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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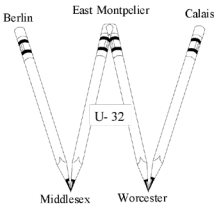

Washington Central Unified Union School Board Meeting
1.22.25 6:15-9:15 PM
In-Person and Virtual
U-32
930 Gallison Hill Rd
Montpelier, VT

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

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

(Also online participants)

1. **Call to Order: Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:20 p.m.** She noted that there are about 25 participants online tonight.

2. **Welcome:** Flor Diaz Smith reflected on the message of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She encouraged board members to ground themselves in the Core Beliefs of the board and to focus on approving a responsible budget.
   2.1. **Adjustments to the Agenda:** no adjustments
   2.2. Reception of Guests
   2.3. Public Comments-*Time limit strictly enforced, see note*: (no public comments at this time)

3. **Presentation**
   3.1. Final Budget Presentation: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate introduced this slide deck, presenting the final version of the budget.
      3.1.1. Community Q & A: Hannah Brown asked for clarification around nursing staffing at Rumney. Steven Dellinger-Pate explained that this would reflect 0.6 FTE, which is three days per week and this, is based on the number of students at the school. Hannah Brown had expressed concerns about this part time nurse availability based on a personal experience with her children. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate spoke about the

school nurse at Calais School as well, and noted that in April and May there would be a plan/ system in place for nursing services across the district so that students have access as much as possible, and access to a nurse for consulting.

3.1.2. Board Questions on FY 26 Budget: Julia Hewitt asked Superintendent Dellinger-Pate whether he is able to indicate which staffing cuts are by attrition. He stated that they do not know retirements this early, but are also considering positions that remain unfilled, for example, one-year positions. He stated that at this time there might be two reductions in force in teaching positions; this is not certain yet.

Lei DeGroot asked Susanne Gann why Worcester's CLA is down but estimated property tax total goes up. She explained that the CLA dropping actually drives tax rates up. Zach Sullivan explained CLA and its effect on tax rates.
Patrick Whelley asked for some clarification around the excess spending threshold. Susanne Gann explained.

Daniel Keeney asked about services that are shifting to centralized management; he asked if there is a projection of any savings in this budget from this. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that these have not been shifted to centralized - they had already been centralized. Susanne Gann stated that we do expect some savings in centralizing food service but we do not know enough just yet about how this will show itself.

Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that it would be important to share information about income sensitivity. Our residents must know this, regardless of whether or not we pass our budget. She asked how we monitor the impact(s) of our budget. As a board, how do we monitor the impact of the ripple effects? (E.g. more student needs, more revenue) Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that education quality is one of the first places that we look, as well as collecting common data across our schools (for example, nursing care). We should be looking at this data at least a couple of times a year. He stated that transportation is one of the areas that it will be important to consider at least a couple of times a year. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that, for example, on the Ed Quality Committee she asks the question about advanced placement courses and is not sure we are looking at the impact of the ripple effect.

Chris McVeigh asked what "buying local" means. (Related to food service) Susanne Gann explained briefly but stated that our new food service director will have more insight and more input on tracking data. Chris McVeigh asked for a definition of "buying local."

Daniel Keeney asked for clarification around, for example, being flexible in meeting the changing needs of our students. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate spoke about using general fund or as needed, fund balance; these are updates to the board or in some cases action taken by the board.

Patrick Whelley asked for clarification around layers of services - where are nursing services and transportation in these layers?
Superintendent Dellinger-Pate clarified MTSS (multi-tiered systems of support).

Lei DeGroot asked for clarification on the decrease in revenues. Susanne Gann explained this is primarily due to a decrease in the use of fund balance toward revenue.

Kealy Sloan asked for some more detail about covering library and tech needs in each school. Steven Dellinger-Pate explained that all of our students at the elementary schools would receive the same level of library and tech services that they are receiving this year. He stated that the specifics of staffing and programming are still under consideration for the coming year. He stated that this is an area of programming - level of programming - that he would like to discuss for the coming years. Kealy Sloan asked for some clarification about tech integrationists. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate explained.

Chris McVeigh asked whether this budget includes what we would consider a tech integrationist at each school. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that we combined these at some point in our budgeting so it is not delineated and it is work that we need to do in the future. Chris McVeigh asked for clarification around the role of a tech integrationist versus a librarian.

Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that Ed Quality standards inform this and it would be helpful to revisit.

Mckalyn Leclerc asked for clarification that indeed the library and tech services at each school are equitable. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that per student, they are receiving equitable library and tech services.

Daniel Keeney asked whether access to health education is equitable across the district - and do we have a plan to create a district-wide policy, if not?

Alicia Lyford stated that this budget reflects equitable services in health across the schools. How it would be delivered has not been determined yet. Karoline May stated that the budget has equitable services at each school but it has in the past come down to hiring, and who we receive as candidates. Amelia Contrada asked for clarification - what is the procedure for making choices around reduction in force? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that RIF is determined by enrollment, and what teachers are reduced is determined by the contracted agreement.

4. **Reports**
   - **4.1. Superintendent/ Central Office Leadership Team (COLT) Report:** Superintendent Dellinger-Pate had provided a written report. He highlighted both Arlyn Bruccoli's and Randy Brown's recent awards.
   - **4.2. Principal Report:** District principals provided an overview of the written Principal Report.
   - **4.3. Student Report:** Linnea Darrow and Lei DeGroot shared student reports. Linnea spoke about J-term, which is underway at this time. Natasha Eckart spoke about the Pilot program and the incredible work that the students are doing. She encouraged board members to check out the work of students in this program.

4.4. Central VT Career Center Report: Flor Diaz Smith shared specific information from a teacher at CVCC about teaching hair styling for a diversity of hair textures. Patrick Whelley reported that the CVCC is working on its annual report at this time. Flor Diaz Smith stated that there is a position on the board for CVCC and invited WCUUSD community members to consider.

4.5. VSBA Report: Flor Diaz Smith reminded board members to check their weekly email updates from VSBA.

5. Board Operations

5.1. Approve Budget FY 26:

5.2. Final Budget Warning: Flor Diaz Smith read aloud the language for the final budget warning. **Julia Hewitt moved to approve the final budget warning, Article 6, as presented.** ***ARTICLE 6. Shall the voters of the Washington Central Unified Union School District approve the school board to expend $43,225,002, which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? It is estimated that this proposed budget if approved, will result in education spending of $15,272 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is 6.20% higher than spending for the current year.*** **Amelia Contrada seconded.** Discussion: Chris McVeigh stated that he is supportive of the amount that is being approved by the board**. Chris moved to amend the motion, to reallocate some of the funding so that we are responding to our community's concerns around nursing and library/ media. Specifically, at Calais, increase nursing by 0.3FTE and increase library media by 0.3FTE; at Doty, increase library media by 0.3FTE, and at Rumney increase nursing by 0.2FTE and increase library media by 0.4FTE. He would also propose to reduce the board's allocation by half, and that we reduce the director of grounds personnel at U-32.** With that, we would stay within the parameters of the total budgeted amount as presented. He stated that as a board we reflect the community values and are representatives of our community, and have heard a great deal of concern from our community about these positions. He asks that if the budget is voted "yes," then the allocation be respected. He stated that this would make the starving a little less hungry. Flor Diaz Smith stated that it is not fair representation to say that the board does not reflect the values of the community. She would like to make clear that we have heard all of our community, not just the vocal minority. Chris McVeigh stated that he feels sometimes with budgeting, there are different focuses, and when we hear, e.g. about nursing through the lens of safety issues, and the ripple effect of reducing library media, he feels this is a tiny adjustment that would have exponential effects. Flor Diaz Smith invited discussion from board members about the motion to approve the budget warning.

Zach Sullivan asked, given all the discussion we have had to date, what is the expertise that is brought to the table to inform us to overrule the expertise of the administration?

Chris McVeigh stated that we have heard from our constituents and we have a duty to reflect their values. Why do we have all of the community forums if we are not going to honor what the community brings to us and we are just going to rubber stamp what the administration brings to us?

Zach Sullivan asked, for example, why is it that we do not need the grounds position? Chris McVeigh stated that the positions he proposes increasing would have an exponential effect on students. The cuts being proposed affect our smallest schools - Doty and Calais - that came into our union without debt and they are bearing the burden of being cut. There is an undercurrent that we are not talking about, that is inequitable.

Kealy Sloan stated that we just heard from our administrators about their planning for these positions. This is very last minute; she agrees with Zach Sullivan on this.

Ursula Stanley stated that we would be doing this blindly. The principals were asked how to allocate funds and this arbitrarily undermined what the administrators worked hard to propose.

Daniel Keeney stated that discussing this in an open forum is appropriate; he stated that he feels ambivalent and would not support the amendment for the same reasons that other board members have brought up. He stated that he would support decreasing the board allocation of funds by half as Mr. McVeigh had proposed. He noted that it bears repeating that the district can step in and add positions as the need arises. This budget is supposed to reflect the need, and the expertise of the administration has indicated that it does. If this is a miscalculation when put into practice then we together can come back and address the needs.

Michelle Ksepka supports the budget as it is, and feels it is last minute to be making these changes.

Elizabeth Brown has shared concerns in the past about the allocation of staff based on population. She referred to the letter that the board had received from one of the U-32 nurses, expressing concern about this proposal. She shared that the administrative assistant and the principal at Calais have been in the position to cover for a nurse on many occasions. She expressed concerns about low accessibility to nurse services. She feels it will be important to monitor how this rolls out to be sure we are meeting the needs.

Julia Hewitt stated that there is no statute of limitations on creative solutions to a problem. She stated that she was uncomfortable with the tone and the tenor of the conversation and invited everyone to take some breaths and be mindful of our speech and our tone as we discussed this.

Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that she recalls talking about the grounds position in past meetings and was not clear that it was reinstated. Susanne Gann spoke about a COLT report addressing this at a past meeting. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that this is a dramatic change and she would have liked to have this highlighted when it is brought to the board. Daniel Keeney stated that, with Roberts Rules, he is not comfortable with where we are at this time. He stated that Chris McVeigh had moved to amend and he believes we are allowed to address the amendment. **Patrick Whelley seconded the amendment by Chris McVeigh.**

Patrick Whelley asked whether there is a minimum to the ratio for a school nurse position. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that there is no minimum; we are provided a ratio.

Amelia Contrada asked for more specific information about the position of the ground's position. Susanne Gann stated that the position is the Director of Building and Grounds at U-32. She also noted that the Director of Facilities is going to take on the role of project manager, and not having the Director of Building and Grounds would impose on the Director of Facilities' ability to take on that role. Discussion followed around the responsibilities of the Director of Building and Grounds at U-32.

Flor Diaz Smith spoke about the funds in the budget that fall under board allocation, for example, funding consultants.

Daniel Keeney stated that the reason he supports that aspect of the amendment is that it is a big increase in what has been allocated from past years. He would prefer to individually authorize the use of the fund balance to pay for consultants as the need arises.

Ursula Stanley asked Susanne Gann if the Director of Building and Grounds position was decreased, would it affect honoring employees' contracts for taking time off, etc. Susanne Gann stated that this would not affect their contracts, as they would take time off; it would affect the upkeep of the building. She also noted that we are speaking specifically about a position right now that has not been discussed with the employee, so this is unfortunate; this was not the intention.

Ursula Stanley spoke about governance and the role of the board. It is our responsibility to approve the overall amount; asking the administration to abide by certain allocations is not within our jurisdiction.

Flor Diaz Smith stated that she is uncomfortable with talking specifically about this position at this time; we lack the knowledge to single out this particular position; we do not have an idea about the specific roles of the facilities, building, and maintenance positions.

Zach Sullivan spoke about the impact that this type of discussion has on staff. He spoke from personal experience about the value of these positions.

Elizabeth Brown asked generally, when we talk about reallocating or when a need arises; can you give a general example? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate spoke about, for example, adding a kindergarten teacher when we had more students than anticipated. Generally, we cover this from the general fund, and from there we come to board as needed to ask for authority to take from the fund balance.

Amelia Contrada asked whether we could consider approving the budget as it stands, knowing that we will monitor in an ongoing way and make improvements or changes in staff allocation as needed.

Lei DeGroot expressed appreciation that the board can have such discussions, taking into consideration feedback from our communities.

A vote was called on the amendment. Two in favor. The majority not in favor. This amendment failed. A vote was called on the original motion/ warning language. This motion carried unanimously.

A**pprove Warning: Ursula Stanley moved to approve the warning as presented. Seconded by Diane Nichols-Fleming.** Discussion: Zach Sullivan noted that at the top of the warning, it notes articles 1 through 8, but it should read one through nine. This correction will be made. Ursula Stanley noted that at a previous meeting, it had been raised to consider increasing the clerk's salary and we were going to get more information about this. Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that this salary had been recently increased, and at this time, it is thought an increase is not warranted. (This after discussion with the clerk.) **This motion carried unanimously, with noted edits (articles 1 through 9).**

Approve Clerk/Treasurer Term Article 9 (this is reflected in the above action)

5.3. Budget Communication: Flor Diaz Smith shared that a trifold will be mailed; a video will be created in short segments to explain the budget. She stated that the board has discussed, as in the past, to provide opportunities in each community for people to speak with board members.

Daniel Keeney asked whether we should think about co-hosting a budget information forum with the U-32 Student Government. He stated that he has concerns about people not understanding that they can have access to an absentee ballot; he would like the mailed trifold to offer this information.

Lei DeGroot had spoken earlier with a Student Council representative about the possibility of having a budget forum.

Patrick Whelley asked what forms of social media we would use to communicate about the budget. Flor Diaz Smith stated that we use Instagram, Facebook, our webpage, and Front Porch Forum.

Flor Diaz Smith, Kealy Sloan, and Elizabeth Brown will work on an update to summarize this meeting to share on social media. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate will create a very short video to share to provide an overview.

5.4. Update for the Configuration Committee: Flor Diaz Smith provided an update from the committee meeting that occurred earlier this evening. She briefly reviewed the agenda; no big decisions were made today - the work is underway and she will continue to report to the board.

5.5. Legislative Breakfast: February 11, 2025 at Berlin Elementary School.

6. Finance Committee

6.1. Rumney EV Charger: Flor Diaz Smith stated that this is now in the hands of the Policy Committee; she had provided a brief written report. Patrick Whelley asked whether we could charge for the EV Charger, which is currently installed. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that we would need to change carriers in order to put that into place, and this will be part of the work of the Policy Committee.

7. **Policy Committee**
   7.1. **Second Reading: F20 Fiscal Management and General Financial Accountability:** This updated policy had been provided for the board's consideration. **Patrick Whelley moved to approve this policy as presented. Seconded by Kealy Sloan, this motion carried unanimously.**

8. **Negotiations Committee**
   8.1. **Matrix Review Update:** Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that we are working on this, as agreed, as next year we enter into negotiations and had agreed to address the matrix in the meantime. Patrick Whelley asked whether he could join this committee. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that on the matrix review subgroup, there are two board members and two union members. Flor Diaz Smith noted that in March we would be having board reorganization.

9. **Transportation Committee**
   9.1. **Affirm Appointments to Committee/Next Steps: Ursula Stanley moved to appoint Michelle Ksepka and Patrick Whelley. Seconded by Natasha Eckart, this motion carried unanimously.**

10. **Personnel:** None

11. **Consent Agenda**
   11.1. **Approve Minutes of 1.8.25: Zach Sullivan moved to approve the minutes of January 8, 2025. Seconded by Keely Sloan, this motion carried unanimously.**
   11.2. **Approve Board Orders: Patrick Whelley moved to approve the following board orders:**
   12-19-24 to 1-22-25: 1,585,533.90
   12-19-24 to 1-22-25 $15,955.66
   11-21-24 to 12-17-24 $10,566.82 Total: $1,612,056.38
   Seconded by Kealy Sloan, this motion carried unanimously.

12. **Future Agenda Items**
   12.1. Board Evaluation
   12.2. Advocating as a Board (beginning with Legislative Breakfast - Feb 11, 7:30 - 8:30 a.m.)Natasha Eckart asked what is meant by "advocating" - is this advocating as a board or advocating individually? There is a board meeting before this February breakfast and the board can discuss. She had expressed before that she does not care to advocate from the perspective of VSBA, as some of the positions they have stated do not align with her values. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that we need to keep the national issues on the forefront when prioritizing advocating with legislators (e.g. DEI)
   12.3. Superintendent Evaluation

Natasha Eckart asked about the "Community School Team" - what is this team? Flor Diaz Smith stated that this team is not in place yet; we have applied for a grant, which would allow for hiring a coordinator to start the work. She has been offering to bring information forward for two years.

13. **Board Reflection:** Mckalyn Leclerc stated that she is supportive of this budget overall but continues to have concerns about the nursing staff and would like to keep abreast of this as it unfolds. Same with the library/ tech integrationist positions.

    Patrick Whelley stated that there are students who use "they/ them" pronouns that are feeling attacked right now based on federal government happenings and would like to affirm that this board has an education philosophy that includes providing an inclusive environment that includes people who do not fit into traditional binary sexes. He appreciates sending his children to this school district.

14. **Public Comment:** Hannah Brown thanked Chris McVeigh for suggesting the amendment. She stated that she has liability concerns, though her primary concern is safety. She feels there is a difference between the spirit of the law and the letter of the law. She expressed displeasure with being characterized as a "vocal minority" - she stated that it is insidious to refer to a non-vocal majority, and it is disenfranchising, especially after the conversations the board has had over the past few years around transparency. If you want the board to approve a budget then you need to allow for engaged discussion.
    Bekah Mandell asked whether the board would be speaking on behalf of constituents to the legislators, and if so, will there be an opportunity for the community to provide input? Ursula Stanley stated that last year much of the conversation was around budget and education finance. Much of the interface is around the legislators sharing with board members what their priorities are.

15. **Adjourn: Daniel Keeney moved to adjourn at 9:05 p.m. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary