the board's interest in hiring an outside consultant regarding configuration. He stated that the strategic plan goals directly relate to the Equity Scholar in Residence position. Chris McVeigh stated that ultimately we are making policy decisions when we, for example, reduce student support positions and retain Equity Scholar in Residence positions.

Daniel Keeney asked, regarding the U-32 reductions, what the area of the classroom teacher position proposed is to be reduced. He asked if office assistants and administrative assistants are synonymous. He asked for more details on what is being cut and how we adjust.

Principal Tatistcheff stated that the reduction is fluid because we are still waiting for students to express their interest in registration for class offerings. The question is how to maintain choice while also right-sizing?

Daniel Keeney asked, how do we rectify that under our CBA to notify staff of reduction? Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that once the board adopts the budget we are required to notify the board of potential RIFs and notify staff by a certain date in March.

Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that for the purpose of this budget discussion there is no difference between office assistants and administrative assistants.

Natasha Eckart stated that there is an obligation by law for school systems to provide programs to address equity; this directly correlates to the Equity Scholar position. She asked, in the feedback there were questions about cuts to administration, was there any consideration about cutting the number of administrators? She asked about Athletic Director, Athletic Trainer and a teaching position - is there the possibility of combining as has been done in the past.

Steven Dellinger-Pate stated there was nothing that was "untouchable" in these discussions (except positions that are required by law). He stated that the

requirements for reporting, etc. have changed over the years. He stated that our current structure requires the current administrative positions.

Lei DeGroot asked about the possibility of a particular teacher being reduced in staff. He stated that there are rumors among students about what sections would be cut, or what offerings will be cut. Can students know this, to put the rumors to rest?

Principal Tatistcheff shared that some of the details at this time are not to be shared widely; the staff that could potentially be affected are made aware but this is still an unknown. She spoke about Student Council meeting earlier today and having a facilitated discussion about budget development. The Student Council will present to the board at the January board meeting.

Daniel Keeney asked for clarification about new models of service delivery (e.g., nursing.) He asked, what is the timeline for developing an alternative approach to this service delivery? He stated that he continues to be perplexed by how a school can be served by a part-time nurse position. At what point will we have more detail?

Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that nursing is not the only consideration - for example, food service, Pre-K programs, and community connections are all topics of discussion in configuration considerations. He stated that he would share a timeline with the board about the development of these options.

Julia Hewitt asked for more specific information about the board services, and she wondered if there is a way to reduce that line overall, to affect the budget to some degree. Some discussion followed for example, the board retreat over the summer at Trapp Family Lodge.

Elizabeth Brown echoed Daniel Keeney's request to have a better understanding of how schools will "pivot" with changes in nursing staff or counseling. She expressed worry of overburdening other staff in the school. She stated- about the concept of equity - that having a nurse once a week at a school causes concerns around continuity and basic health needs. This causes her to wonder how students at one school experience equity in access to services, as do students at another school.

Lei DeGroot asked does the board or the district have a definition of "equity" especially when considering this budget process. Can this be shared? Flor Diaz Smith stated that for the purpose of this presentation we used the Agency of Education's definition of equity; however, we also have a WCUUSD Equity Policy.

Lei DeGroot asked for clarification on one of the lines in the budget around teacher training. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that this increase is due to grant monies no longer covering a position for teacher coaching.

Zach Sullivan stated that having a good understanding of how services will be provided (for example, in the nursing field) would be critical for all.

Daniel Keeney stated that it would be helpful to hear from another school district who uses one of these alternative models of service delivery and to hear from staff and or families from said district. He suggested, regarding the line in the budget around board expenses, could the board wait and decide on spending that money (for a consultant) as they see fit further down the road, and if so, authorize the use of fund balance?

Elizabeth Brown asked if we had gotten creative with positions where a staff member has multiple endorsements. Steven Dellinger-Pate provided some examples.

Susanne Gann stated that the budget is based on what was utilized last year, as well as what the board has discussed as the desired use of professional services. (Regarding budgeted board expenses).

Chris McVeigh asked about the Technology Director position. He asked whether there was a difference between the Director of Facilities (WCUUSD) and the Director of Buildings and Grounds (U-32). (There is.)

Amelia Contrada expressed that Arlyn Bruccoli's letter was poignant and she feels that her perspective is powerful. Amelia spoke about the board's policy work around teaching and learning about controversial issues, and during this time of AI, deep fakes, online information, etc., would we consider reinstating this position?

Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that this is an important topic of discussion and that this falls under the purview of the Director of Technology. This is also an area of development; we do not have an answer but this is ongoing work.

4. Reports

- 4.1. **Superintendent/COLT Report:** Superintendent Dellinger-Pate provided a written report. He stated that the Finance Department has been very busy, as has Human Resources as it is currently open enrollment period.
- 4.2. **Principal Report:** Principals provided a written report. Karoline May spoke briefly about work at Rumney around Humanity and Justice.
- 4.3. **Student Report:** Lei DeGroot provided a brief update of student happenings. Zach Sullivan asked about the joint venture with Montpelier High School (around the show Hadestown). Lei DeGroot will report on this, to the board in January.
- 4.4. **Central VT Career Center Report:** Jody Emerson presented CVCC Budget Overview. She invited questions from board members.

Natasha Eckart asked, regarding EQS, how does this affect CVCC programming? Jody stated that CVCC does work toward EQS; she spoke about some of the efforts, as well as some of the challenges, for example, finding time by possibly extending student days, to allow for affinity group opportunities.

Daniel Keeney stated that we embed in our budget the expense of sending students to the career center. He asked whether our current budget includes these updated numbers. Susanne Gann stated that it does not yet.

Daniel Keeney asked whether we could have some discussion around the process for determining a new career center location. Jody Emerson provided an overview; a site has been selected for exploration and a bond vote will hypothetically occur in 2025 or 2026. The exploration process is still underway.

4.5. VSBA Report: Flor Diaz Smith reminded the board that they have received a survey; she asked them to participate.

5. Board Operations

5.1. Approve Participation in Winooski Valley School Choice Lottery: Ursula Stanley moved that WCUUSD participate in the Winooski Valley School Choice Lottery. Seconded by Zach Sullivan, this motion carried unanimously.

5.2. FY 26 Budget Draft Next Steps: In January, the board will have updated numbers and information for the next budget draft consideration; the expectation is that the board will vote on the budget at the second meeting in January.

5.3. Mailing Ballots: Berlin and Middlesex did not approve mailing ballots, so we will include information on our postcard mailing for people to request a ballot by mail if they desire but we will not be mailing ballots as a whole. All towns in WCUUSD need to be approved.

5.4. Configuration Committee Appointments

5.4.1. Executive Session: Appointment of Configuration Committee Members: At 8:58, Julia Hewitt moved to go into Executive Session. Seconded by Zach Sullivan, this motion carried unanimously. At 9:30, the board came out of Executive Session by consensus. Diane Nichols-Fleming moved to appoint the following to the Configuration Committee Daisy Scarzello, Middlesex, Matthew DeGroot, Worcester, Andrew Shapiro, East Montpelier, Shannon Miller, Berlin, Anna Matheson, and Calais. Seconded by Michelle Ksepka, this motion carried unanimously. The board will finalize appointments of board members and administrators at the January board meeting.

6. Ed Quality Update

6.1. Post-Secondary Outcomes: Ursula Stanley provided a written update. She provided an overview. She invited questions, comments, and feedback from board members.

Zach Sullivan shared that we have a significant number of students attending early college. He stated that there could be some issues around equity when it comes to opting for early college versus participating in advanced classes on the school campus.

Dan Keeney stated that the committee had a very rich conversation about this, with engagement from administration.

Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that she would like to understand data from students about their experiences post-high school after having taken AP courses.

Amelia Contrada spoke about the question of how to diversify the group of students who participate in AP courses.

Some discussion followed around Student Services offering services to students beyond graduation (the term “lifetime” was used.) Chris McVeigh suggested inviting Lisa LaPlante to a Policy Committee meeting so that the committee can discuss this through the lens of policy.

7. Finance Committee

7.1. Fund Balance Projections - Enterprise Funds: Susanne Gann had provided information about the Enterprise Funds.

8. Policy Committee: Chris McVeigh spoke about the challenge of having a quorum for committee meetings. Amelia Contrada reminded him of a conversation with previous Superintendent Roy that a quorum is not needed for a committee meeting.

8.1. First Readings:

8.1.1. F20 Fiscal Management & General Fiscal Accountability: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate suggested eliminating #6 and #8 from this policy. The policy committee will consider suggested edits and bring this back to the board.

8.1.2. D4 Title I Comparability: Dan Keeney moved to approve D4 as presented. Seconded by Amelia Contrada, this motion carried unanimously

8.1.3. Prevention of Conflict of Interest in Procurement: This policy will come back to the board for further discussion. Susanne Gann stated that she would join the Policy Committee to clarify some issues around this.

8.2. Second Reading & Adoption :

8.2.1. F45 Fundraising: Ursula Stanley moved to approve this policy as written. Seconded by Elizabeth Brown; this motion carried unanimously.

9. Personnel

9.1. Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in FTE: Ursula Stanley moved to approve New Hire (for 24-25 school year) Kathryn Saunders - School Nurse 1.0 FTE - Calais Elementary. Seconded by Dan Keeney, this motion carried unanimously. Ursula Stanley moved to approve Long-Term Substitute (24-25 School Year) Robin Gannon – LTS Special Educator .8 FTE– Berlin Elementary Seconded by Patrick Whelley, this motion carried unanimously.

10. Consent Agenda

10.1. Approve Minutes of 12.4.24: Chris McVeigh moved to approve the minutes of December 4, 2024. Seconded by Dan Keeney; this motion carried unanimously.

10.2. Approve Board Orders: Ursula Stanley moved to approve the board orders in the total amount \$1,610,920.32. Seconded by Elizabeth Brown, this motion carried unanimously.

11. Future Agenda Items

11.1. Board Evaluation

12. Board Reflection: Jonathan Goddard announced that he is going to resign from his position at the end of this year. He thanked the board for their dedication and hard work. Flor Diaz Smith thanked him for his hard work and service.

Natasha Eckart stated that she would like to see the board take some stance on school funding separate from VSBA. How can we as a singular board, separate from VSBA, do some work around education funding and take stances that are more in support of our administrators and teachers?

Zach Sullivan shared from a constituent who felt she could not speak up at a board meeting. She indicated that, for example, around the topic of equity, it is difficult to state an opinion and not feel uncomfortable in the group. It is difficult to disagree with neighbors or others in the meetings. Flor Diaz Smith spoke about continuing to try to establish a climate where this open dialogue is encouraged.

Chris McVeigh stated that he hopes we will take further steps to address the concerns that were expressed. What mechanism can we create so that we as a board can be sure to address these issues? What environment can we create so that everyone feels free to speak up at meetings?

Elizabeth Brown stated that it is more about access and outlets - how can members share and feel like their voices are heard?

13. Public Comment: Hannah Brown spoke about the cuts in nursing positions. She shared an experience her daughter had at school, coming home at the end of the day being very sick and very dehydrated, with strep. A school nurse was not on duty that day. She stated that there are real safety consequences that need to be considered. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate noted that he would follow up with her about this.

Flor Diaz Smith will send an email to board members to approve the board orders remotely.

14. Adjourn: Zach Sullivan moved; Michelle Ksepka seconded, to adjourn at 10:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary