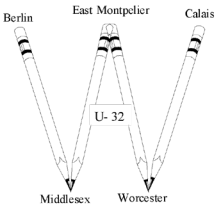
Washington Central Unified Union School District

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
10.8.25
6:15-9:15 PM
(In-Person & Virtual)
East Montpelier Elementary School

Present: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate, Flor Diaz Smith, Daniel Keeney, Chris McVeigh, Patrick Whelley, Julia Hewitt, Amelia Contrada, Ursula Stanley, Kealy Sloan, Mckalyn Leclerc, Elizabeth Brown, Michelle Ksepka, Jen Miller Arsenault, Alicia Lyford, Zach Sullivan, Jarrod Weiss, Karoline May, Jody Emerson, Cam Feathersonhaugh of Truex Collins, ORCA Media, Alison Fayle, Andy A, Catherine Whalen, David Hannigan, David Lawrence, David Delcore, Denise Roy, Erika Zimmerman, Erin Berry, Kari Bradley, Kathryn Biggam, Lila Richardson, Liz Balaconis, Noah Weinstein, Patrick Wood, Representative David Yacavone, Sue Paxman, Susie DeForge, Teegan Dykeman-Brown, Veronica Fair, Virginia, Anne Watson, Ann Cummings, Marc Mihaly

1. **Call to Order: Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:20 p.m.**

2. **Welcome:** Flor Diaz Smith noted that we have guests from the community; we have some legislators present tonight, along with board members and administrators. She invited the legislators to introduce themselves.
   2.1. Adjustments to The Agenda
   2.2. Reception of Guests

3. **Community Meeting (Public Input, Q&A):**
   3.1. Career Center (Jody Emerson): Jody Emerson, Superintendent of Central Vermont Career Center, provided a slide deck: *Building Vermont's Future: Reimagining Career Education in Central Vermont.* She invited questions.
   Q: How will students get there? **A:** Currently, sending schools are required to provide transportation; this may change. This effort is complicated by what is going on statewide.
   Q: How are you working together with that effort? How will we know the impact on attendance at the high schools? How do you balance when so many different things are going on at once? **A:** Will be either part of a regional district or part of a statewide career district. This is an opportunity for the board to put forth what they think our students will really need. If this does not happen then we will need to put the plans on the back burner

and wait to see. Yes, if we open, a new building there will be less students in sending schools; this may be a factor in the discussions about merging high schools. **Q:** If less students are going to be at the sending schools, what are the tax implications of those sending schools having fewer students in their schools? **A:** Not a linear answer; the reason to have the career center is that the students need it now. Act 73 will have to respond to the Career Center being there. This is one of the multiple pathways to graduation. Jody: The foundation formula will be across the state; though it is hard to know how it will play out. Comment: Supports what this is about, the concern is the timing, the uncertainty with what is going to happen in the legislature - this makes it very hard to vote to increase taxes on something where we don't really understand all of the financial implications. Some discussion about the tax burden. **Q:** In the future, do we not know who will be paying this bond? **A:** It is possible that it could change. The bond may transition to the new district, based on experience (e.g. Act 46). **Q:** How flexible will be the pathways? E.g. automotive. **A:** Yes, we will continue to keep data on program requests and add staff and programs. **Q:** Operating tax impact will be on top of the bond tax impact. **A:** Yes **Q:** Could you give a summary of where the current facility is and what is lacking? **A:** Currently located at Spaulding in Barre; lost about 45 parking spots; expanding within this space is not possible. **Q:** Would you consider a more satellite approach? Some of our existing properties have additional space. **A:** Many logistical challenges with various spaces; not necessarily impossible, but a great deal of logistics. Discussion of segregating the career tracks from the more traditional academic tracks; consider having students attend at the same facility for more cross-pollination. Acknowledges all of the work in preparing this; has concerns about sticker shock during a time of financial uncertainty. **Q:** With the increase in the cost of materials over the coming years, it is possible to turn around and need more money. **A:** There is a cost escalation contingency as part of the contract. **Q:** Is there a Plan B? Is there an idea if this does not pass, what might be cut? **A:** The gym is the first consideration. About 60 students from U-32 that attend currently. Goal is to expand 9-12 enrollment. It is concerning that; a greater number of kids will be out of their home schools. Also, concern around needing to hire more teaching staff to cover all graduation proficiencies. **Q:** Wonders is space the only reason that students are not accepted to the center. **A:** Because we have so many students apply, there are many reasons why students might not be accepted. **Q:** How many students are asked to leave the program once the school year has started? **A:** Believes there is one student who was asked to leave last year; returned to their sending school.

3.2. Act 73: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate provided a brief overview of Act 73. Question: Do you have any idea about what is being said about local folks not voting on their local school budgets? A: Local boards would not vote on the budget amount; this would be part of the foundational formula. Questions for small group work:

- What are the strengths of your current school system as you see it?
- What are the challenges/ weaknesses of your current school system as you see it?
- What opportunities do you see as a member of a bigger district?
- What risks or concerns do you see as a member of a bigger district?
- What other districts might you want us to consider for joining re: redistricting

Discussion of small group discussions: Strengths: Strong teachers, systems of support, sense of community, facilities, class sizes; challenges: class sizes can be a double-edged sword, partial FTE challenges, creativity needed re: budget, lack of foreign language in elem. school; opportunities: more culture, lots of kids remain in high school, possible social diversity, trim administrative costs, create administrative efficiency; risk: some towns might lose school building, loss of local governance, per pupil cost could increase, possible loss of services; other districts: Montpelier, Harwood, Northfield, Barre, Washington County, Cabot

Strengths: Sense of community, representation, students are known in their schools, children are connected; challenges: equitable achievement, school can be too small, unused capacity; opportunities: expansion of programs, more options, more equity, before and after programs, daycare for smaller schools; concerns: easier for kids to get lost, potential school closures, how long is too long on the bus?; other districts: Montpelier, Twinfield, Woodbury

Strengths: Flexible pathways, community based learning, co-curricular, student groups and leadership, strong TA system; challenges: small sizes, decreasing numbers at U-32 due to, e.g. early college, decrease in elective offerings, transportation challenges; opportunities: greater social groups; concerns: loss of local control, superintendent selection process

Strengths: Five elementary schools reflect their communities, positive socializing factor for community members, U32 brings together the schools in a vibrant way; challenges: dissimilarity in curriculum in elementary schools, different stages of preparedness for HS; opportunities: improve and review administrative structures, more curriculum offerings, geographic consolidation, better early childhood opportunities; challenges: towns without schools might suffer, risk of not having our voices heard, unfairly weighted school boards, misplaced trust in legislature, too much governance turnover; other districts: Career Center

Strengths: Arts being important/ elevated, flexible pathways, culture of kindness; challenges: transportation, start times, lack of rigor/ differentiation in classroom; opportunities: differentiation, critical mass, more diverse student population, more diverse faculty, opportunity to create reuse of properties we already have; concerns: school closures, local voice, are we really going to realize cost savings? Is there a risk of losing families with transportation challenges? Other districts: Twinfield, Plainfield to us, Marshfield to St. J

Strengths: We know our students well, art, theater, sports programs, TA system, outdoor learning opportunities, passionate communities; challenges: long bus rides, cost, lack of full time nurses, lack of early childhood and childcare, not all students can access career tech center; concerns: reduce local control, question about cost, merging governance seems daunting, teacher contracts? Other districts: Harwood, Twinfield

Anything else? David Yacavone: Appreciated conversation, learned a lot, appreciated the different perspectives. **Anne:** With thanks, a lot of this is yet to be told, as proposals come forward, would like to know what constituents think, have some doubts about moving forward with this plan, however, keeping an open mind. **Ann Cummings:** Thanked everyone for coming; this is helpful to hear what people are really thinking; helps us to determine where we need to focus, become clear. This is the biggest change in the time she has been here - and the hardest - causes us to look at tradeoffs that we do not want to make. Trying to do what is best for all of our children while at the same time trying to honor those who have built our towns and who would like to afford to live here. Daniel Keeney asked whether the legislators have anything to say about Act 73's impact on the Career Center. Would there be an opportunity to retroactively support the building? **A.** We do not know. Regarding existing debt when schools merge - either way, the money will be spread across the state, part of the statewide funding formula. Do not see a disadvantage as far as voting for this effort, will be part of the big picture either way. One thing the treasurer has been clear about is that this will not be a state bond. Patrick Whelley asked are there opportunities for us to bias what might happen in the future. Are there dates in mind - are there pressure points on the horizon where we might make some impression? **A**. If there is a specific district that you have in mind, thinks that doing this/ indicating this ahead of time would be helpful. No guarantees.

4. Board Operations

4.1. Debrief Community Input: Diane Nichols-Fleming: At what point do we bring up the question about what would be our preference? Invited Montpelier as a board to join to talk about, what do you make of the study that we committed to? Understanding that they might say no - but at least make that effort.

Chris McVeigh: We should be having discussions and reaching out now to other districts.

Stephen Dellinger-Pate: Would like to consider, if we have a conversation with just one district and then we are merged with others, what message does this send to the others in the end?

Flor Diaz Smith spoke about the challenge at this time to get further in discussions with neighboring school districts - not everyone has the capacity and bandwidth.

Diane Nichols-Fleming: Who makes the decision to send an invite? At what point do we decide to move forward regardless of Act 73? What is the deciding factor? She noted the study that was completed between Montpelier and WCUUSD.

Daniel Keeney: There is a history, and there is a difference between sayings "this is 'a' district we are interested in merging with, and saying "this is 'THE' district we are interested in merging with." The value in making a statement declaring this and explaining why these two are a logical match that should be honored.

Ursula Stanley: (1) We can make a declaration of other districts we would be interested in merging with, (2) Get together with Montpelier board and throw out ideas. Board chairs and superintendents got together; we heard from them that they do not feel this is the right time to move forward. Because of the uncertainty, there is a lot of anxiety amongst staff and having our two boards meet adds to this anxiety.

Chris McVeigh: We have to work with the "ifs".

Flor Diaz Smith: Both Montpelier and WCUUSD have expressed "interest. "We will have this on the next agenda as a discussion/ action item.

5. **Personnel : (none tonight)**
   5.1. Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in FTE

6. **Consent Agenda**
   6.1. Approve Minutes of 9.17.25, 9.22.25: Chris McVeigh moved to approve the minutes from 9-17-25, and 9-22-25. Seconded by Patrick Whelley. Discussion: Daniel Keeney was not present at the 9-17-25 meeting. **This motion carried, with noted edit.**

7. **Future Agenda Items**
   7.1. Consider action on moving 6th grade to U-32/ discuss, debate this. (Flor Diaz Smith stated that the Configuration Committee would meet before the next meeting to consider the administration's models). Daniel Keeney expressed concern that this has not come to the full board for consideration; he expressed concern about the timeline.
   Kealy Sloan - the Configuration Committee intends to consider models at the next meeting.
   Noted - and will keep Daniel Keeney's statement in mind as the committee considers the models.

8. Board Reflections (none tonight)

9. Public Comments: (none tonight)

10. Adjourn: Chris McVeigh moved, Daniel Keeney seconded; the board adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary