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
10.21.26
6:30-9:15 PM
(In-Person & Virtual)
U-32 High School
930 Gallison Hill Rd
Montpelier, VT

Present: Superintendent John Alberghini, Flor Diaz Smith, Patrick Whelley, Ursula Stanley, Elizabeth Brown, Zach Sullivan, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Andrew Boye, Daniel Keeney, Michelle Ksepka, Judy Buchanan, Chris McVeigh, Marty McMahon, Kalita Lindig, Kathryn Stauffer, Rainier Dryfoos, Julia Hewitt, Alicia Lyford, Susanne Gann, Heidi Dimick, Linda Gray, Allison Fayle, Lilah Richardson, David Delcore, Michael Sherwin, Emilie Clark, Dell Waterhouse, Denise, Kelly, Maia Stone, Kathleen Bookchin, ORCA

1. **Call to Order: Diane Nichols-Fleming called the meeting to order at 6:26 p.m.**

2. **Welcome:** Diane Nichols-Fleming thanked those in attendance. She welcomed student representatives, Kathryn Stauffer and Rainier Dryfoos.
   - **2.1. Adjustments to The Agenda**
     Ursula Stanley moved to revise the agenda to add 7.4: School Board Workplan. Seconded by Flor Diaz Smith, the motion carried unanimously.
   - **2.2. Reception of Guests**
   - **2.3. Public Comments: Time strictly enforced; see note**
     Linda Gray thanked the board for the monthly public engagement. She urged the board to develop action steps addressing achievement gaps shown in student data, and recommended recruiting new staff to ensure stronger representation of disabled individuals and people of color to reflect the student population.

     Kathleen Bookchin reported speaking with two community members outside: a student and a Montpelier parent. When asked, neither was aware of the proposed plan to build on the field. She added that she had a sensitive comment to share and would consider sending it to the board via email after taking time to reflect.

3. **Reports**
   - **3.1. Superintendent/Central Office Leadership Team (COLT) Report**

John Alberghini introduced himself and referenced the written report provided in the board packet. He then opened the floor for questions and concerns. Flor Diaz Smith requested clarification regarding the "triple squeeze" concept mentioned at the VSA/VASBO conference, which Susanne Gann briefly explained. Patrick Whelley inquired about the request from CVSU, and John Alberghini clarified that the matter is strictly under discussion at this time.

3.2. CESA (Cooperative Educational Service Area) Report: no report

3.3. Merger Report

Flor Diaz Smith reported on the October 8 Merger Group meeting, facilitated by Brad Morgan, noting that draft minutes are available. She stated discussion began about "non-negotiables." She invited board members to share input for her to bring back to the group. Flor Diaz Smith outlined plans for a community survey, highlighting sample topics such as current awareness of merger conversations, aspects families like about their current schools, and key educational priorities.

Patrick Whelley asked what specific information the survey seeks to collect.

Daniel Keeney also asked for clarification about the survey and noted the minutes are AI created and they should be edited for accuracy.

Kalita Lindig stated that there is a wide gap in how much people know about the merger group work. She wonders how a survey will reach a large group of people.

Flor Diaz Smith stated that the big questions for the group are "what must the group consider" and "what do people love about their schools."

Kalita encouraged using creative ways to ensure survey participation, to include reaching remote people who may lack primary group communication channels.

Diane Nichols-Fleming asked if there has been discussion about creating a mechanism for board check-in and feedback exchange. Flor Diaz Smith stated not yet; the group is awaiting further guidance from the Agency of Education. The next meeting is slated for November 19th in Northfield.

Daniel Keeney highlighted the interrelations between the Superintendent's report regarding Paine Mountain, recent news about Cabot, and the information in the merger committee minutes. He asked how the board should move forward with future discussion with regards to the capacity to house other students.

John Alberghini reiterated that these discussions are in their early stages and he will continue to keep the board apprised. He noted that specific parameters are set regarding building capacity based on square footage.

Diane Nichols-Fleming expressed concern regarding the delays from the AOE in providing the information and resources previously indicated for the merger study groups.

3.4. Student Report

Kathryn Stauffer and Rainier Dryfoos shared student events including student government elections, theater performances, and sports updates.

Zach Sullivan asked the student representatives for feedback on the cell phone policy at the school. Rainier Dryfoos stated it's been a good practice with no observed issues

with keeping phones in backpacks. Kathryn Stauffer stated that the cell phone policy has gone well in her experience.

3.5. Central Vermont Career Center Report

Andrew Boye shared that the bond vote is upcoming and much of the committee work is around community engagement. There is ongoing work on lease details but the bigger focus currently is on the bond vote.

Zach Sullivan asked whether the board should take a more active role in community engagement specifically related to Washington Central. Andrew Boye stated he would bring the topic back to the committee for further discussion.

Ursula Stanley shared that, per Jody Emerson's update at the community forum, voters will see two separate ballots for the upcoming vote, including one specific to Washington Central.

Daniel Keeney asked if the committee discussed U32 being under capacity, and potential proposals to construct additional buildings on the U32 site. This topic is actively being discussed in the community. He stated that other facilities were reviewed and considered when CVCC was considering a full build, but the plan changed given the failed bond vote. It was not clear whether other buildings/options were reconsidered given the change in plans.

Ursula Stanley shared that the topic was recently discussed at the community forum, where it was explained that renovating existing facilities to accommodate the Career Center's needs would require extensive work.

Flor Diaz Smith explained that after the bond failed, a smaller facility group evaluated three main options (new build, Vine Street/SHS two-campus model, or U32 site build). The findings consistently pointed toward a two-campus model utilizing the U32 site.

Daniel Keeney recommended the board dive deeper into details beyond the promotional materials provided by CVCC. He reported that community members feel patronized by very broad-strokes mailers, which lack specific criteria and details. He asked if the Communications Team could help create a communication that could go out on behalf of the board.

Diane Nichols-Fleming committed to collaborating with Andrew Boye and Jody Emerson to gather more information explaining why the U32 site was selected over other facility options. She will speak with the Communications Committee to determine the best strategy for sharing these details with the community.

Daniel Keeney highlighted community feedback, and constructing a new facility at U32 does not align with ongoing conversations around declining student enrollment and overall district configuration.

Kalita Lindig agrees that providing the data and criteria about how the decision was made will be helpful.

Chris McVeigh stated that it would be helpful to share how this might benefit U32 in the future, particularly regarding Tech Centers and merger discussions.

3.6. Community School Report (no report)

3.7. VSBA Report

Flor Diaz Smith provided a brief update; she reminded board members that they receive updates from VSBA on a regular basis. The upcoming conference on October 30th is open to all board members.

She shared that a webinar will be available on November 12th related to Act 170.

Diane Nichols-Fleming informed the board the AOE's has temporarily removed its Class Size policy and is currently reworking it as an active work in progress.

3.8. Humanity & Justice Coalition Report

John Alberghini shared that he attended the most recent meeting. He shared the purpose of the coalition as well as the goal for this school year. A brief video was shared with student voices from Humanity and Justice Coalition, regarding the Vision Statements (middle school and high school) of the coalition. John Alberghini stated that the coalition discussed the topic of "Responding to Harmful Behaviors" as a priority.

4. Policy Committee

4.1. Cell Phone Policy

Chris McVeigh reminded the board that they approved the Cell Phone Policy in the spring of 2026. He stated that the procedure for the policy is unclear at this time and the Policy Committee intends to address this at a future meeting. He referenced a Times Argus article noting that current procedures include student suspension for cell phone policy violations. Chris McVeigh highlighted this is an area that needs to be discussed.

Patrick Whelley suggested an edit to #5 which refers to the state of Vermont, whereas this policy relates to WCUUSD.

Ursula Stanley moved to affirm that the board approved this policy on March 18, 2026. Seconded by Flor Diaz Smith.

Discussion: Zach Sullivan believes that the policy might need further work. He raised concerns whether the policy aligns with state standards and if the policy will remain effective over time. For example, are access to phones really prohibited by students keeping them in backpacks? He noted that advocates who supported the state law have expressed concern that the law is not being followed.

Judy Buchanan asked is this a matter of policy or a matter of procedure? Chris McVeigh stated that he believes it is policy.

Kalita Lindig inquired about student and staff oversight/accountability in adhering to the state law policy and procedure. Chris McVeigh indicated that staff are responsible for reporting violations.

Daniel Keeney stated this points to the role of the board. He noted being dissatisfied with the feedback that comes to the board about policy implementation. He suggested this issue serve as a test case for leaders to detail procedures to the board.

Diane Nichols-Fleming recalled that student voice was intended to be included in the procedure back in March, suggesting a future agenda item on current procedures and student involvement.

Chris McVeigh noted that the Policy Committee discussed this, and believes that student input may not have been considered in the procedure. This topic is on the agenda for the next Policy Committee meeting.

Elizabeth Brown emphasized focusing on ongoing monitoring and data points rather than board micromanaging. She encouraged trusting administrators while reviewing data.
Ursula Stanley stated that it is policy that the board is informed of procedure related to policies.
Flor Diaz Smith reiterated that the board's role is policy approval, leaving daily operations and procedure to administration.
Chris McVeigh stated that he believes the board has a review role in procedure.
Kalita Lindig inquired whether a baseline data point exists to evaluate the policy's future effectiveness.
John Alberghini confirmed that baseline data is available, noting that after speaking with the U32 Principal, very few cell phone incidents have been reported. He will summarize this in his upcoming Superintendent's Report to the board.
The motion carried unanimously.

5. Finance Committee

5.1. Budget Parameter Discussion & Approval

Flor Diaz Smith presented a memo included in the board packet detailing a list of parameters developed by the Finance Committee, applying the Equity Policy framework.
Elizabeth Brown requested that the board vote on each parameter individually rather than voting on them as a complete slate.
Marty McMahon inquired whether an impact assessment has been conducted to determine the overall effectiveness of MLSS. John Alberghini responded that the Ed Quality Committee recently reviewed substantial data and ongoing examination of data through the MLSS lens remains a priority.
Daniel Keeney stated that implementing MLSS across all of the schools in an equitable way is complicated. He expressed support for MLSS within the parameters, but questions the potential budgetary implications.
Patrick Whelley said, for example, if we approve this parameter does it mean that we are committed to a math interventionist in each school? Daniel Keeney shared that the Finance Committee had discussed that parameters are important and that this is going to be a very difficult budget development year.
Chris McVeigh stated that the parameters are guidance, not specific mandates.
Elizabeth Brown stated that there is not a very clear understanding of "most vulnerable students having what they need…." How are we communicating for both the board and community understanding?
Flor Diaz Smith stated that it is important for us to not undermine systems across our schools. She expressed that Jen Miller Arsenault is a good resource to discuss this.
Diane Nichols-Fleming summarized the discussion, asking what concrete information the board will receive to guide its budget decisions.
Zach Sullivan stated that sometimes the board is not aware of unmet board-set parameters (e.g., class size). This information needs to be shared with the board.

Flor Diaz Smith moved to approve Parameter 1. Seconded by Michelle Ksepka. The motion carried, with one abstention (Marty McMahon).

Parameter 2: Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that the board will need to establish a clear agreement on how to make this parameter actionable. Marty McMahon noted there are some parameters in the list that are not clear. What is the meaning? More transparency is needed.

Chris McVeigh moved to approve Parameter 2. Seconded by Judy Buchanan. This motion carried unanimously.

Parameter 3: Patrick Whelley inquired about a way to state this parameter as a goal to stay below the parameter, however, would like to consider a budget that might be slightly over it. Chris McVeigh further inquired if direction should be given for a level-service budget, even if doing so goes beyond the set threshold. He asked Susanne Gann if there is any information about this year's parameter. Susanne Gann stated, possibly $16,563 as a threshold. It was acknowledged that this remains conjecture at this point.

Daniel Keeney moved to adopt Parameter 3. Seconded by Chris McVeigh.

Discussion: Daniel Keeney stated that it is important to be transparent (e.g., exceeding the threshold by __, affects the tax rate by __).

Flor Diaz Smith stated that she believes it is important to leave this parameter as is.

Patrick Kelley asked whether the parameter could be amended to reflect a level-service budget preference. Susanne Gann stated it was not necessary as it will be brought to the board in November.

The motion carried unanimously.

Parameter 4:

Discussion: Marty McMahon asked the meaning of "strategic enrollment." Flor Diaz Smith stated that this parameter is allowing leadership to be creative in order to meet the needs of students and also Ed Quality Standards. Elizabeth Brown asked for a definition of "equitable distribution of resources." She further stated, this needs to be clearly explained and communicated to the communities, as well as the "strategic enrollment" piece. Chris McVeigh stated that if strategic enrollment includes relocation of students then we should name that in the parameter, for the sake of transparency. This is going to be a harrowing budget year and if there is the possibility of some student movement then we should be clear in communicating that.

Elizabeth Brown echoed Chris McVeigh's comments, emphasizing the importance of precise language and intent communicated clearly.

Daniel Keeney questioned whether the board should return to the parameter's original focus of minimizing net spending. He concurred with previous comments that the term "strategic enrollment" is neither helpful nor clear.

Kalita Lindig suggested eliminating "strategic enrollment" from parameter 4 and including it in parameter 5.

Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that the board's responsibility for clarity extends beyond the language of this document, emphasizing that clarity and transparency depend on ongoing, active community engagement.

Ursula Stanley noted that everyone at the table is well aware that "strategic enrollment" can imply student relocation, a topic discussed for years that may become a reality. Marty McMahon supported the importance of clear, direct language over standard "boilerplate language" ensuring the public fully understands the board's discussions.
Parameter 6: Chris McVeigh moved to approve Parameter 6. Seconded by Flor Diaz Smith. Discussion: Patrick Whelley requested clarification on the definition of "sustainability" in this context. Discussion followed and board members recalled input from the East Montpelier community forum, where residents emphasized the need for a long-term, sustainable plan. Elizabeth Brown stated that the idea of sustainability makes it critical for the board to remain future-thinking.
The motion carried unanimously.
Parameter 7: Chris McVeigh stated that if "closing schools" is intended as a contingency plan, language to that effect should be included in the parameter.
Chris McVeigh moved to approve Parameter 7. Seconded by Patrick Whelley, the motion carried unanimously.
Parameter 4: Flor Diaz Smith revised the parameter.
Dan Keeney moved to approve the parameter, as modified. Seconded by Michelle Ksepka. The motion carried unanimously.
Parameter 5: Flor Diaz Smith presented the revised verbiage, "consider school and class configurations…"
Flor Diaz Smith moved to approve the parameter as modified. Seconded by Michelle Ksepka.
Discussion: Chris McVeigh stated that if closing a school is under consideration, information regarding potential cost savings and outstanding debt associated with the school should be provided. Diane Nichols-Fleming suggested these details do not belong within the parameter. Chris McVeigh clarified if "school and class configuration" encompasses school closures, then that specific information should be included in the parameter. Zach Sullivan agreed, noting the parameter should focus on the "what," rather than "how."
Susanne Gann noted that given the current transition period with two interim superintendents and two new principals, a proposal to the board involving school closures is highly unlikely at this time. Elizabeth Brown expressed hope that the parameter would not steer the board in a specific direction before all options to better position the district are thoroughly considered.

The parameters as discussed and edited:

1. *Continue to offer and further develop the Multi-Layered System of Supports (MLSS) to all students across all schools and Professional Development for Teachers. Strategic investment in building teacher capacity, so that the most vulnerable students will have what they need.*
2. *Frame budget to the Goals of our **Strategic Plan** and our **Core Beliefs**.*

3. *Ensure planning remains under the Excess spending threshold determined by the Vermont Agency of Education.*
4. *Develop a budget that meets Educational Quality Standards (EQS), promotes equitable distribution of resources, and addresses student needs, while minimizing net spending increases ~~through~~ ~~strategic enrollment and program adjustments~~. (That may include grade combinations across schools and program adjustments.)*
5. *Consider schools and class configurations that realize program quality improvements within the existing procedures for class sizes. (Class size policy)*
6. *Move towards long-term financial sustainability of our system (appropriate level of increase that we can sustain within our community).*
7. *Develop contingency plans for expense reduction options, in the event that the Board determines that the proposed spending leads to unfavorable tax implications.*

The motion carried unanimously.

Flor Diaz Smith shared that the Finance Committee established a workplan with clear communication as a goal.

6. **Proposed Executive Session: Personnel**
   Daniel Keeney moved to enter Executive Session at 8:55 p.m. to discuss an appointment decision of which premature general public knowledge could clearly place the Board at a substantial disadvantage, and to include Heidi Dimick. Chris McVeigh seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

   Daniel Keeney moved to table Agenda Items: 7.1, 7.2, 8.1, and 8.2. Seconded by Kalita Lindig, this motion carried unanimously.

7. **Board Operations**
   - **7.1. Reviewing District Quality Standards & Current Standards**
     Diane Nichols-Fleming indicated that the board could table this if they desire.
   - **7.2. CVCC Lease** (no additional information)
   - **7.3. Superintendent Search**: Diane Nichols-Fleming reviewed the charge adopted in June 2026. She invited board members to suggest amendments. Ursula Stanley recommended revising the wording to "a consultant" and advocated for increasing student representation on the committee to more than one student. Chris McVeigh added that the committee should aim to present at least two finalist candidates to the full board for interviews and consideration.
     Board members agreed to have two students on the committee.
     Daniel Keeney objects to the idea of charging the committee with bringing two candidates to the board; we can indicate a strong preference for two viable candidates.
     Zach Sullivan asked, are we saying "at least two"?
     "At least two viable candidates, unless the committee has determined that there is only one viable candidate"

Julia Hewitt stated that this is a misleading and contradictory statement.
Chris McVeigh stated that this leaves it up to the committee to determine. There is a preference for at least two strong candidates, but if the committee determines that there is only one strong candidate, then that is their discretion.
Discussion ensued, resulting in a preference for at least two candidates and leaving out the second clause of "unless…."
Chris McVeigh moved to approve the charge as amended. Seconded by Michelle Ksepka, this motion carried unanimously.

Daniel Keeney moved to authorize the chair to hire a superintendent search consultant in consultation with Heidi Dimick. Seconded by Zach Sullivan, this motion carried unanimously.

Chris McVeigh moved to reactivate the pre-existing search committee. Seconded by Patrick Whelley.
Discussion: Ursula Stanley inquired whether the members of the original committee had been contacted regarding their availability. She suggested outreach be conducted to community, staff, and students to see if they are available. Daniel Keeney agreed, proposing a re-invitation to the same committee members first before seeking new members.
Elizabeth Brown recalled that several previous committee members had expressed interest in continuing to serve, though she wasn't sure of the exact details. Diane Nichols-Fleming clarified that she couldn't confirm anyone's availability at the time because the details weren't settled yet.
Flor Diaz Smith recommended reopening the application process to the public in the interest of transparency, noting that this is a different charge focused on a two-year contract with a superintendent.
A roll call vote was taken:

- Ayes (6): E, J, M, D, C, P
- Nays (7): M, K, J, U, Z, A, F

The motion did not carry.

The board agreed to establish a screening committee. Diane Nichols-Fleming will contact members of the previous committee to invite them to reapply, if interested.
Chris McVeigh recommended holding off on appointing board members to the committee until the next meeting to ensure proper notice and to include the action item on the agenda.

7.4. Board Work Plan

Diane Nichols-Fleming shared the document with the Board, inviting member input. She suggested that the Steering Committee bring forward a draft for board consideration.

8. **Personnel**
   - 8.1. **Vacancy Updates**
   - 8.2. **Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in FTE (none)**

9. **Consent Agenda**
   - 9.1. **Approve Minutes of 9.16.26 and 10.7.26**

     Ursula Stanley moved to approve the minutes of September 16, 2026, and October 7, 2026. Seconded by Patrick Whelley.

     Discussion: Diane Nichols-Fleming noted an edit to the October 7th minutes. Natasha Eckart did not abstain from the vote after Executive Session to ratify the CBA; she voted in favor. **This motion carried with the noted edit.**

   - 9.2. **Board Orders**

     Patrick Whelley moved to approve the board orders in the total amount of $1,442,661,85. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, the motion carried unanimously.

10. **Future Agenda Items**

    Discussion followed on a draft policy regarding the Relocation of Students proposed by Chris McVeigh; Diane Nichols-Fleming suggested referring it to the Steering Committee. Due to the late hour, discussion on Technology and Student Achievement was postponed to a future meeting.

11. **Board & Leadership Reflections**

    Michelle Ksepka stated that the packet is not in order tonight and it was difficult to follow along. Diane Nichols-Fleming will pass that along.

12. **Public Comments:** Time limit strictly enforced, see note (no public comment)

13. **Adjourn: Zach Sullivan moved to adjourn at 9:54 p.m. Seconded by Ursula Stanley, the motion carried unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary