

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
1.21.26
6:15-9:15 PM
(In-Person & Virtual)
U-32 Middle & High School
930 Gallison Hill Rd
Montpelier, VT**

Present: Board Members: Flor Diaz Smith, Daniel Keeney, Chris McVeigh, Patrick Whelley, Ursula Stanley, Kealy Sloan, Mckalyn Leclerc, Elizabeth Brown, Michelle Ksepka, Zach Sullivan, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Amelia Contrada, Julia Hewitt, Natasha Eckart, Kealy Sloan, Lei DeGroot

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

Others: Allison Fayle, David Delcore, Giuliana Jensen, Lila Richardson, Lisa Hanna, Mallory Russell, Mark Brown, Marilyn Martin, Noah Weinstein, ORCA Media, David Hannigan, Rosemary Leach, Mallory Russell, Kristy, Meg, Sonya Rhodes, Jessica Maurais, Erin Galligan-Baldwin, David Nichols-Fleming, Danielle Mackay, Annie Ledue, Teegan Dykeman-Brown, Kathryn Saunders, Devon Bonady, Ainsley Burroughs, Ellen Knoedler, Annie Ledue, Autumn Wheeler, C, Caroline Grace, Cat Fair, Kara Rosenberg, Jordan Nobler, Dave Bazis, Michael Sherwin, Maya Stone, Sonja Andrews, Susan, Veronica Fair Alison Byrnes, Danielle Mackay, Ellen Knoedler, Erin Mooney, Hollis St Peter, Janine Griggs, Jenna Howard, Jennifer Chambers, Kristy, Lauralea Curavoo, Anna Matheson, Maria Paris, Ellen Cook, Nate Lovitz, Maia Stone, Phoebe Stone, Cairsten Keese, Jade Walker, Gracie Taylor, Tracy Martin, Linda Gray, Cynthia Gardner-Morse, Dave Bazis, Anne Conner

1. **Call to Order:** Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.
2. **Welcome**
 - 2.1. **Adjustments to The Agenda:** (no changes to the agenda)

2.2. **Reception of Guests:** Flor Diaz Smith welcomed everyone and thanked all for their continued discussion and work for the shared outcome of the best programming for all students.

2.3. **Public Comments: Time strictly enforced, see note:** Flor Diaz Smith noted that we would allow some time for public Q&A after the Budget Presentation. She invited people to wait until that time, or the end of the meeting, or now; she noted that the 90-second time limit would be honored due to the large attendance tonight and the heavy agenda.

- Noah Weinstein stated that community impact, which was one of the criteria that was set, has not been addressed and continues to be a huge issue for many of the Worcester residents. He suggested that an MOU be created to address these concerns. He urged the board to create a contingency budget that meets the needs of all students, should the towns vote not to close a school.
- Ellen Cooke, high school counselor at U-32, spoke on behalf of the school counselors at U-32 about the proposed elimination of the Director of Student Services at U-32. She asked what information led the school board not to consider the current leadership team.
- Cairsten Keese, another school counselor at U-32, continued the message expressing concerns about the loss of leadership with this proposed cut. She asked the school board to respond to the questions that were raised.
- Allison Byrnes spoke about concerns about the elimination of the position, as previously stated. She also spoke about large class sizes at EMES; she noted that reconfiguration would help to address the larger class sizes.
- A school counselor read a letter on behalf of Erin Galligan-Baldwin, continuing the message of concern around eliminating the position.
- Mark Brown spoke about the impact on students and programming, should the positions as proposed be cut. He stated that the board and administration would need to address this.
- Jade Walker read a letter on behalf of another school counselor. She delineated some of the roles in the position; she stated that it is an essential position - she asked, who then, will take on these roles? She implored the board to reconsider this position elimination.
- Science teacher at U-32 asked the board to reconsider the elimination of the position. She spoke about the role of the position in Title 9.
- Kara Rosenberg asked what is the justification for increasing administration at the elementary level while decreasing administration at U-32.
- Gracie Taylor, a recent graduate from U-32, spoke about her experience and the importance of the position of Director of Student Services at U-32.
- Dave Bazis, teacher at U-32, spoke about his fear of losing this position of Student Services. He urged the board to consider another avenue besides eliminating this position.
- Cari Wilson, U-32 teacher, reiterated what others had stated about the loss of the Director of Student Services. She asked the board to reconsider the three-administrator model.
- Maia Stone, East Montpelier resident, urged everyone to vote. She implored voters to seek out current parents of students in the WCUUSD towns; listen to those who stand to lose the most. She asked people to please come together, talk and support the best interest of students, which she believes is a reconfiguration model.
- Anna Matheson read a post she had prepared for Front Porch Forum. She spoke about the quality of education being critical versus maintaining/ protecting buildings. She

spoke about underfunded schools. Closing a school is not a failure; it is an act of responsibility. She warned against questioning the integrity of those who have worked to create the budget and the configuration; she reminded that they are the experts around best practice in education.

- Cynthia Gardner-Morse stated that she had asked for what else had been considered before the three school model was developed, and she has not heard an answer to this

3. Presentation: Final Budget Presentation: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate shared a slide deck, *FY27 Budget Presentation, January 21, 2026*. He stated that this is pretty much a “bare bones” budget. He spoke about the pressures of declining enrollment and the pressures coming from the state. He stated that we unfortunately have to make hard decisions at this time about how we spend our money. Susan Gann explained the details of Budget Draft #3. She shared that this draft is under the excess spending threshold and meets most of the programmatic goals and financial goals set by the board.

3.1. Public Q & A: Flor Diaz Smith invited questions from the public about the presentation.

- Cynthia Gardner- Morse commented that when all of this information is provided during a meeting and then questions are invited, she does not have time to consider all of the information to develop a question; she wished the information had been shared earlier.
- Lauralea Curavoo stated that it would be helpful to see the individual school budgets so that the question can be answered at each building. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that at each level the development starts with student enrollment and then the decision-making about what is needed to meet student needs is left to the administration at each building. Lauralea Curavoo clarified, is it up to the building principal to make the decision about what are the student needs at each school? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that dollars from the greater sum of WCUUSD budget are assessed to each school based on student population and then the administrators at each schoolwork with that dollar amount to create a budget that meets student needs. He spoke about centralized services being an exception to this.

3.2. Board Q & A:

- Patrick Whelley asked about Assistant Principal positions - what is the guidance for determining whether this position is warranted? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that the guidance is that for ten certified staff at a school, a full time principal is needed. The guidance is that around 200 students warrants an assistant principal. He stated that around 25-30 staff members per administrator is the guidance. He noted that supervision of staff is a factor; he also noted that in this draft, aspects of behavior positions have been wrapped into Assistant Principal positions. He stated that this reconfiguration process has brought the conversation to the forefront around supervision, instructional leadership at each school based on staffing patterns. He reminded those present that a reduction in a position is not any indication about the value of an actual person.
- Chris McVeigh stated his intention to move to restore the position of Director of Student Services at U-32. He asked whether principals at schools that are possibly closed will be eliminated or will their employment go to another school, for example, as Assistant Principal. He stated that in the past, the board found money to restore a position and he feels that this is a critical one.

- Lei DeGroot asked, how would the responsibilities be dispersed, for this position? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that the workload will be redistributed among the three remaining administrators that are building based, and some of the workload will be redistributed among other staff as needed.
- Mckalyn Leclerc clarified about a three-administrator model. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that the current model is a Principal, Two Assistant Principals and Director of Student Services at U-32. The model that is proposed is Principal and two Assistant Principals, and that we are currently searching for a Principal.
- Lei DeGroot asked why two Assistant Principals are suggested? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate spoke about the guidance of an assistant principal for every 300 students, and U-32 looking at around 600 students.
- Daniel Keeney spoke about concerns around institutional knowledge, school culture, social emotional learning/ well-being, given the loss of a principal and this proposal for eliminating the position of Director of Student Services. He spoke of the loss of three positions - losing the current principal, losing the position of Director of Student Services, as well as the loss of the position of Social Worker. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate indicated that he understands the concerns and they are valid, and the work of the new Principal will be to come on board understanding this dynamic. He reminded the board that the question is perennially posed from the public: “why are you not considering eliminating administration?” and this is an answer to that question. He stated again that this is not a reflection of the current person in the position.
- Natasha Eckart stated that this is not in fact eliminating administration, as there is a proposed increase in elementary-level (assistant) principals. She has concerns about this proposed elimination.
- Flor Diaz Smith that the behavioral coach at the elementary level, will be rolled into the assistant principal position.
- Superintendent Dellinger-Pate reiterated that again, we have to make very hard decisions about where to place our resources. As part of the configuration, we have been trying to create three elementary schools that have a full range of services to offer to students; again, he spoke about difficult cuts that had to be made.
- Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that what the community needs to know is that we are repeatedly told that we do not have the right to make some decisions. As a board member, she is interested in class sizes and staffing patterns. Bottom line, the board is being told that we are making financial decisions. However, sharing information with clarity around - these are the harder decisions we have to make, and here is how/ why we came to them, would be helpful.
- Michelle Ksepka asked whether consideration is given to using the other experts to provide supervision/ evaluation, for example, the Director of Facilities providing custodial supervision/ evaluation, the Director of Food Services providing supervision/ evaluation to kitchen staff. Ursula Stanley stated that at this time, we are asking clarifying questions, and asked the board to govern ourselves to stay on task.
- Lei DeGroot asked who are the two current Assistant Principals. JB Hilferty and Amy Molina.
- Chris McVeigh asked, at Berlin will there be an increase in students and/ or an increase in staff? If not, he does not see the impetus for having an Assistant

Principal. He asked whether the behavior position at Berlin is grant-funded. It once was but is now in the general budget.

- Daniel Keeney asked about nonsalary items - what percent of late buses are cut? Two of the 5 days. Summer curriculum work is eliminated; some is cut from the athletics program. What are the percentages?
- Kealy Sloan asked, regarding Berlin Staff, that the behavior coach be swapped for the Assistant Principal position.
- Mckalyn Leclerc asked for clarification around behavior positions at other schools.
- Amelia Contrada asked, if the only change that is made were to add the position of Director of Student Services, would this push us over the penalty threshold? Susanne Gann stated that no, it would not.
- Patrick Whelley asked for clarification around where Assistant Principal positions lie within MTSS, versus the Director of Student Supports position. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate spoke about the role of assistant principal in, for example, supervision/ evaluation, in behavioral support and decision making, in some of the professional learning to teaching staff - a wide variety of roles, many times teacher-facing, whereas the behavior role would be more student-focused.
- Julia Hewitt asked whether there would be time to talk about the contingency budget. She stated that some people are wondering whether the contingency budget will provide minimum EQS standards and provide adequate instruction. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate responded that we will be able to meet minimum EQS standards, but this still requires us to make the proposed cuts at U-32.
- Flor Diaz Smith explained that the Social Emotional Learning position would be eliminated in the contingency budget model; she explained the critical role of this position.

4. Reports

4.1. Superintendent/Central Office Leadership Team (COLT) Report: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate had shared a written report. He shared the status of the search process for U-32 Principal.

4.1.1. Three Year Impact Report Humanity & Justice Scholar in Residence:

Superintendent Dellinger-Pate shared the professional development from yesterday and extended appreciation to the student panel and to those who organized this. He had also shared an impact report from the Humanity & Justice Scholar in Residence. He noted that this role is no longer included in the budget and that he believes WCUUSD is in a position to continue to carry the work forward. Zach Sullivan clarified that, historically, the professional development day around MLK Jr holiday has a focus on equity work. Natasha Eckart commended the students who worked on the panel for the Humanity and Justice Work.

4.2. Student Report: Lei DeGroot shared updates from the student perspectives. He spoke about the recent development at U-32 of Volunteer Club. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that she appreciates the insight that he brings to the board.

4.3. Principal Report: School principals provided brief overviews from the written report.

4.4. Central Vermont Career Center Report: Patrick Whelley shared some highlights - he recently toured the Electrical Technology area; a board member opening for Berlin; CVCC's need for a strategic outreach plan.

4.5. Community School Report: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate provided an overview of the written report.

4.6. VSBA Report: Flor Diaz Smith provided an update from VSBA.

5. Board Operations:

5.1. Budget Approval: Flor Diaz Smith noted that the work of the board tonight is to approve the budget. **Zach Sullivan moved to set the budget for the FY27 for WCUUSD for \$43,115,896. Seconded by Ursula Stanley.** Discussion: **Chris McVeigh moved to amend to include the position of Director of Student Services at U-32 by increasing the budget. Seconded by Diane Nichols-Fleming.** Discussion: Susanne Gann clarified that this amount would be the total of \$43,271,845. Diane Nichols-Fleming asked what the per-pupil spending is with this amount. Susanne Gann answered: \$16,372.81 Increase 7.21% 1.773 equalized tax rate. She shared CLA impacts for each town under this scenario. Fund balance is around \$3,114,537. Tax rate stays around the same as FY26; this remains under the threshold.

- Mckalyn Leclerc expressed support in maintaining this role; the three-administrator model intrigued her. She asked if there is a cost savings in considering the three current administrators in place: both Assistant Principals and the Director of Student Services. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate asked the board to consider its role in determining staffing; he expressed the importance of having a building principal.
- Zach Sullivan stated that this cut was proposed in response to board parameters. He warns the board against making specific suggestions around staffing and leaving that to administrators.
- Kealy Sloan agreed with Zach Sullivan's statement; she noted that U-32 is about to go through a lot of changes, and she believes that the board can have the role of saying we are in support of weighing more heavily on programming versus financial in this instance (of reinstating the position)
- Flor Diaz Smith stated that she is not comfortable with talking about specific people versus positions. As a board member, she would hold the superintendent accountable but also honor the expertise to make the decision around staffing. Create systems as opposed to institutional knowledge.
- Ursula Stanley stated that, as hard as it is to separate a person from a position, she realizes that the administrative team had to come together to make these recommended changes, being even closer to the staff/ positions.
- Patrick Whelley stated that it is important to separate people from positions. He noted that he has heard from constituents that we do not spend enough money on our students. The opinion is out there asking how we actually spend *more* money in order to provide more for our students. However, he spoke about the threshold penalty. He stated that the amendment that is offered is a small but significant change to the proposed budget and would be impactful for students' educational experience. **A vote was called on the amendment. This motion carried with two abstentions. (Two votes of "nay," 2 abstentions, the rest in favor) A vote was called on the amended motion. This motion carried with three abstentions, 9 in favor.** Steven Dellinger-Pate thanked the board; the board thanked the Superintendent and the leadership team in return.

5.2. Approve Announced Tuition Rate for 2026-2027: Chris McVeigh moved to approve the announced tuition rate for the FY 2026-27 school year as \$22,300 for Elementary Tuition and \$23,351 for Secondary Tuition. Seconded by Amelia Contrada. Discussion: Kealy Sloan asked for clarification that the memo indicates that the number needs to be announced by January 15. Susanne Gann offered clarification. **This motion carried unanimously.**

5.3. Final Budget Warning Language

5.3.1. District Clerk Pay: Zach Sullivan moved to approve the budget warning language as presented. Seconded by Patrick Whelley. Discussion: Flor Diaz Smith noted that the change includes the updated budget amount, updated per pupil cost, and percentage, as well as a change for the District Clerk Pay as agreed at the previous meeting. **This motion carried unanimously.**

5.4. Budget Communication: Flor Diaz Smith stated that the board would continue to have small-scale budget information meetings. The board will use the slide deck as presented tonight in order to facilitate information sharing. She noted that Superintendent Dellinger-Pate would help develop a short video. Budget information meetings: Feb 4 - Doty, Feb 7 – Calais Superintendent Dellinger-Pate asked Policy Committee members to respond to the doodle poll around changing the committee meeting in order to accommodate the budget information meeting at Doty. Flor Diaz Smith stated that we hope for 100% participation in the superintendent evaluation, and she reminded board members to attend to this email survey.

5.5. Ed Quality Spring Data Report: Ursula Stanley provided an overview of this document. She invited questions/ comments. Patrick Whelley asked what the relative weighting of digital tools versus analog tools. Is the data on the charts coming from these two formats? iReady is online; Acadience is in person, teacher-led. Kealy Sloan asked if we are considering longitudinal trends. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that we are looking more globally, and it helps to analyze the systems that are in place at each school, for them to consider specific data. The system has not been in place long enough to consider, for example, longitudinal - e.g., three year- data, yet; we are moving in that direction.

5.6. Twinfield Communication/ Possible Feasibility Study: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate had provided a memo, and he asked board members by straw poll whether they are in support of continuing this discussion. Board members indicated that they are - there are many unknowns, etc. However, the conversation should continue. Some discussion followed around some of the possible logistical issues. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate indicated that it is premature to get too far into logistics at this time but that he will continue to keep engaged in the ongoing discussion.

6. Negotiations Committee Update: Diane Nichols-Fleming shared: regarding teachers, board and association discussed language around the Reduction in force (RIF) process and seniority and regarding Educational Support Personnel (ESP), we worked on seniority associated with RIFs.

7. Personnel

7.1. Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in FTE: (none tonight)

7.2. WCUUSD Transition and Community Engagement Coordinator Job Description: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate had shared information about this temporary, part-time position in tonight’s board packet. **Daniel Keeney moved to approve the job description for WCUUSD Transition and Community Engagement Coordinator. Seconded by Zach Sullivan.** Discussion: Chris McVeigh stated that he feels it is premature to be creating this position. Diane Nichols-Fleming asked what resources were used to build this position. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate shared information about some of the sources for drafting this document. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that she is not prepared to vote on this without a salary range. Daniel Keeney disagreed with Chris McVeigh’s point and indicated that many people have expressed that we have not put enough thought into fully moving forward. Kealy Sloan suggested adding that this position will liaise with any community organizations with which we are currently working. **Chris McVeigh moved to amend that the position would not become effective until one or more of our towns vote to close a school.** Flor Diaz Smith noted that we are only approving the language of a job description at this time. **This motion to amend was not seconded.** Ursula Stanley stated that if we approve the job description now, then it means after the Feb 10 vote, we can move forward if we need this. She stated that people are asking, hypothetically, how are we going to get this job done? This is a step toward answering that. **The question was called on the original motion. This passed with one vote of “nay.”**

8. Consent Agenda

8.1. Approve Minutes of 1.7.26: Chris McVeigh moved to approve the minutes of January 7, 2026. Seconded by Daniel Keeney, this motion carried unanimously.

8.2. Board Orders: Ursula Stanley moved, Chris McVeigh seconded, to approve the following board orders: Dated from 12-18 - 25 to 1-21 - 26 for \$1,104,509.46. This motion carried unanimously.

9. Future Agenda Items

9.1. U-32 Schedule

9.2. Ed Quality

9.2.1. Multiple Pathways/ College and Career (February 18 Meeting)

Julia Hewitt asked if we could get more details about the contingency budget since we might be in a position to have to consider it. She feels it is important as a board that we understand this budget with detail. Stephen Dellinger-Pate stated that much of the information we shared in Budget Draft 2A is represented in the contingency budget. Susanne Gann stated that we would need more time to revisit with administration - more time than being ready for the next board meeting. Flor Diaz Smith stated that it would make more sense to do this after Feb 10. Julia Hewitt stated that that would be too late, as information could influence peoples’ votes. Ursula Stanley stated, in broad strokes, a five-school model would be using the same amount of money and having to stretch it further. Mckalyn Leclerc stated that it might not be complicated to create a table for comparison. She was tasked with doing so. Daniel Keeney stated that elementary principals have provided narratives to make it clear what staffing and programming would look like under the five-school model.

10. Board Reflections:

- Natasha Eckart expressed disappointment that the Humanity & Justice position has been cut from the budget, and does not believe that the budget that was approved reflects our core beliefs.
- Zach Sullivan asked the board to consider in the future, sometimes it is worth just putting a clean motion on the floor, even if it is going to be discussed/ amended.
- Daniel Keeney spoke about U-32's Volunteer Club; he feels this is an important step forward.
- Diane Nichols-Fleming expressed thanks to the board-recording secretary - and to Susanne Gann as well for all of the work that has gone into budget development and presentations and scenarios and revisions.
- Flor Diaz Smith thanked the administrative staff for their continued work during this budgeting process.

11. Public Comments: Time limit strictly enforced, see note 15 minutes:

- Linda Gray, Calais, expressed disappointment in the board for approving a budget that they only just saw tonight at this meeting. The board is spending this taxpayer money. She stated that discussing administrative cuts did not refer to principals; it referred to central office staffing. These types of complicated documents should be shared at least 48 hours before the board is expected to take a vote.
- Anne Connor, from Calais, stated that it is really the older voters who we need to outreach to. She believes that we are getting deep in the weeds of staffing in our messaging; this is not really, what people are interested in hearing. She hopes the point is made that "we can't have this year, again next year." If the budget is voted as "no," then we are in a tough position. She would like to hear the answer to the question that towns would not be suddenly burdened with maintaining a school building. She noted that future budgets would be stabilized by a vote in favor. Future costs will be saved now if we move forward - we are on the edge of a cliff that we are about to go over.
- Jordan Nobler worries that the board is assuming we are going to go forward with a three-school model. We have not given enough consideration to what would happen going forward with the contingency budget - she has a lot of worries about what that will look like - how will we meet student needs if it comes to that?
- Flor Diaz Smith clarified the board's intention with school buildings - even if the vote passes to close a school we will continue to care for the building.
- Chris McVeigh clarified that only after the board makes a decision that the building is no longer to be used, and then the offer can be made to the town to buy the building back. Until and unless that happens, the building is still the responsibility of the board.

12. Executive Session: Superintendent Contract: At 9:56, Diane Nichols-Fleming moved to go into Executive Session, with just board members. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously. At 10:18, Ursula Stanley moved to come out of Executive Session. Seconded by Mckalyn Leclerc, this motion carried unanimously. Diane Nichols-Fleming moved to approve the contract for Superintendent Dellinger-Pate, and to authorize board chair to sign. Seconded by Amelia Contrada, this motion carried unanimously.

13. Adjourn: The board adjourn at 10:18 p.m. Motion by Ursula Stanley; seconded by Chris McVeigh, unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary