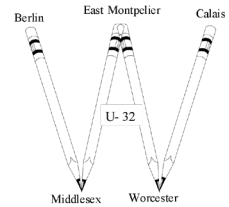


Washington Central Unified Union School District

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 12.3.25 6:15-9:15 PM (In-Person & Virtual) Berlin Elementary School

Present: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate, Flor Diaz Smith, Daniel Keeney, Chris McVeigh, Patrick Whelley, Ursula Stanley, Mckalyn Leclerc, Elizabeth Brown, Michelle Ksepka, Zach Sullivan, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Amelia Contrada, Julia Hewitt, Natasha Eckart, Karoline May, Celia Guggemos, Lisa LaPlante, Alicia Lyford, Julia Pritchard, Jen Miller-Arsenault, Cat Fair, Jarrod Weiss, Amy Molina, Bernie Lambek, Ania Kehne, Anthony Houser, Christine Hertz-Hausman, Erika Zimmerman, Mack Gardner-Morse, Allison Fayle, Caitlin Howansky, Lila Richardson, B Bernstein, Cyrus Hanson, David Lawrence, Dena Brown, Ellen Knoedler, Emilia, Garth Kurts, Giuliana Jensen, Kurt, Helena, Honi Bean Barrett, Jane Boudreau, JB Hilferty, Jennifer Chambers, Jennifer Maurais, Jordan Nobler, Kathryn Saunders, Kristy, Lauren Chabot, Matthew Thomas, Michelle Meacham, Rachel Bliss, Rachel, P Matheson, Ross Andrews, Veronica Fair, Michael Sherwin, Noah Weinstein, April Davis, Callie Weller, Ainsley, Deborah Bloom, Jenna Howard, Jill, Lauralee Curavoo, ORCA Media, David Delcore, Tennessee Lamb, Chris Winters, Deborah Bloom, Larraby Fellows, Sonja Andrews, Devon Bonady, Kara Rosenberg, Katie, Cavan Farrell a group of cross country team members, several others in the audience

1. **Call to Order:** Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.
2. **Welcome:** She welcomed those present and asked those present to maintain a tone of kindness.
 - 2.1. **Adjustments to the Agenda for the board to consider the appeal:** Flor Diaz Smith noted that we would move the Executive Session to after 3.1. **Chris McVeigh moved to accept this agenda adjustment. Seconded by Daniel Keeney, this motion carried.**
 - 2.2. **Reception of Guests**
 - 2.3. **Public Comments: Time strictly enforced, see note:** Flor Diaz Smith invited public comments that are not related to the appeal. A member from the audience asked whether there would be an opportunity to provide public comments about the appeal. Bernie Lambek, legal counsel for the board, explained that if the board decides to take up this appeal then there would be an opportunity for parties to provide input during the Executive Session if they are invited into the session. He suggested that two or three comments could be appropriate. Chris Winters stated that there is “what’s legal” and “what’s right.” He

stated that legal counsel trying to diminish risk sometimes removes the humanity from the process. He stated that there are children who feel that the process has failed them and they would like to have an opportunity to be heard. He asked the board to do what is just and fair for the children and what is just and fair for Andrew Tripp.

Deborah Bloom, a Worcester resident, asked people to keep in mind as we consider configuration, what we really need to be focusing on first and foremost is the education of our students, and to put trust in our educators to help make those decisions. She stated that at some point, this will need to happen and she warns against pitting us against each other and instead consider how to make this a positive transition.

Sophia Emigh stated that voters could not vote on something for which they do not have information. She noted there are some questions that have been brought up and are unanswered. She asked the board to pause and do due diligence to answer all of the questions before this is brought forward.

Larraby Fellows asked why the board is doing this. It feels like you do not care about the students and you really want to do what is best for you. It feels like you are not listening to us. We do not want this. We need to be able to speak up about what we want.

Sonja Andrews, Calais, spoke about the presentation about the survey. She stated that the questions were highly leading and were asking for answers that were predisposed to school consolidation. That is not good data. She asked the board to authorize an independent review of all survey data by a neutral party. If it is going to influence our decision, we need good data.

Devon Bonady asked, if there is going to be a decision for consolidation without a vote where does that leave the trust for your public service. She stated concerns that the lack of trust will trickle down and has concerns that conflict will influence students. She asked the board to slow down the process.

Kara Rosenberg noted that she appreciates all of the work. She spoke about the Times Argus article and she asked the board to communicate clearly to the community what are the “tradeoffs” - for example, \$2+ million decrease represents 20+ teachers.

Katie spoke about the benefit of small schools. She spoke about the need to take more time and many more meetings, and community input. She stated that the budget decrease represents people in our communities losing jobs. She feels this needs a lot more time and consideration in order to make a decision.

Cross Country, team member Cavan Farrell presented the petition with 300+ student signatures. He stated that we want the board to hear student voice.

3. Board Operations:

3.1. B22 Public Complaints About Personnel Appeal: At 6:36 p.m., Diane Nichols-Fleming moved that the board go into executive session for purposes of confidential attorney-client communications per 1 VSA 313(a)(1)(F), provided it makes the required finding that public knowledge would clearly place the board (or another party) at a substantial disadvantage. Seconded by Michelle Ksepka, this motion carried unanimously. At 7:27, the board came out of Executive Session. Diane Nichols-Fleming moved to hear the appeal based on the first request received on 11-19-25. Seconded by Chris McVeigh.

Discussion: Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that what the board would like to hear about is the process, the communication with the superintendent, the interactions, and the process that was followed between the superintendent.

Ursula Stanley stated that based on the complaint that was filed, that is something that the board can hear. She shared with the audience that the board has to follow the processes and policies. We are held to a very high ethical standard. No matter what you want to say publicly, we have no idea what kind of harm can be done. She spoke about transparency.

Elizabeth Brown thanked the students for speaking out and sharing and she promised that the board has read the letters and takes this seriously; it is important to be heard. She stated that they were brave to share their concerns aloud.

Patrick Whelley stated that this is how you get involved - you speak up, you ask to be heard. This is how democracy works; how good governance works. He stated that he hopes students have learned that if you have people beside you, you can amplify your voice and be heard. Even if the outcome is not satisfactory, he hopes that they receive that feedback - that their voices are heard and taken seriously by the board.

Flor Diaz Smith acknowledged that the last meeting was hard, and she asked everyone again to be kind. She stated that, sometimes if we do not get our way, it does not mean we are not listened to. She stated that we have to protect all of our students. **This motion carried unanimously. At 7:34, Diane Nichols Fleming moved to go into Executive Session for the appeal filed on November 19, 2025, which indicates “Pursuant to (policy) B22, the below individuals are appealing the superintendent’s decision based on a failure to provide sufficient input to those affected by the decision. This violates school policy requiring student centered and community decision making,” and to include administrators. Seconded by Chris McVeigh. This motion carried unanimously.**

Question: If you are going to hear from the administrators about the process, it puts us at a disadvantage in responding if we don’t hear what they have to say, and also about the actual way the process unfolded - because it has been a confusing and poorly lit process.

Bernie Lambek stated that student information needs to not be included in the discussion - law dictates this. He also noted that personnel matters are considered confidential. The petition actually says that it is an appeal of the superintendent’s decision based on failure to

provide adequate information. Some discussion followed about how to hear from administration and from others that are present to provide information.

Audience member : Any appearance that something is being done exclusively and secretly can only harm these kids who have shown up and followed the process that they were told - the values should be openness and transparency, particularly because the students have felt excluded and in the dark from the very beginning.

Zach Sullivan stated that if we are all going to be in the room together we need to acknowledge what will be within the boundaries of discussion. He spoke about personnel and student confidentiality. He worries that students will feel frustrated with the limits.

Flor Diaz Smith pointed out that the board at this time has gone into Executive Session. The community members who had attended the meeting to provide testimony stayed during Executive Session, alone with administration.

At 9:15 p.m., the board came out of Executive Session in a motion made by Chris McVeigh and Seconded by Daniel Keeney, carrying unanimously. Diane Nichols Fleming stated that the board heard the appeal and agreed that the policy and procedure were followed as written. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously. Due to the late hour, Flor Diaz Smith recommended that the board prioritize which agenda items to address tonight.

Steven Dellinger-Pate noted that documents have been updated online, as was discussed at the previous meeting. He stated that information related to configuration is posted online on our webpage. Trying to arrange them in a way that is easy to access; providing Act 73 materials from the state, as well as FAQs. Everything that he has shared with the board to date should be included on this site. He stated that the transition time line is also shared online - it is not yet fully fleshed out. He stated that we would be looking to hire someone to help shepherd through the transition process.

Mckalyn Leclerc asked when the FAQ document would be available. Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that one of the commonly asked questions is around budget - he noted that these would be available at the December 10 meeting. By the end of this week, some of the FAQ will be posted online.

Daniel Keeney asked whether the budget for the configuration scenario includes savings, and will it include the cost for a "point person" who is hired to help shepherd to transition.

Julia Hewitt asked for clarification - will we be expected to vote on the 10th? When will we receive this information? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that it is being prepared as quickly as possible for the board; Flor Diaz Smith stated that the packet is typically shared on Friday but will be shared by Monday definitely.

Julia Hewitt stated that there are so many questions that are being asked by community members - there are too many that are unanswered.

Zach Sullivan stated that it is important for us to remember that this is not the first time we have looked at configuration. We also need to remember the timeline we are up against - we are not asking the public to vote on the answer on the 10th - we are being asked as a board to vote whether to go forward with a vote to the public later.

Chris McVeigh stated that the vote could be on town meeting day. He noted that if we need more time, we could push out the date. This is a significant decision for two of our communities to make, if the configuration proposal goes through to a vote in the towns. He stated that we have time, and he does not think we should rush this.

3.2. Configuration update

3.2.1. Updated documents

3.2.2. Transition Time Line

3.2.3. Outcomes for December 10 meeting: Flor Diaz Smith shared that three members of the Steering Committee met today and considered this.

- Vote on configuration model
- Vote on closure of one or two schools if necessary.
- Vote on language of motion for the article for the affected town(s) - one for Calais, one for Worcester

She stated that we have been asked that one of the documents allow for Calais staying open to provide preschool. Some discussion about the articles of agreement and whether a vote from the electorate is needed to move students from a school. Flor Diaz Smith stated that we do want to do this in collaboration with our communities but the board and the administration has the right to make the decisions about how to best serve students.

Patrick Whelley and Daniel Keeney stated that they object to the idea of putting a vote to the town and then possibly ignoring the will of the vote (and move students from the school.) Daniel Keeney stated that he thought at the last meeting we had agreed to not take that route.

Natasha Eckart stated that it sounds like a threat and does not sit well with her as a member of the Worcester community. She wants to be supportive of the configuration process as long as it is transparent, fair, and not threatening. That statement comes across as a threat.

Flor Diaz Smith spoke about the scenario, should both communities vote to not close the school - the board would have to decide what to do next. We are trying to make the best decision on behalf of all of our students, so that we can serve all of our students.

Natasha Eckart stated that we are trying to be transparent with our communities so they can make informed decisions and feel like the school board does care about all of the students in all of the communities. We need to be deliberate and thoughtful in our communication that we are trying to be fiscally responsible and first and foremost, trying to do what is best for all of the students in all of our communities. Flor Diaz Smith reiterated that she was not making a threat in that language.

Daniel Keeney stated that leaving that option on the table does a lot of harm to the work he has done to communicate with the towns and build trust. He cannot accept leaving that on the table at this time.

Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that it would be critical to understand the budget that will meet the parameters and what is the realistic budget. She has heard that this might be tricky to get to us in advance of next week's meeting. We will need to be clear on what we are setting forth in the motion that we are voting on; be mindful that we have all of the information. Patrick Whelley asked whether we should reconsider the language for the Calais motion/ outcome for December 10 meeting.

Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that the Steering Committee wants to affirm that this is the configuration that we want to move forward with. The board affirming that can decide the other outcomes. If we were to move forward with the model, the Worcester community would have to vote to close the building. The Calais proposed model of having preschool in the building for the next year, and a vote to the town on the following year, for building closure. He spoke about some of the agreements that have already been made about configuration regarding preschool and kindergarten and Worcester and Calais.

Elizabeth Brown spoke about the idea of Calais remaining open and operating preschool in the school. She stated that what would be helpful would be to see a four-school model regarding budgeting. She stated that it is asking a lot, but these are big decisions, and we have to get the information. Moving preschool to one building has a budget impact. She noted that phasing could be much less painful and intentional.

Chris McVeigh asked, if Calais were to remain open to house preschool, where would the other students go? Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that the three-school model is that - combining Worcester/ Middlesex and Rumney, and combining Calais/ East Montpelier at East Montpelier.

3.2.3.1. Motions

3.2.3.2. Communications Timeline

3.3. Update on Correspondence in the Packet

4. Policy

4.1. First Readings

4.1.1. D23 Selection of and Access to Instructional Materials: Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that this is modeled around the access to library materials. We felt this was important to have a process by which materials can be challenged. Zach Sullivan stated that the ban is very broad and he wonders if that is the intent of the policy. Chris McVeigh stated that it is intentionally broad and is meant to be a protective policy. This policy will come back to the board for a second reading.

4.2. Second Readings

4.2.1. C15 Student Conduct and Discipline: Chris McVeigh invited questions or concerns around this policy.

4.2.2. C45 Bus Discipline: Chris McVeigh noted that there are no significant changes to this policy except a reference to a separate policy around security cameras.

- 4.2.3.D8 Selection of Library Materials (Procedures):** Steven Dellinger-Pate noted that this is a required policy.
- 4.2.4.Rescind Policy D22 Library Media Center Selection & Reconsideration (this will be covered by D8)**
- 4.2.5.Rescind Policy B31 Educator Supervision & Evaluation: Probationary Teachers:** This is covered in other places - Ed Quality Standards and the negotiated contracts we have with teachers.

Chris McVeigh moved to adopt policies C15, C45, D8, and to rescind D22 and B31. Seconded by Patrick Whelley. Discussion: Daniel Keeney asked about the language in the Student Conduct and Discipline policy around analysis of behavior data. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate clarified. **This motion carried unanimously.**

5. Personnel

5.1. Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in FTE:

6. Consent Agenda

- 6.1. Approve Minutes of 11.19.25:** Ursula Stanley moved to approve the minutes of November 19, 2025. **Seconded by Elizabeth Brown. Julia Hewitt noted that there was something in the minutes that was attributed to Elizabeth Brown (p 30 in the packet). This motion carried with noted edit.**

7. Future Agenda Items

7.1. U-32 Schedule

7.2. Ed Quality

7.2.1.Multiple Pathways/ College and Career

- 8. Board Reflections:** Amelia Contrada stated that she is not planning to run for another term in 2026. She expressed gratitude for the opportunity to work together, and she has a great deal of appreciation and respect. She thanked Flor for being a good role model and leading the charge, and having grace in the face of difficulty. She asked the board to continue to work on goals of extending programs in an equitable way and leverage resources and remain growth oriented as we try to ethically make these difficult decisions going forward.

9. Public Comments: Time limit strictly enforced, see note:

Lila Richardson stated that she was confused and concerned about the votes that would be offered to the communities. She hopes that if the board decides to go forward with this, there is more thought given to what vote Calais has in the matter.

Rachel stated that the board is about to make a decision about not only a school but also a town (Calais.) She spoke about the school population in Calais having grown this year. She asked the board to reject this plan.

Sophia Emigh stated that the students who were affected by COVID (3 to 6 graders) could avoid yet another transition, year after year, if the board would be willing to wait until Act 73 goes into

effect. Our students deserve more than this; they deserve to be involved in an impact study; they do not deserve another disruption on top of what they have already experienced.

Ross Andrews stated that the way language is presented is important. He stated that there is not enough discussion about the opportunities, and there is too much language around “this is our right as the board...” This could end in a power struggle.

10. Executive Session: Personnel, depending on outcome of item 3.1, possible executive session to hear complaint, per 1 VSA 313(a)(3) (matter relating to employment of personnel); (a)(4) (disciplinary action against employee); (a)(7) (student records): This occurred earlier in the meeting

11. Adjourn: Ursula Stanley moved, Michelle Ksepka seconded; board adjourned by consensus at 10:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary