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
4.15.26
6:15-9:15 PM
(In-Person & Virtual)

Present: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate, Flor Diaz Smith, Daniel Keeney, Chris McVeigh, Patrick Whelley, Ursula Stanley, Elizabeth Brown, Zach Sullivan, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Julia Hewitt, Natasha Eckart, Marty McMahon, Andrew Boye. Student Representatives: Kathryn Saunders, Lei DeGroot. Barry Bernstein, Jen Miller-Arsenault, Susanne Gann, Allison Fayle, Alicia Lyford, Danielle Mackay, Gillian Fuqua, Jarrod Weiss, Celia Guggemos, ORCA Media, Morgan Fryzel, Maia Stone, Lauralea Curavoo, Callie Weller, Victoria Capitanelli, Emily Alfano, Ainsley Burroughs, David Hershey, Alison Byrnes, Jenna Howard, David Delcore, Griffin Ludwig, Heidi Dimick, Michael Duane, Emilie Connor, Lucretia Guajardo, Hans Melhus, Dena Brown, C Ecklund, Jamie Bohn, Jillian, Bec Dezan

1. **<u>Call To Order:</u> Diane Nichols-Fleming called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.**
2. **<u>Welcome:</u> Adjustments to The Agenda: Elizabeth Brown asked whether we can include the letter from the Calais Selectboard as part of board operations tonight. Ursula Stanley moved to accept this amendment to the agenda. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously.** Reception of Guests. Public Comments-Time limit strictly enforced, see note None at this time
3. **<u>Reports:</u>**
   a. **Superintendent Report/Central Office Leadership Team (COLT) Report:** Superintendent Dellinger-Pate had included an update on the legislative action; he noted that even by tonight, this has changed. He encouraged everyone to stay abreast of the activity. He invited questions or comments. Marty McMahon asked what is the current fund balance. Susanne Gann reviewed: $3,114,548, projecting around $2,500,000 at the end of the school year. Susanne Gann noted that Bill Ford will be retiring as Project Manager and Clerk of the Works, and that Andrew LaRosa has been hired to replace him. She thanked him for his work and wished him well in his retirement. The board applauded Bill Ford's service to the board. Diane Nichols-Fleming asked how many RIFs have been provided at this time. Steven Dellinger-Pate answered 13.2 FTE. RIFs with reassignments: 5.52 FTE; increase of 0.8 in

district overall; 0.4 of the increase represents preK programming moving to five days a week. Chris McVeigh asked for clarification in the Superintendent's report about special education funding. He explained that new funding for special education is problematic, as opposed to the block grant funding.

b. **Principal Report:** Superintendent Dellinger-Pate invited questions from the board for the school principals who had prepared a written report. Chris McVeigh asked for clarification about the statement around chronic absenteeism. Celia Guggemos explained some of the steps that Berlin School is taking to create an improvement in student attendance. She stated that the District Leadership Team discusses this topic as well. Lei DeGroot asked whether the chronic absence number takes into account factors such as illness or issues at home. Steven Dellinger Pate stated that the data does not filter out any factors in this data and one of the reasons is that, regardless of the reason behind absence, we still want to be sure to support the student and family as needed. B Jen Miller Arsenault shared that the Equity Team is working together with students to consider universal experiences, for example J-Term, 8th grade celebration of learning, student service day for 11th and 12th graders through the lens of our core beliefs statement. Flor Diaz Smith asked for more information about supervision and evaluation. Karoline May shared that April is the month when staff is notified to reflect on goals from the beginning of the year and evidence toward meeting the goal. Alicia Lyford shared that ESP is on a slightly different timeline - on alternate years they have an evaluation cycle or goal setting/ reflection. Chris McVeigh asked for further information on the meeting with Doty around the Principal search. Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that he had asked questions such as what are the traits that you are looking for in your next leader? He stated that the Doty position will be a Teaching Principal. Celia Guggemos shared that the Berlin Librarian, Jessie Dall, had secured a Cliff grant for the school for the coming year.

c. Student Report: Lei DeGroot shared that the final quarter is underway. He and Kathryn Saunders shared some of the recent student happenings.

d. **Community Schools Report:** A written report has been provided. Mary McMahon asked what are the outcomes that will determine whether we have been successful in meeting the goals of the Community Schools work. Celia Guggemos shared that one of the ways to think about community wellness is food access, mental health, physical health. She stated that one metric of success is how much we have facilitated access to these. Daniel Keeney asked who is on the Steering Committee for Community Schools? The Steering Committee includes Flor Diaz, Celia Gueggemos, Steven Dellinger Pate, Bec Dezan, Becca Tatistcheff, Erika Zimmerman, Natasha Eckart, Karen Lieberman, and Jessica Heinz. Celia Guggemos shared that the next meeting is in May, all are welcome to attend; also a forum is planned for May. Daniel Keeney suggested reducing the barriers for the other schools in the district as well as the grant recipients. Celia Guggemos stated that the goal is to create a program that is replicable in all of the schools. Chris McVeigh asked what is the current funding source for the Community Schools initiative. Superintendent Dellinger Pate stated the funding is from the state level. Chris McVeigh asked, if we are planning a sustainable model, what are the plans for funding this into the future. Superintendent Dellinger Pate answered that we are seeking future grants and/or building it into our budget in the future. Celia Guggemos spoke about the return of investment regarding this program. Elizabeth Brown asked

about how this can be brought to all of the other schools in the district. When seeking grants, are we looking toward all of the schools in the district or are we trying to first fine tune in one location. Superintendent Dellinger Pate answered, both. Elizabeth Brown asked who is responsible for grant seeking in our district? Superintendent Dellinger Pate stated that it's usually at the school level and that it goes through the principal. Elizabeth Brown stated that she would like us to consider a grant writing/ managing position for WCUUSD. Daniel Keeney asked for clarification about Washington Central Friends of Education. Superintendent Dellinger Pate suggested that this be on an agenda, and that perhaps representatives from Washington Central Friends of Education can attend a board meeting. Lei DeGroot asked again about grant funding distribution. Superintendent Dellinger Pate stated that this topic has come up with the Finance Committee as well, and he will prepare information to share with the board related to this topic. Some discussion followed around grant funding and sustainability. Celia Guggemos also shared that student achievement data is one of the outcome goals.

e. **Humanity and Justice Coalition Report:** Natasha Eckart shared work on a student survey; she shared that Mele had recently joined the meeting of HJC. Diane Nichols-Fleming had attended the most recent meeting and she shared her favorable impression. Jen Miller-Arsenault commended the work of the teacher, Anna Garrison.

f. **Central Vermont Career Center Report:** Andrew Boye shared that the career center continues to discuss facilities needs and next steps, and financial goals, and programs.

g. **VSBA Report:** Flor Diaz Smith shared some updates from VSBA. She noted that it will be time to work on resolutions for 2026-27, and reminded the board to be engaged in the process. Daniel Keeney asked what is this board's interest in advocating for some type of resolution around early college. Flor Diaz Smith stated that resolutions need to be submitted by June 15th. She suggested that if the board would like to present a resolution it would make sense to set aside some time at a board meeting.

4. <u>Board Operations:</u>

a. **2026 - 2027 School Calendar:** Superintendent Dellinger-Pate had shared the calendar. He noted that some of the changes in the calendar are due to the requirement to align with career center calendars. 178 student days; 185 teacher days. **Elizabeth Brown moved to approve the 2026-27 School Calendar. Seconded by Patrick Whelley, this motion carried unanimously.**

b. Board Evaluation: Diane Nichols-Fleming asked board members what they are noticing about this survey information and what would they like to consider for board goals? Board members reflected on the information including the narrative comments. Zach Sullivan asked how we are using our time, and are we giving ourselves the time to do our best thinking and best judgement? He referred to the comment that spoke of the night the board entertained public comments for hours about a decision about a coach which is not in the purview of the board. Elizabeth Brown stated that understanding the boards, leadership, and admin roles is critical. We need to have a significant conversation about this, perhaps at retreat. Andrew Boye stated that we need to do a better job of new board member training. He suggested a sort of retreat at the same time next year, when the board is newly configured. Marty McMahon seconded that and stated that waiting until August to come together is difficult. Daniel Keeney stated that he agrees with the discussion about timing and he also noted that not all can be completed at an August retreat. He spoke about the idea of parameters and board roles. He stated that we need to

have these conversations more regularly than August and he spoke about the idea of a sort of "manifesto" to guide the board. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate spoke about the need to create a plan to address the big topics that are important to each board member. We can't answer all of the questions all of the time. He spoke about the individual emails that he receives from board members, each having their own interest. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that some of the work with VSBA will be around specific scenarios. She would like the first meetings of the month to allow for dialogue, not only with our communities, but with ourselves. She stated that she has discussed with the superintendent the idea of three retreats throughout the year. Flor Diaz Smith spoke about board orientation. She spoke about open meeting law. She spoke about the challenge of prioritization; we need to lean on the systems we have created, such as the workplan. She spoke of the importance to work with the administration as a board rather than individual requests/ communications. Diane Nichols-Fleming spoke about developing clear identification of hierarchy of communication. Chris McVeigh would like to develop a mechanism so that board members can put questions in some place so that information can be answered and be provided before the board meeting so that we can not only ask, but solve questions at a board meeting. He suggested having legal counsel come to a board meeting and clarify open meeting law and communication. Ursula Stanley stated that we have discussed this in the past. Questions go to the superintendent and the board chair and then through the work of the Steering Committee, board agendas are created. Chris McVeigh disagreed with the direction that questions should go only to the superintendent; he believes questions should go to the entire board. Diane Nichols-Fleming suggested we bring this idea of communication to the Steering Committee to work out. Elizabeth Brown asked how the Communications Committee can help with these efforts. Patrick Whelley spoke about the questions from the survey and he feels that we should be more critical of the questions in the future; have less ambiguous questions. Flor Diaz Smith stated that we are required to ask these questions to answer to the AOE regarding governance. Ursula Stanley suggested making the questions into individual questions, for more clarity. Letter from Calais Selectboard: Elizabeth Brown stated that the board received this letter today and she feels it is important that, as a board, we recognize that we received it, and she is unsure about how to proceed and discuss. Diane Nichols-Fleming invited board members to reflect on what they read, and to pose questions. Patrick Whelley expressed appreciation that the town took the time to draft this letter, and he finds it informative. Daniel Keeney shared that there was a resolution at the end of the Calais town meeting that the selectboard make the wishes of the town known to the school board. The Calais selectboard invited Calais representatives of the WCUUSD Board to their selectboard meeting. He heard the selectboard's response to the resolution at town meeting, to provide this letter to the board. Julia Hewitt asked if all board members have had the opportunity to read the letter, as it was received late in the day. One board member had not. Superintendent Dellinger Pate stated that this letter had not yet been shared in the board packet information. He also reminded the board to consider its role through the lens of policy. What policy can be created to direct how the board can address this? E.g., class size, location, school choice. He urged the board to think about the policy and not one single decision. Flor Diaz Smith stated that the letter should be included in correspondence, not as part of the board packet, and she believes it should be responded to by the board chair

and the superintendent. She stated that the decision about preK has already been made by the board. Chris McVeigh stated that the board voted that it would not move students as a way of subverting and not honoring the town's vote. He asked again why Calais students are moved to East Montpelier as opposed to East Montpelier students moved to Calais. Chris McVeigh stated that this is worthy of discussion; he suggested inviting Calais Selectboard representatives to a board meeting to provide some history of the origin of the letter. Zach Sullivan clarified that the board discussion and action about honoring towns' votes recognized that moving some students might be a reality. Zach Sullivan stated that this board has a history of responding to people that yell at them. We need to recognize that incentivizing whoever yells loudest gets their way is only going to turn the temperature up. We need to show leadership. He read a speech about leadership. He stated that we need to exercise judgement. We have discussed this, have heard from the experts in the field, we have witnessed decline in student enrollment and we have lost really good staff. We need to exercise judgement. Julia Hewitt stated that it is ok to change our minds if we have information that indicates that changing our minds is in the best interest of our students. She asked if it makes sense to postpone this discussion and put it on the next agenda. She asked, is it ok for us to change our mind? Flor Diaz Smith stated that this is not about us changing our minds as a board, it would be up to administrators to change their minds if new information is received. She stated that the selectboard does not have educational oversight of our district. What our communities deserve is a board that is strong enough to stand behind our superintendent and our leadership. We need to be strong as a board and hold the back of our administrators, and bring some closure to our communities. Our decisions are on the behalf of all of our students. The decision has been made and the letter should be sent from the board chair and superintendent. Julia Hewitt posed the question to the board chair. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that the decision was made, the context and understanding has changed, however she is not 100% sure of what is the role of the board in this situation. She stated that again this is future work for the board, to better define our roles. Daniel Keeney stated that he believes that the selectboard has a lot of ambivalence about this matter and is doing its due diligence and is communicating the will of the town. He stated that the letter is addressed to Steven Dellinger Pate and should be responded by Steven Dellinger Pate. He suggested that at the previous board meeting we discussed this very complicated issue at great length. He stated that we need to move on in this discussion. Marty McMahon suggested that we do put this on a future agenda for discussion. He stated that the situation has changed and it does not seem to be just, to move forward without revisiting this in a determined way, using data. Diane Nichols-Fleming will ask for facilitation from VSBA at our next board meeting, to address this specific scenario.

5. **Personnel:**
   a. **Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in FTE: Zach Sullivan moved to approve the new hire: Jaycee Coyle, EMES, SLP, 0.50FTE. Seconded by Daniel Keeney, this motion carried unanimously. Zach Sullivan moved to approve the hiring of long term substitute (25-26 school year) Eric Kapner, U32, Classroom Math Teacher. Seconded by Daniel Keeney, this motion carried unanimously. Zach Sullivan moved to approve extended leave of absence for Kimberly Knapp, BES, under Article 12.6 of the Teachers Agreement: a request for an unpaid leave of absence not to exceed one academic year. Seconded by Daniel Keeney, this motion carried unanimously.**

6. **Consent Agenda:**
   a. **Approve Minutes of 3.18.26 and 4.8.26: Chris McVeigh moved to approve the minutes from March 18, 2026, and April 8, 2026. Seconded by Patrick Whelley. This motion carried unanimously.**
   b. **Board Orders: Patrick Whelley moved to approve the board orders in the amount of $895,216.05. Seconded by Elizabeth Brown, this motion carried unanimously.**
7. **Future Agenda Items:** Funding differences in preK, criteria/ parameters how to move students between schools, Technology in schools, Carrying over voluntary merger conversations, Washington Central Friends of Education, VSBA resolutions, VSBA facilitation of board role, Community Schools, Board orientation, Andrew Boye shared that career center has asked to bring back up the idea of U32 as a location, dialogue between full board/steering committee/chair for public forum topics. Flor Diaz Smith shared that the Steering Committee considers the future agenda items through the lens of the workplan. Ed Quality presentation - third Wednesday in May. Chris McVeigh asked, if proposed future agenda items are not moved forward, then it will be explained to the board why that is the case.
8. **Board Reflections:** Natash Eckart regarding how we communicate on the board- be deliberate and thoughtful about how we frame our comments. Sometimes comments are made that are generalized and imply that board members are not competent enough to make informed decisions, and only make them by emotion and by being yelled at by community members; she finds that insulting. If we want to work towards communicating with each other with civil discourse, then we should be thoughtful about the way we frame our comments. Chris McVeigh stated that it is a good thing to have vigorous discussion with each other and he feels that we did this tonight. Flor Diaz Smith shared information about a pot luck and book talk later this month at U32.
9. **Public Comments:** Maia Stone stated that she feels the board is eroding trust by putting academic standards to the backseat of local politics. She stated that some of the data that is being shared does not reflect us - we are not a community school; we are a rural school.Barry Bernstein thanked Diane Nichols-Fleming for her effort at the previous meeting to engage in a more reciprocal discussion. He stated that the responsibility of this district begins at preK; it does not encompass daycare. He stated that before the consolidation, the chairperson assured the community that preschool would remain at Calais. He stated that at the previous board meeting he was shocked to not hear from the Calais principal. He shared a rumor that administrators are told to not speak to the community. Superintendent Dellinger Pate stated that this rumor is not true. Callie Weller asked the board to be aware of the continually

changing preschool enrollment numbers. She does not believe that the board would want families to go outside of our district for preschool. She stated that classrooms for preschoolers have a limit to capacity. Cindy Gardner-Morse asked the board to consider the impact on asking children to change to a different school. She asked, where is the child in this discussion? She stated that she has not heard much discussion about the possibility of preschoolers attending Calais versus East Montpelier. Griffin Ludwig stated that part of transparency is making a decision and sticking with it. He stated that he does not think now is the time for the board to change the decision about preschool location. He stated that equity and justice is important; nobody in East Montpelier got a vote on the future of their school building. David Hershey expressed support for the Community Schools initiative. Lucretia Dujuardo stated that enrollment numbers should have an impact on decisions. It makes sense to change things based on a change in information (e.g. enrollment). Question: is it accurate to say that keeping the staff at Calais will not cause the district any additional money? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that if we keep preK at East Montpelier too then yes it does cost additional money. Lucretia Dujuardo stated that it is difficult to understand the decision making behind moving a larger population of children while keeping a smaller population of students in place. Emilie Connor reminded those present that during the configuration planning, continuing preschool at East Montpelier was always the plan. This is not a new development. Susanne Gann stated that there is a process for developing a budget. As business administrator, she wants to follow the timeline; she feels that the budget is complete at this time. The board followed the process and incorporated many stakeholders in the discussion. If the board continues to respond to the community and change course after the process is complete, where does it stop? Where can we continue to move the ball forward as administrators? She also stated that board members asking questions as individuals becomes problematic for administrators to respond to. Sam Ehrenfeld asked the board to strongly consider that the decision to move preK and kindergarten to East Montpelier was done with the thought in mind - what programs can be maintained at Calais? If those programs are moved back to Calais, what programs will be lost? What will be the impact? He spoke about decision making of the board. If the board asks administrators to make difficult decisions, and then when an unpopular decision is made, the board reconsiders, it greatly destabilizes the governance structure.

10. **<u>Proposed Executive Session:</u> Student Residency Requests:At 9:15, Chris McVeigh moved to go into Executive Session for a student residency request, and to invite our superintendent. Seconded by Flor Diaz Smith, this motion carried unanimously. Ursula Stanley moved to come out of executive session at 9:19. Seconded by Andrew Boye. Flor Diaz-Smith moved to accept administration's recommendation for both residency requests. Seconded by Elizabeth Brown. Motion carried unanimously.**
11. **<u>Proposed Executive Session:</u> Superintendent Evaluation**: **Chris McVeigh moved at 9:21 to go into Executive Session to discuss superintendent evaluation, and to invite our superintendent. Motion was seconded by Elizabeth Brown. Elizabeth Brown moved to come out of executive session at 10:00. Seconded by Chris McVeigh. No action was taken.**
12. **<u>Adjourn-</u>Zach Sullivan moved to adjourn at 10:01. Seconded by Flor Diaz-Smith.**

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary