

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
4.16.25
6:15-9:15 PM
(In-Person & Virtual)
U-32 Middle & High School
930 Gallison Hill Rd
Montpelier, VT**

Present: Elizabeth Brown, Zach Sullivan, Daniel Keeney, Ursula Stanley, Chris McVeigh, Patrick Whelley, Natasha Eckart, Julia Hewitt, Kealy Sloan, Flor Diaz Smith, Linnea Darrow, Michelle Ksepka, Mckalyn Leclerc, Diane Nichols-Fleming **Student Representatives:** Lei DeGroot, Linnea Darrow

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

Others: Michael Sherwin, David Lawrence, Marilyn Martin, ORCA Media, Lila Richardson, Allison Fayle, Allen Gilbert, Alison Byrnes, April Davis, Becca Gentile, Bekah Mandell, Caitlin Howansky, Cash, David Delcore, Jill, Lauren Chabot, Lisa Hanna, Marisa Melamed, M. McLane, Noah Weinstein, Perry Bellow-Handelman, Sam Mishkit, Tammy Joslyn, Tracy Sudhalter, Veronica Fair, Brigitte, Catherine Coteus, Chani Waterhouse, Honi Bean Barrett, Kathryn Biggam, Maggie McGlynn, Naomi, Petra Halsema, Sharon Spector, Traci Thompson, Jo Elms, Phoebe Stone

- 1. Call to Order:** Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:16 p.m. She reminded the board of the agreed upon norms, as this board is newly reconfigured after Town Meeting Day.
- 2. Welcome**
 - 2.1. Adjustments to The Agenda:** Flor Diaz Smith shared that we will move the Student Representative report to earlier in the meeting.
 - 2.2. Reception of Guests**

2.3. Public Comments-Time limit strictly enforced, see note: Jo Elms (Middlesex), teacher at Turtle Island, expressed support for the opportunity to collaborate with WCUUSD.

Phoebe Stone (East Montpelier), teacher at Turtle Island, expressed support for this possible collaboration. She is very excited for this opportunity and see it as a potential model for the future for other schools/ communities.

Sam Mishkit expressed support for Turtle Island, as a parent in the district and a teacher in the district.

Perry Bellow-Handelman, who lives in the district (North Middlesex), asked the district to support this proposal. The idea of having childcare in the area of Worcester is very appealing, and she noted that finding childcare in this area is a challenge for families.

Becca Gentile expressed support for the possible collaboration of Turtle Island with WCUUSD - she spoke about the critical role that early childhood care provides.

Bekah Mandell spoke about the possibility of attending school into the week of June 23. She asked the board to consider not asking families to accommodate that late schedule.

Alison Byrnes, East Montpelier and teacher at U-32, expressed support for the Turtle Island collaboration.

Lila Richardson, Worcester, stated that there is a lack of information that is causing confusion in the community regarding the Turtle Island collaboration. She asked the board to consider a Q&A session after the board presentation.

Kim Mckee, Calais, expressed support for the Turtle Island collaboration. She spoke about the shortage of providers.

Caitlin Howansky, Worcester, hopes to hear some definitive answer today about preschool students in Worcester in the fall. She stated that the “double drop off” is very difficult for families.

Tracy Sudhalter, Calais, spoke in support of the collaboration with Turtle Island. She noted that her family had been on a two-year waitlist before accessing childcare at Turtle Island.

Lauren Chabot, Worcester, learned today that her fourth grader would be moved to Rumney in the fall in order to make space available at Doty for Turtle Island. She stated that she was blindsided by this decision. She asked the board to be honest about the rationale for this decision. She noted the challenges to families of having children in two separate schools. She stated that Doty's rising sixth graders would need to transition to Rumney next year and then U-32 the following year. She asked for transparency as to why not all of the elementary schools in our district were offered as possible locations. She asked for information about plans to move sixth graders to U-32 in the fall.

Marisa Melamed spoke in support of the collaboration between Turtle Island and Doty and asked for as much transparency as possible in the process; she thanked the board.

Lisa Hanna, Worcester, requested that the board give specific information tonight about how to support Worcester students moving to Rumney in the fall. She would like to hear from the administration about how students would be supported. She expressed concern similar to Lauren Chabot's around rising 6th-grade students' transitions and asked how they will be supported. She asked to hear specific information about transportation concerns.

Noah Weinstein, Worcester, reiterated his support for bringing Worcester preschoolers back to Doty. He asked, "How many students from Turtle Island will the Doty School building accommodate?" This concerns 'death by a thousand cuts.'" How much of the building will be leased to Turtle Island?

Caitlin Howansky spoke about the traffic coming into Worcester village and asked Turtle Island staff and parents to be aware of the speed limit if the facility is to be relocated to Doty School.

Linnea Darrow stated that fifth and sixth grade are very important at Doty and there are traditions that are in place and it will be very important to honor these traditions.

The board discussed this issue. Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that this is an opportunity to build a stronger community between our communities.

Julia Hewitt asked if a Worcester child would need to be enrolled at Turtle Island in order to be a preschool student at Doty. Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that we have not worked out the logistics yet. Being part of a Pre-K program at Turtle Island is how this is envisioned; he noted that currently there are three children in Worcester that are registered to attend Doty Pre-K.

Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that as a board member, she is blindsided by the fact that a decision has been made and the process is underway. It is surprising that we are being put in this position. Why did we not have a group to design the parameters, when these tours were happening, how would we know whether this is a space that would work or not? She noted that she is in the field of early childhood so she understands the critical role of early childhood. She does not feel like she has a good handle on the building space and needs, and does not understand the trauma of the community. She hopes there is more details shared (e.g., how many children will access the five rooms, what is the capacity and cost of families, what is the traffic pattern, what does this mean long-term?) She stated that it sounds like the board makes the final decision in terms of the lease, but has not had a voice in the decision-making and planning.

Zach Sullivan expressed that he felt he had a good understanding of the parameters; however, some of the information could not be shared in open session due to contract negotiations, etc. He stated that the issue of childcare and early childhood education is one area that has been unanimously agreed upon as a need.

McKalyn Leclerc acknowledged that there will be grief in the process; this does not mean that it is not a positive thing overall. She feels strongly that there needs to be space in the Pre-K that is located at Doty for Worcester residents, to guarantee that there will be space. She would not support creating a situation that “locked” our preschool children out of the Doty School. She expressed concerns about the possibility of losing the music and art space in the school.

Daniel Keeney stated that he feels ambivalent and excited to learn more. He would like to see a copy of the letter that went to families. He expressed agreement with Mckalyn’s statement: Worcester residents should be guaranteed space at the Doty School for preschool students. On the other hand, parents should be ensured space in another of the school buildings for preschool, should their parents desire a school-sanctioned preschool program.

Chris McVeigh supports this proposal. He would like to see the lease first before taking any board action. He stated that guaranteeing space in the Turtle Island preschool program for Worcester families could be part of the lease agreement. It will be a collaboration between a public and a private entity. He asked, in terms of the building, is Gillian the ultimate authority in the building? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated there would be two documents - a lease document and a memorandum of agreement. We will be the “landlord” in the agreement, but not the director of Turtle Island’s program. Chris McVeigh asked Linnea, if you have a list of Doty traditions that you would like to see carried over, please do share with the board to ensure real continuity.

Flor Diaz Smith stated that Gillian Fuqua and Karoline May would be communicating and collaborating regarding transitions and traditions. Chris McVeigh stated that he hopes there will be a forum for the Rumney community as well as the Doty community.

Zach Sullivan stated that he believes the sentiment is what we can guarantee this spring, to ensure that traditions are honored and transitions are as smooth as possible.

Elizabeth Brown asked whether there has been an audit of possible roadblocks in the process. Would like to be sure that roadblocks along the way do not sideline us.

Amelia Contrada reminded the board that a year ago, we worked together with Jeanie Phillips and agreed that a priority would be to find creative ways to meet early Ed/childcare needs. She encouraged the board to stay involved, ask questions, expect, and listen to answers. Moving forward with a community-oriented mindset.

Flor Diaz Smith stated that she would like to support the Superintendent and the work that has occurred; she noted that much of the discussion was not shared publicly because of unknowns and confidentiality concerns. She expressed trust in our administrators and in our board to provide the necessary resources. She reiterated the fact of the dire need in this area of childcare and early education.

Superintendent Dellinger-Pate: Next steps: transition plan - speaking to families in Worcester and Middlesex; bringing forward a lease for the next board meeting - this document will be shared with board members as soon as it is available; bringing forward a MOA document for the board to consider at the next board meeting as well. He stated that these documents would be shared with the board as far in advance of the meeting as possible so that board members can consider the documents and provide feedback in advance of the meeting.

Patrick Whelley stated that our charter is in our district first, and we need to make sure that this is in the forefront of our consideration. He is very interested in this proposal and we need to keep an eye on our own district.

3. Reports

3.1. Superintendent/Central Office Leadership Team (COLT) Report: Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that there is no decision that has to be made tonight regarding Turtle Island. He stated that we did not know until last week that in fact, the building could accommodate Turtle Island. He stated that we have a proposal around how this could look. We are ready to have our attorneys review a lease for the board to consider. He stated, regarding the Turtle Island collaboration, an opportunity to “put” infant to early childhood education into our building. The proposal uses five of the classrooms - there is a doorway that allows for the separation of space. This would require moving the fifth and sixth grades to Rumney School. He stated that there is a plan to meet with families of fifth and sixth-grade students tomorrow. Full fifth-grade, full sixth-grade classroom at Rumney - 20 to 21 students. He recognizes that this is a huge transition; he noted that the Doty teachers and principal have already begun talking about how to support the students and what activities to plan to bring the two groups of students together (from Middlesex and Worcester). He stated that we did consider each of the elementary schools; however, the layout and student population of the other schools would not work for this purpose at this time. He stated that there is some promise at Calais, not immediate, to accommodate some of the young children; the Doty solution does not accommodate all of the young children from Turtle Island. He stated that there could be other opportunities in the future to collaborate with other organizations, but this first pass will be beneficial for future endeavors. He stated that the goal right now is to keep preschool students with their communities. What kind of programming are we offering to our community? What kind of space can we offer other organizations in our communities? These are questions for consideration in the configuration discussion. Any type of way that we can utilize our school buildings to the fullness of their ability will benefit, going forward, sustainability, etc. He stated that there is no intention of “death by a thousand cuts” - the vision is Pre-K through grade four at Doty. He answered the question of transportation. He spoke about the commitment to provide transportation for our children. He stated that there are many questions that arise and we are creating a question and answer document. He stated that this possibility does not reduce any existing staff. Gillian Fuqua spoke to the issue of this happening quickly, late in the year. However, she is hearing commitment and care about helping fourth and fifth grade students with the transition. She stated that we would be talking with fourth and fifth grade students tomorrow morning. The focus is on the Doty larger family. She stated that Rumney School staff is already thinking about and prioritizing how to support students in the transition. Lei DeGroot asked about the student population at Doty versus child population at Turtle Island. Are we prioritizing childcare and early education over the needs of our own school age students? It kind of feels, as a Worcester resident, that

this is a step toward ending Doty School as a Pre-K - 6 entity. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that if we as a district can work on these collaborative efforts long term then we are setting up structures to support and keep our families and young people in our communities. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate provided a few other highlights from the COLT report.

- 3.2. Community Schools Report:** Becca Taitistcheff introduced the idea of vision, program-structure, resource action sequence. She stated that the vision that WCUUSD has set forth is aspirational and exciting, and there are many elements within this vision that allows opportunities for young people to grow. She stated that we have an opportunity through Community Schools to explore what this looks like in a coherent way in our school district.

Beck Dezan, Community Schools Coordinator, highlighted some key aspects in the Community Schools Initiative (a grant-funded initiative). This is a grant-funded opportunity to do some exploration around rigorous, relevant curriculum; reducing barriers/ bridging to resources; things that happen outside of our school day, e.g. after after-school program, evening programs/ opportunities. She is currently doing many listening sessions and inviting voices from the community, teachers, and students. Centering student voice, driving the process. (Students PreK-12).

Elizabeth Brown asked how the Community Schools model addressed the great need for mental health support to students and families. Becca Taitistcheff spoke about the desire to bridge barriers with community partners. She stated that we are not the only ones working on this, Vermont-wide, and nationally, on the Community Schools concept. For example, in Community Schools this year, there are mental health interns through UVM.

Chris McVeigh asked how student input is solicited - how to solicit a wide range of student voices, not just the ones who are anxious and willing to come forward. Beck Dezan stated that there are already two students that were part of the hiring committee; she shared many of the venues that she is using to integrate with students and solicit their voices and build relationships. She spoke about some of the expertise that is shared with her in her work - one of the questions is “who are you hearing from? Who are you NOT hearing from?”

Patrick Whelley asked what is the universe of the boundaries/ barriers to which you allude. Becca Taitistcheff stated that we are currently in the discovery process, trying to uncover the barriers, trying to test the boundaries, look for patterns. This will be part of the work going forward.

Daniel Keeney shared that the Configuration Committee earlier today struggled with finding the overlap between the work of the committee and the Community Schools work. The intersection is broadening our lens as a community regarding programming - not just “what is” but “what could be.”

Ursula Stanley asked, within the three pillars, is there some hope of growing capacity for bringing outside resources into our school spaces? Becca Taitistcheff stated that in this visioning phase there is room for dreaming!

Elizabeth Brown asked how you are bringing staff into the discussion/ discovery. Beck Dezan spoke about staff and Washington Central Friends of Education adults etc., making relationships in the same way that she is going about it with students.

Beck Dezan stated that there is a “bubbling” that is happening within the schools, the first two weeks have been exciting and energizing; there is much energy around and interest in Community Schools.

Becca Taitistcheff spoke about the desire to create coherence with many facets that are already underway, toward the vision.

- 3.3. Principal Report:** The principals had prepared a written report. The elementary building principals spoke briefly to highlight their reports.
- 3.4. Student Report:** Linnea Darrow provided an update of student happenings including spring sports, state assessments, and middle school musical.
- 3.5. Central Vermont Career Center Report:** Patrick Whelley shared that the Career Center is moving forward with a plan to build a new building. May 4th is the day that the Career Center is meeting with the Town of Barre; there are news articles available at VPR, Vermont Digger, and CBS.
- 3.6. VSBA Report:** None tonight

4. Board Operations

- 4.1. Approve 2025-2026 Calendar: Ursula Stanley moved to affirm this calendar. Seconded by Daniel Keeney.** Discussion: Mckalyn Leclerc shared that it seems every year we are faced with the ask to excuse a few days at the end of the year. She asked to consider perhaps not taking the entire week of Thanksgiving off - not necessarily this year but in years forward. Zach Sullivan stated that most people are used to having a few snow days built into the calendar. He suggested adding this “padding” into the calendar. Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that this calendar aligns with the career centers and across the state, Superintendents work to align April break and the first day of school. He stated that, based on current legislation, it looks like we will be moving

toward a statewide calendar. Mckalyn Leclerc suggested that we share and communicate more widely with parents around snow days possibly extending the school year. Diane Nichols-Fleming appreciates our dedication to maintain Juneteenth as a holiday. **This motion carried unanimously.**

4.2. Approve Last Day of School: Ursula Stanley moved to set the last day of school for all WCUUSD students to be Tuesday, June 24. Seconded by Daniel Keeney.

Discussion: Kealy Sloan suggested that publicizing the last day of school for preschoolers would be very helpful to families. Patrick Whelley asked whether we have some flexibility. Daniel Keeney stated that ensuring that the last week of school has at least three days in it so that students are more likely to attend. **This motion carried unanimously. Ursula Stanley moved that the last day of work for all staff be Wednesday, June 25. This recommendation includes the observance of the Juneteenth holiday on Thursday, June 19, 2025 (which will be a non-work day). Teachers will have fulfilled their 185 days; school year ESP will have fulfilled their 183 days. Seconded by Daniel Keeney, this motion carried unanimously.**

4.3. Advocating as a Board:

5. Finance Committee

5.1. Review and Accept the Final FY 2024-2025 Audit Report: Kealy Sloan moved that the Board accept the audited financial statements for the Washington Central Unified Union School District for the year ended June 30, 2024, from RHR Smith & Company. Seconded by Zach Sullivan. Comment: Zach Sullivan stated that the auditors had very good comments about these findings; the board thanked and congratulated Susanne Gann and her staff. **This motion carried unanimously.**

5.2. Award 2025 District-wide Combined Construction Project Contract: Ursula Stanley moved that the Board increase the allocation of capital reserve funds to the WCUUSD 2025 Combined Construction Project by \$330,276 and award the contract to Farrington Construction Co., Inc. in an amount not to exceed \$1,038,896. Seconded by Zach Sullivan. This motion carried unanimously.

6. Policy Committee:

6.1. First Readings: Chris McVeigh provided an overview of the following first readings:

6.1.1. Procurement Conflict of Interest

6.1.2. B30 Staffing & Job Descriptions

6.1.3. A32 Board Goal Setting & Evaluation

6.1.4. A34 Board Relations with School Personnel

6.1.5. A24 Board/Superintendent Relationship

6.2. Personnel

6.2.1. Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in

FTE: Zach Sullivan moved to approve the following new hires: Marc Chamberlain - .2 FTE Physical Education Teacher- Doty; Jessica Kobb - .2 FTE Librarian– Rumney; Annie Coppock – 1.0 FTE Special Education Teacher – Rumney; Makenna Lund – 1.0 FTE Music Teacher (.4 FTE Rumney/.6 FTE EMES). Seconded by Daniel Keeney; this motion carried unanimously. Zach Sullivan moved to approve the following retirements, with thanks for their services: Margrith McGlynn – Speech Language Pathologist – WCUUSD; Elizabeth Vanderlip – Special Education Teacher - Berlin; Mary Carpenter – Interventionist – Calais. Seconded by Kealy Sloan, this motion carried. Chris McVeigh noted heartfelt thanks to these people who had a great impact over a number of years on the students in our communities. Zach Sullivan moved to approve the following resignations, with thanks for their services: Blakely Gilmore – Classroom Teacher – Calais; Rachel Hernandez- Special Education Teacher – Rumney; Annalissa Kirby – Special Education Teacher – Berlin. Seconded by Patrick Whelley. Discussion: Diane Nichols-Fleming asked if these are effective immediately or at the end of the school year. Steven Dellinger-Pate: end of the school year. This motion carried unanimously.

7. Consent Agenda

7.1.1. Approve Minutes of 4.1.25, 4.2.25: Kealy Sloan moved to approve the minutes from April 1 and April 2, 2025. Seconded by Zach Sullivan, this motion carried unanimously.

7.1.2. Board Orders: Ursula Stanley moved to approve board orders in the total amount of \$1,106,670.75, dated 3-20-25 through 4.16.25. Seconded by Zach Sullivan, this motion carried unanimously.

7.2. Future Agenda Items

7.2.1. Board Reflections: Natasha Eckart had been at the track meet tonight and commended the student athletes! Ursula Stanley stated that she appreciated the discussion about Community Schools initiative.

8. Public Comments: Time limit strictly enforced, see note: Cathleen B, Worcester, VT: feels hazardous about what is about to happen tomorrow with students. It sounds like there still needs to be a board vote and a lease created. This is not a “done deal” yet; this is a

concern to her, as a child advocate. She asked whether this change for fourth and fifth graders to Rumney next year would also involve a change to U-32 for sixth grade the following year. She stated that she had heard that ECO (through North Branch) might be coming to Doty School. Rumney does not have an ECO program. Could this be a future partnership, assuring an ECO program at Rumney? She spoke about the transportation issue, for example, for Worcester students who will ride a bus to Rumney School (her child for example, was planning to bicycle to Doty School). She expressed concerns about who is custodial over the Pre-K program, e.g., for Worcester preschoolers attending the Turtle Island program at Doty School? Honi Bean Barrett stated that she sees a great deal of “pros” for this possible collaboration. The fifth and sixth-grade students from Middlesex and Worcester are going to have a great time learning together.

Caitlin Howansky stated that the loss of our space in our school, for example, for art and music, is not in line with what is best for our students. She stated that we have asked repeatedly to allow our preschool students to attend preschool in their communities; there is a difference between public education and private programs. She stated that she appreciates the position that Turtle Island is in but she warns the board against making rushed decisions. “We don’t know that yet,” and “We can figure that out in time” are not acceptable answers.

Noah Weinstein reiterated caution about what is said to students tomorrow. He asked, instead of sending fifth and sixth grade students to Rumney, what about using other building spaces (historical building/ renting a pod, e.g., in the town of Worcester? This would also allow the Configuration Committee to thoughtfully do its job.

Lauren Chabot stated that a day lost in February is not made up in June. June 28th is excessively late for students to be in school. The longer you go in June, the less purposeful the days become. The ripple of the decision is wide. She stated that, can’t we as a district determine how many students from Turtle Island we are able to accommodate. Retain the larger section of the school. She stated that she has heard the board talk about the importance of student equity in their experiences. This action means that every year, the students from Doty will have to make the transition from one school to the next and then to U-32 for sixth. This is not an equitable experience for the children. She feels there is a way that the district can offer space at Doty School for some Turtle Island children, while maintaining classes at the school through grades five and six.

Lila Richardson expressed surprise from people expressing that we have the space to do this. We are creating the room by displacing grades five and six. She joins the other voices that urge that another arrangement be sought. She expressed disappointment with the board’s use of public comment for this by promising an FAQ document after- she wishes the board would offer an opportunity for question and answer.

Naomi, Worcester, expressed the same as others around feeling baffled by this hasty decision and she does not understand the board prioritizing Turtle Island's very quick timeline; she finds it appalling that we would essentially cut the student population at Doty in half and make some significant structural changes to the building, in order to accommodate this. After all, of the discussion around the importance of allied arts, this proposal eliminates the music and art classroom. She has concerns around traffic flow, parking lot pick up/ drop off, and playground equipment. She has questions about the governance - this is a public and a private entity coming together. As stewards of public property (Doty School), we need to be thoughtful.

Hannah Brown, Middlesex, reiterated concerns that were expressed earlier about this hasty and unthoughtful decision-making. She stated that the district should think carefully about the optics of prioritizing a private entity at this time that there is tension between public and private education. She spoke about how quickly private entities can change. There is no guarantee or governance from the district's standpoint about the quality of the program. It should not be that Doty should be the only school that has "music on a cart" or "art on a cart." If we are asking people to be agile, we should be asking all of the communities to be agile.

Alison Byrnes spoke about the childcare crisis, and she thanked the board for considering this very complicated situation.

Flor Diaz Smith stated, through Act 166, we already have a partnership with public and private entities.

9. **Executive Session: Student Residency Request: At 9:13, Kealy Sloan moved to go into Executive Session for discussing student residency, and to invite the superintendent. Seconded by Ursula Stanley, this motion carried unanimously. At 9:21, Ursula Stanley moved to come out of executive session and seconded by Daniel Keeney. Daniel Keeney moved to accept the administration's recommendation regarding student residency request. Ursula Stanley seconded. Approved unanimously.**

10. **Adjourn: Daniel Keeney moved to adjourn and seconded by Ursula Stanley at 9:23.**

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary
and Diane Nichols-Fleming, Board Clerk