



Mission Statement: To support and challenge all students to achieve personal and academic excellence in a student-centered environment.

BERLIN-BOYLSTON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Tuesday, March 25, 2025, 5:00 pm
Tahanto Regional Middle/High School
Auditorium

Present: School Committee: Mr. Michael Totman, Chair; Ms. Meagan Grill, Vice Chair; Ms. Lori-Anne Hart, District Clerk; Ms. Jessica Deglialberti; Ms. Lisa Mair; Ms. Elizabeth Mancini

Administration: Mr. Albert Ganem, Interim Superintendent; Mr. Aaron Osborne, Director of Finance & Operations; Ms. Sally-Ann Stukuls, Director of Curriculum & Grants Gr 6-12; Ms. Jannel Fitzpatrick, Director of Pupil Personnel Services; Mr. Joseph Sposato, Interim Director of Technology; Mrs. Lisa Sequiera, Tahanto Principal; Mr. Richard Cameron, Tahanto Assistant Principal; Ms. Renee Legendre, Tahanto Assistant Principal; Mr. John Campbell, Berlin Memorial Principal; Ms. Cindy Sykes, Boylston Elementary principal

- I. Call to Order** - Mr. Michael Totman called the meeting to order at 5pm
- II. Pledge of Allegiance**
- III. Public Comment** - Mr. Totman asks if there is anyone who has a non-budget-related comment.
- IV. Communications** - None
- V. Consent Agenda** - **Motion to pass the consent agenda made by Mrs. Meagan Grill and seconded by Mrs. Jessica Deglialberti. All in favor, Vote 6-0, motion passes.**
 - February 11, 2025 Open Meeting Minutes
 - Warrant

VI. Reports

- Chair's Report - Mr. Michael Totman
- Business Office Update - Mr. Aaron Osborne and Mr. Albert G. Ganem Jr.
 - FY26 Budget Update -
Mr. Ganem apologizes to the large crowd for a smaller room, adjustments are made to bring in more chairs for the public.

Mr. Osborne presents the budget via a Google Slide show presentation, which he begins at slide 20 with a quote for us to focus on. Mr. Osborne reminds us of the

numbers that were voted on by the committee at the March 11th meeting, explaining that both Berlin and Boylston gave us targeted reduction numbers and the budget he will present will reflect potential cuts the district could make to meet these numbers. It was noted that the principals, directors, and administration do not support these cuts.

Mr. Osborne reminds the community of the April 11th presentation of Beetlejuice, Junior, in the Tahanto Auditorium

Mr. Osborne returns to beginning of slideshow to present:

Slides 2 & 3: The Capital number was notably high, the district didn't expect for it to be fully funded, but our greatest needs were listed in order of priority.

Slide 4: Results of meetings with towns

Slide 5: BMS Cuts made at 3/11 meeting followed by new, possible cuts

Mr. Ganem interjects that health class has been coupled with physical education and that the librarian will be replaced with a paraprofessional who will also have recess and other duties.

Mr. Osborne calls attention to the 2nd grade teacher cut, which will result in 27 students in a class with a paraprofessional. The increase in the music teacher is a result of seniority: the elementary level teacher will be bumped by a more senior music educator at the high school level. He adds that they tried very hard to save positions by pulling from other places.

Mr. Ganem discusses the potential danger and impacts of losing that teacher and the tutors.

Mr. Totman asks Mr. Ganem to explain the logistical implications.

Mr. Ganem explains how seniority leads to shuffling of teachers, new curriculum for veteran teachers to learn, true potential of losing other teachers who don't want to be reassigned, and how it's not ideal for teaching or learning.

Mr. Totman asks how town growth affects this.

Mr. Ganem says while it saves money now, our schools are growing and that any growth in that class will lead to needing an additional teacher to make the class size smaller. It's a pay-now, pay-later prospect. He adds that this is a bare bones presentation, pointing out that there is no extra staffing at the district's Central Office, which has been pared down and is lower than the majority of districts in our state.

Mrs. Grill interjects that this cut at BMS could affect a teacher at BES due to seniority. Mr. Ganem agrees, also citing licensure. Mr. Campbell discusses room changes from tables to rows

Slide 6: Mr. Osborne explains operating assessment.

Slide 7: BES cuts made at 3/11 meeting followed by new, possible cuts. These numbers look different from Berlin due to the Regional Agreement configuration. Mr. Totman asks for clarification of the term “money in the pot”, due to members of other towns interpreting this as Boylston taking money from Berlin taxpayers. Mr. Osborne explains how Berlin is \$.35 of every dollar so when they don’t spend their portion, that means \$.65 of the money Boylston taxpayers were willing to pay then goes into the budget at Boylston Elementary School. Mr. Ganem says the regional agreement needs to be revisited. Mr. Totman explains how money is dispersed to the schools. Mrs. Degliaberti explains how when money from Berlin isn’t applied to Tahanto, the portion Boylston would have paid is given to Boylston Elementary. Mr. Osborne said they were able to keep more at BES due to the money shift.

Mr. Ganem said they tried to keep it as equitable as possible between the schools with cuts. Mrs. Grill noted that tutors and coaches were gone from Berlin but will stay in Boylston.

Slide 9: Mr. Osborne says when contemplating cuts, they weighed what was risky vs. what was reasonable. Oil has trended as over budgeted so they felt safe cutting back on that. Mr. Ganem said they were mindful of reductions, they tried hard to spare the impact on students and teachers. Mrs. Sequiera said budget cuts were hard to accept when Tahanto’s goal is to “grow and lift up, for whatever comes after high school,” pointing out how much harder that is going to be when five full time positions could potentially be eliminated.

Mr. Osborne discusses Slides 10-15

- Explains what capital is per request of Mr. Ganem
- Potential to eventually move computers from capital to operating
- Cameras needed to keep all safe during the day and to keep buildings safe after hours
- Ring cameras, while cheaper, are not good alternatives per Mr. Sposato

Slide 16: Mrs. Sequiera brings a middle school chair to the front of the room for Mr. Sposato to sit in, as many 8th graders are the size of full-grown men. They reduced request for \$225,000 replacement cost to \$25,000. This was an arbitrary number to help reduce budget but would allow for some furniture to be replaced. Mr. Ganem notes that a student’s environment directly affects their learning.

Slides 17-19: Assessments: Mr. Ganem says there are no contracted positions in the schools or central office for FY26. He said the district was left in a financial situation when he came on and that the finance department has completely flipped with new hires. He reiterated that the administration and principals are not in support of this revised budget.

Mr. Totman reminded that statewide our costs are rising. He revisited last year's budget meetings where Berlin pressured the committee to use free cash to buy down the assessment. Additionally, minutes before the town meeting, the committee was pushed to buy it down more, adding an additional approximately \$250,000. He noted that this deferred spending was why this year's budget seemed to balloon in comparison to last year's ask. Mr. Campbell added that despite this supplementation, BMS lost important positions last year: literacy coaches, the only Kindergarten paraprofessional the two classes shared, etc. He said it was discouraging, that they were left wondering how much the town leaders really valued education.

Mr. Totman said that artificially adjusting numbers using free cash is why the assessment appears so much higher this year. If the taxes had gone up in smaller increments, the ask wouldn't be so big. Mr. Ganem reminds everyone that we are in the middle of teacher negotiations. Ms. Sequiera points out that when Berlin asks us to reduce the budget, it is felt three times as much at the high school as they also lose the $\frac{2}{3}$ portion that Boylston was willing to pay. She suggests this answers the School Committee's question of why that middle/high school loses so many students to private schools each year. Mr. Totman reiterates that when we cut \$.35 in Berlin, an entire dollar is cut. He says many in the community have suggested dealing with this by seeking a private education, asking Mr. Ganem why this is not a good solution. Mr. Ganem says we want to keep our students in our communities, noting they are our future. When we invest in them, we are investing in our future as we hope they will come back and settle in the towns that gave them so much.

○Budget Public Comment

- James Underwood, Boylston
- Bill Whitehead, on behalf of BBEA
- Ilene Rodman, High School Counselor and Department Head
- Melissa Tucker, Grade 3 BMS
- Howard Drobner, Boylston Finance Committee Chair
- Mel Martinez, Boylston
- Ericka Humphrey, Boylston
- Christina Medeiros, Boylston
- Cara McNeil, Berlin
- Lauren Coomey, Berlin
- Jason Paquette, Berlin
- Mark Johnson, Boylston Planning Board Chair

–Per Mr. Johnson's comment, Mr. Totman shared the Department of Revenue Calculator (as suggested by the Berlin boards to calculate potential tax increases) & slide

- Adam Wilbur, Boylston
- Niara Caplan, Berlin

- Jason Carroll, Clinton School Choice
- Mark Johnson, clarifying question about 2 budgets, Mr. Totman explains vote process
- Lindsey Tatnall, Berlin
- Jason Paquette, clarifying question about Berlin Levy limit and limitations on budget number
- Julie Lee-Berlin

Mr. Totman explains the budget process and how regionalized school districts work, noting the possible scenarios that might occur per voting results. He mentions the letters the committee has received from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Mr. Ganem stresses the importance of people going to town meetings to support the budget, noting that non-passage could potentially lead to the state taking over and giving us a 1/12 budget. He also added that DESE feels the district is “in good hands now.” He also highlighted the difference between a town/city school budget vs a regionalized one. In the former, you can go back and ask for more money if you fall short during the year; in the latter, which is where BBRSD falls, you have to make do with the money the towns voted to give you in May.

There will be a noontime meeting on Thursday, March 28th, to vote on the number associated with what the School Committee votes tonight.

○School Committee Discussion and Vote

Break requested by Mrs. Deglialberti is granted
Meeting resumes at 7:29pm

Mr. Osborne suggests keeping the capital budget as is and work on the Operating Budget, potentially keeping small budget cuts. Mr. Totman asks for slide 5, Berlin Memorial Budget Cuts and Savings, to be put on the screen. He then goes from left to right, asking members to share their thoughts. Mrs. Deglialberti suggests only cutting the bottom 3, which amount to \$15,638 dollars. She says these seem like lower risk items and won't impact students. Mrs. Grill, Mrs. Hart, and Mrs. Mair agreed. Mr. Ganem cautioned about “negotiating against yourself”. Mr. Totman uses the DOR calculator to show that the small cuts really don't amount to much. Mrs. Grill says she agrees with March 11th budget but cautions that everyone who showed up for this meeting needs to go to the town-wide vote with others to make sure this passes. She said it's important to stay the whole time, even when it's late, because Berlin lost the vote by less than 10 votes last year. Mr. Totman cautions Mrs. Grill, who stated that the Finance Committee would not support our new vote if we didn't agree to cuts, saying we don't know yet if they will or not. Mrs. Grill agrees. Mrs. Mancini asks if there are implications if device repair is removed from the budget, Mr. Sposato advises.

MOTION To approve the capital line items as presented in this budget version. At Berlin Memorial, it will be to replace the elevator controls and add and replace the cameras made by Mrs. Deglialberti and seconded by Mrs. Grill. All in favor, Vote 6-0, motion passes

MOTION to pass Boylston Capital items repair water pump, window repairs, update cameras and fobs, student and staff device replacement, repair area brick work, and accessible playground equipment made by Mrs. Meagan Grill and seconded by Mrs. Jessica Deglialberti. All in favor, Vote 6-0, motion passes.

Motion to approve Tahanto Capital request for middle school furniture made by Mrs. Mair and seconded by Mrs. Deglialberti. All in favor, Vote 6-0, motion passes

Mr. Totman asks Mr. Osborne if he supports the March 11th budget, Mr. Osborne says he was suggesting the smaller cuts but if keeping them is what Mr. Ganem wants, he can support that as well.

MOTION to keep the March 11th budget to Boylston Elementary as stated made by Mrs. Grill, Mrs. Hart seconds. Mrs. Deglialberti makes a motion to amend the motion to subtract \$5000 to OPEB from the March 11th number seconded by Mrs. Mair. DISCUSSION: Mrs. Deglialberti reasons that she watched the Berlin Finance Committee meeting and they made small cuts like these to save the taxpayers money; she stated it would show a similar sentiment while not taking from the students. Mr. Totman says it's a fair point and reminds the committee that over \$900,000 was already cut on March 11th. Mr. Osborne states that OPEB is the safest thing to cut. **Vote 6-0, amendment passes.**

Original motion: Vote 6-0, motion passes.

Slide 5 is put up and discussion about Berlin Memorial cuts begins. Mrs. Grill asks about supply cuts, Mr. Osborne reiterates that OPEB is the safest cut. Mr. Ganem says that if money is put back in for supplies, the administrators already anticipated that cut and therefore may pool that money with other savings to spare a position cut.

MOTION to approve the March 11th Berlin Memorial Operational Budget less the \$5000 to OPEB contribution made by Mrs. Grill and seconded by Mrs. Deglialberti. Mrs. Deglialberti considers amendment for adding in substitutes. Mrs. Hart asks if that same number is taken from Boylston, citing the desire to keep things equal. **Mrs. Deglialbert makes a MOTION to amend the motion to add in long term subs. Mrs. Deglialberti, Mrs. Mancini, and Mrs. Mair are in favor, Mr. Totman, Mrs. Grill, and Mrs. Hart are against. Motion fails, 3-3. ORIGINAL MOTION: Vote 6-0, motion passes.**

MOTION to approve the Tahanto Regional Operating Budget to the March 11th budget less the OPEB contribution made by Mrs. Grill and Seconded by Mrs. Deglialberti. DISCUSSION: Mrs. Grill comments about the need to keep even the

smaller cuts due to how much is being cut at Tahanto. She says that she was unaware that we were cutting a Science teacher from Tahanto when we agreed to the March 11th budget. Mr. Ganem reminded that there was a cut of an “FTE” (full time employee) but that they weren’t specific about the role for privacy reasons. Mrs. Grill understands, she says it just made her less comfortable making additional cuts. Mr. Ganem also points out that the Special Education Coordinator was a huge cut, too. **MOTION: Vote 6-0, motion passes.**

Mr. Totman announced that the School Committee has decided on their final budget. He says that Mr. Osborne will calculate the official numbers for the approved budget, which will be voted on Thursday during a 12pm Zoom Meeting and that there will be no further changes or cuts now that the vote has been done. He also reminds everyone of the meeting days and potential times for the town budget vote, which will need parent support.

- **Superintendent of Schools Report -**

- Graduation Requirements for FY25 School Year - *Ms. Lisa Sequeira* -Mrs. Sequeira explains that there are 2 prongs to the graduation requirements and while the committee voted to retain the passing MCAS grades for the 2025 class, another vote was needed on competency requirements. To be in state compliance, the committee needed to vote on the courses that are aligned with demonstrating competency in math, ELA, and science. The state requires that students must pass 9th and 10th grade English (or equivalent courses), pass Geometry and either Algebra I or Algebra II (or equivalent course), and pass one of the three core science courses: Biology, Chemistry, or Physics.

MOTION to approve meeting the state’s competency determination that students must pass 9th or 10th grade English or equivalent course, pass Geometry and either Algebra I or Algebra II or equivalent course, and pass one of the three core science courses: Biology, Chemistry, or Physics made by Mrs. Grill and seconded by Mrs. Degliaberti. Vote 6-0, motion passes.

- Teamsters Local 170 Berlin Boylston School District - Mr. Ganem shared that that the custodians, via Teamsters Local 170, were looking to unionize.
- District Attorney’s Office Presentation April 16th, at 6:00pm.- Mr. Ganem shared that the DA’s office would be giving a presentation at 6pm on April 16th regarding cyber bullying. It will be presented online and students and parents are encouraged to watch.
- FY26 School Year Calendar - The FY 25/26 calendar has been presented. Mr. Ganem called attention to the back page where there is the potential for an extra professional development day at the beginning of the school year that won’t impact the student calendar. This day is tentatively scheduled as it is an item in current, ongoing teacher contract negotiations. Good Friday has also been added as a day off as, per questioning, this is a day that usually requires many

substitutes. The vote on the calendar is postponed for next meeting with public input requested.

- **Administrator Updates -**

- Interim Director of Technology - Mr. Joseph Sposato - Mr. Sposato showed the new district website and demonstrated how to make a public records request.

- **Subcommittee Updates**

- Student Success and Technology Subcommittee - Mrs. Degliaberti said they will have a meeting soon.
- Budget and Facility Subcommittee - Mrs. Grill did not have an update as the budget was presented.
- Superintendent Search Subcommittee - Mrs. Hart updated that Ms. Novick was looking for proposed interview questions from members. Mr. Ganem said the position was posted on School Spring.
- Policy Subcommittee - Mr. Totman said the committee will meet again soon.

VII. Business Items

- Approval of FY26 School Year Calendar - **Vote Needed** - Vote postponed
- Approval of the Bus Bid and Contract - **Vote Needed** - Mr. Osborne gave a bus update. He mentioned local districts that were bidding right now. We received one bid from NRT and so it was posted again, netting two bids: one from NRT the other from Green Wheels. NRT will increase in price by 21.54% for the first year which is substantial, but with no other viable vendors the district is left with little choice. His recommendation is to accept this bid as the amount will likely increase with subsequent bidding processes. He felt he can make this increase work in next year's budget and he is hopeful the district's transportation reimbursement will be bigger. Mrs. Degliaberti requested relooking at the routes and Mrs. Grill wondered if purchasing our own buses was an option in the future.

MOTION that the BBRSD School Committee authorize the Director of Finance and Operations to enter into a 5-year contract with NRT Bus, Incorporated to provide school bus transportation to the district with a total estimated 5-year cost of \$4,820,00.75 was made by Mrs. Grill and seconded by Mrs. Mair. Vote 6-0, motion passes.

VIII. Mr. Totman explains that the committee will be going into Executive Session and not returning to open session. He notes this is a new complaint, unrelated to the one before it.

MOTION The Berlin-Boylston Regional School Committee is convening in executive session under Purpose 1 to discuss an Open Meeting Law complaint filed by Margaret P. Stone against the Berlin-Boylston Regional School Committee made by Mrs. Grill and seconded by Mrs. Hart. Role Call Vote: Mrs. Degliaberti: Aye, Mrs. Mancini: Aye, Mrs. Grill: Aye, Mrs. Mair: Aye; Mrs. Hart: Aye.
Meeting Adjourned.

The listing of items is those reasonably anticipated by the Chair which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may, in fact, be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.

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