

APPROVED 2/13/2018

Burlington Board of School Commissioners Meeting Minutes

**Hunt Middle School Library
January 9, 2018, 6:00 PM**

Attending Board Members: Chair Mark Porter; Jeff Wick; Liz Curry; Mark Barlow; Ryan Maclaren; Kathy Olwell; Susanmarie Harrington; Anne Judson; Stephanie Seguino

- 1.) *Meeting Called to Order 6:05 PM.*
 - a. requested a motion to approve the agenda.
2. *Motion to Approve Agenda*
(Commissioner Curry/Commissioner Olwell)
approved unanimously

Motion to remove Executive Session from the Agenda submitted by Chair Porter.

Approved unanimously.

3. Public Comment

A. Comments/Questions from the Public

Fran Brock: President of BEA. Ms. Brock spoke on behalf of para-educators whose contracts remain at impasse. She explained that following her public comment, the Board will be introduced to a few para-educators that work for the Burlington School District.

Mark Van Buren: Paraeducator at Hunt Middle School. Mr. Van Buren gave a simplified explanation about his day-to-day operations as a paraeducator. Mr. Van Buren explained that his job requires him to be consistently flexible as no two days will be the same in order to successfully meet the diverse needs of the students he works with.

Kelly Bordeau: Paraeducator for Early Essential Education program/ IAA parent. Ms. Bordeau divulged that her son with autism has been fully supported

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in his academic by District professionals. Shared story about her son and the professionals that supported his academic growth. This academic growth fluctuates with support in the classroom. Testimony on file.

Mike Fisher: Mr. Fisher is a parent; expressed concerns about a budget that will result in a double digit tax impact. Mr. Fisher believes a budget that results in a double digit tax increase will be rejected by property owners and Burlington's most financially vulnerable families. Direct student impact will allow reasonable people to understand and defend decisions.

Monika Ivancic: Parent of student at IAA. Concerned that the strike will affect important calendar days such as parent teacher conferences. Afraid parents will not have an opportunity to meet with their child's teacher because the previously existing two full conference days have been reduced to one half day. Asked that these two full days be reinstated.

Kathy Connelly: Here to speak about the budget. She realizes BSD might have to put out a budget with a tax impact that will not be easily digested, but she urges the Board not to make cuts that have direct academic impact. As a taxpayer, Connelly is willing to pay money to see that high-level academic services are maintained.

Nicole Twohig: CES parent speaking on the budget. These numbers may be alarming to taxpayers, urged the community to not view this as a take all or leave all, but as a means of meeting in the middle. Believes we should be bold to support education despite challenging budgets. Asked the Board to please push the envelope on this year's budget to ensure our students can achieve success.

Brendan Fisher: Here on behalf of Carol Livingston (BHS parent): In the transcript Fisher read on Livingston's behalf, asking why the Board was promising to return money to the taxpayers. *(Director Lavery and Superintendent Obeng responded to her concerns during the budget presentation indicating that Livingston misunderstood and there is no money being returned to taxpayers.)*

B. Board Reflection

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Commissioner Wick reflected gratitude to the Community members that support each other, and express their views.

Commissioner Barlow hopes that Senior Director LAvery can speak to the budget

Commissioner Curry expressed that she is disheartened that the BEA continues to illustrate the Board as being unwilling to provide meaningful, truthful information to teachers and faculty. As with the teachers, none of the Board's decisions are personal, nor about what educators do, and BEA knows the issue is about resources. Current expressed perception that BEA seems happy to continue maligning Board rather than explaining larger legislative dynamics at play, which feeds divisiveness. Wishes BEA would join us in the hard work that would allow us to be stronger together - to put unrelenting pressure on our Governor, who chooses to view the Ed Fund as the social service budget for the State and is driving state education policy with cuts that marginalize the largest Districts in the state where Vermont's future workforce is being educated. Burlington was not only prevented by Act 46 from raising taxes that would even cover a level funded budget, but continues to pay for the costs of Act 46, which the legislature realizes is higher than anticipated, Not only did BSD lose another \$500K between the current and next fiscal years, but the projected health care increase for next year is roughly 13% as far as we know.

Close reflections at 6:30

4. Focus on Learning

A. [Early Education Presentation \(1\)](#)

Early Education Director Stacie Curtis: Stacie used her introduction to credit the staff that make her program successful. She also showed the Board how to program continues to grow.

Commissioner Barlow asked how despite losing grant funds, would mandated services required under Act 166 be paid for through the District budget. To which Director Curtis and Superintendent Obeng answered not necessarily, but the shortfall would have to be made up.

5. Board Report

A. VSBA Liaison Report

Commissioner Olwell attended the Governor's Education Summit.

Commissioner Olwell inquired with the Agency of Education where they intend to take money from to supplement the additional programs that the new director of career pathways wants funding for. She assumed that unfortunately the

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Agency of Education would take away from Burlington. She came to the conclusion that more focus was being invested into rural districts, and divested from supporting urban districts. Commissioner Olwell felt disheartened that the Summit did not address the needs of Burlington.

B. Burlington City Council Liaison Report

Commissioner McLaren discussed the potential to budget PILOT funds to aid the District in eligible areas. The city has taken a couple of the Board's ideas and are under development with additional department heads. Specifically summer program. He heard broad support from the administration and city council.

C. State Legislature Liaison Report

Commissioner Barlow held a meeting on December 13 at Champlain that was well attended. The discussion included addressing specific needs and the challenge to attain those needs for the budget. Three policies were developed in an effort to address those needs expressed.

D. PTO Report

Commissioner Curry: Great turn-out at the last PTO meeting. Legislators told Commissioner Curry that it was the best meeting they've experienced with a school district. The next PTO meetings will be in February at IAA, Hunt, and SA Barnes to discuss the budget.

E. Policy Governance Report

Commissioner Harrington referenced an updated calendar in observation to the Policy Governance monitoring report. Commissioner Harrington recognized Superintendent Obeng as a model in diligently following these calendar guidelines.

F. Negotiations Update

Commissioner Seguíno has an update on the teachers and paraeducators contract. The past four months have been spent finalizing the contract due to request to adjust language. The two sides reached an agreement this morning and the revised agreement has been sent to the BEA for final review. Para negotiations are now in their fact-finding stage. The steps in this process are

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determined by the collective bargaining agreement at the state level. This requires mediation and then fact finding.

Commissioner Porter closed board report at 6:56

6. Student Commissioners Report- No student representatives were in attendance

7. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Obeng addressed the public comment question about a budget balance surplus. The surplus is a post-audit figure, which would not have been known prior to audit completion. This will insulated tax-payers from even higher taxes to cover enhancements the budget can support because of the availability of the surplus. The balance was less than 1% of our actual budget. The conversation with the District Auditor during the Special Board Meeting on 12/20/17 recaptured that a District this size should really have a higher surplus.

A. [Budget Presentation \(2.4\)](#)

This presentation began at last two meetings. This development process included significant public input and is tied to strategic planning. Superintendent Obeng summarized the investments that were outlined in past meetings.

Director Lavery explained the increase in FY19 Base General Fudget budget.

“We offset and absorb many of the cost pressures that were structural in the Base General Fund. Some of our investments have been effective. Energy Efficiency could scale back energy costs in the budget. The base cost is not growing fast. Regular, predictable financial increases will be monitored. The painstaking budget process requires the base fund to be identified in order to responsibly address our intended investments.”

The tax variable was not available in the previous presentations. The District does not have a control over the variables other than education spend. Homestead challenge will be common with all school districts across the state. Common level of appraisal is not unique to us, but it is mandated across the state. Increasing pressure on the tax rate.

South burlington common level appraisal is in the 95%. Which is far less pressure on their tax rate.

The tax rate could result in a ten percent tax impact increase without any additional investments. At the baseline education spending would increase \$1.4 million which would increase the tax rate by 9.7% .

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The surplus we mentioned earlier is available for the District to treat as revenue to buy down the tax rate by about 2% points. It is recommended by Director Lavery that surplus is used as revenue.

Obeng suggested Chair Porter encourage the board to provide the Superintendent feedback. Chair Porter in turn suggested ten minutes of questions from the Board.

Commissioner Curry observed that the surplus helps to address the tax rate increase.

Commis Judson asked for clarity on two things outlined that will bring the taxes up about 7.8%. She wondered if it was state related.

Homestead is state-related. CLA is Burlington-specific.

Obeng put forward proposals in hopes for responses this week to apply to the next step in the budget process. The Superintendent explained that he wishes to be able to sustain current projects as well as additional investments.

Commissioner Seguino asked for clarification that these numbers do not reflect District enhancements that Superintendent outlined. She noted that providing enhancements seen in budget presentations and presented by program directors would require roughly an 11% tax impact increase.

Director Lavery explained it would probably be in the high 9% if the surplus could be taken from the baseline.

Superintendent Obeng adds one variable to the base budget, with the additional enhancements would result in a 9.73% impact, if all the enhancements were made.

Chair porter asked if there are funds required to make the equity allocation reachable? Can we shift resources between schools.

Superintendent Obeng explained this is already occurring through equity index.

Chair Porter said there will be more meetings between now and 1/24. *"We need to take this opportunity to review this and cultivate questions. Between the 1/16-1/24 I anticipate three meetings. Our discussion tonight should be based on what direction to take to address the community tax impact. We should also consider priorities. Things on the list for FY19 should not be discounted or traded out."*

Reductions and tax rates:

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Chair Porter asked for specific feedback/comments summarizing what they would feel comfortable in supporting.

Commissioner Barlow did not want the conversation to center on palatability of the tax impact, but on how this budget is necessary for educational spending. To that, he did not see how we could go any lower than 7%.

Commissioner Kleman did not support cuts to any baseline programs.

Commissioner Wick suggested the community and Board should take time to digest and reflect this Budget process.

Commissioner Harrington felt the conversation was disproportionately geared toward the conversation of tax impact when it was really about providing programs for student and faculty success.

Commissioner Curry would be willing to support 10% tax increase to make up for lost federal, state and local support over past four years, and the fact that tax-payers have had taxes legislatively capped by State over past three years while District has been forced to cut programs and hold the line on teacher contract negotiations.

Commissioner Seguino agreed and included sentiment about how income inequality disproportionately affects our students and community.

Commissioner Olwell would support upwards of 10% tax impact if it provided necessities to support the District's main priority: educating children.

Commissioner Judson would be comfortable around 7% increase with cuts being made to the budget with direction from Principals and teachers.

Commissioner McLaren would agree on a tax impact that was equitable and fair in providing students with an excellent education.

Chair Porter challenged the Board and staff to identify opportunities to reduce spending in ways that do not take away from student learning, in order to focus investments on increasing the graduation rate.

Commissioner Kleman believes it is possible to see more cuts made, but does not support messaging to the community that illustrates the District could survive, not thrive, with \$2 mil. cut. She would not support a budget with a 4% tax impact as that would be too low and would mean many baseline services are being cut.

Commissioner Curry believes that the Board should be looking at the District's budget in the current political climate to push back on State rhetoric.

Commissioner Curry urges the Board to meet the challenge in supporting the success of BSD.

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Commissioner Segunio articulated that her job as a Commissioner is to ensure kids get a meaningful education. Significant cuts to programs will not satisfy that obligation as a Commissioner.

Commissioner Barlow would not request cuts to be made from the baseline budget.

Superintendent Obeng recapped by reflecting on the guiding principles that include identifying priorities. He thanked the Board for their feedback and initial thoughts. Superintendent Obeng is committed to maintaining quality programs with respect to each school's strategic plan, goals, and plans.

B. Good News

Three students were recognized for their exceptional education from Burlington High School. Vermont presidential scholars went to the statehouse to receive their awards with students from around the state. They were recognized for their leadership in and outside of the classroom.

8. Consent Agenda

A. Licensed Employment Contracts

Motion to approve consent McLaren second curry
unanimous

B. Routine Financial Reports

Commissioner Wick asked for clarification about the financial reports to which Director Lavery explained the process for approving big routine payouts.

Chair Porter motioned to accept Consent Agenda item 8b.

Motion was approved (Commissioner Harrington/ Commissione Klemen)

9. Board Monitoring of Superintendent-Prepared Reports

A. [1.1 Reducing Disparities](#)

Curriculum Director Stephanie Phillips and District Principal Johnson Aten-
This presentation should support what is in the monitoring report. This also supports the call for equity. When we talk about the achievement gap this is what we are talking out- our kids getting what they need.

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Chair Porter reiterated that collectively the District has been trying to close the Achievement Gap for decades. He wonders, what specifically, are we doing now that we are trying to do differently, and how do we measure success in these initiatives.

Principal Johnson explained that there is a real focus on the intersectional need to address the Achievement Gap which can be seen in the framework of each program and each professional strategy. Principal Johnson doesn't believe the District has seen a plan that is more clear and systematic in addressing closing the Achievement Gap. *"Now, we say 'Achievement Gap' and people know what we are talking about. It isn't a canned program; it is organic in that it will represent Burlington. There is a sense of urgency to do right by our children."*

Chair Ported motioned to accept Agenda item 1.1 monitoring report.
(Commissioner Klemen/ Commissioner Curry)

Approved unanimously.

B. Non Compliance Report 2.8 Communication and Support to the Board

Motion to accept agenda item Non-Compliance Report 2.8 Communication to the Board. Motion approved, Commissioner Seguino/ Commissioner Olwell.

Approved unanimously.

10. Board Monitoring on its Own Policies

A. 3.1 Unity of Control

Discussion around the Board Monitoring.

Motion to declare the Board is mostly in compliance. Motion approved,
Commissioner Porter/ Commissioner Harrington.

Approved unanimously.

B. 4.6 Board Committee Principles

Motion to find Board in compliance with 4.6. Motion approved by Commissioner Harrington/ Commissioner Barlow.

Approved 8-1: Commissioner Curry opposed

11. Meeting Evaluation and Follow Up

A. Review and Evaluate Meeting

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Commissioner Barlow enjoys presentations from Directors and program leaders. The work represented is important, but these things should be moved early. He wonders if we should meet more frequently at shorter intervals.

Commissioner Curry has at this point already received two emails from constituents saying it was a great meeting. She elevated the work staff has done and expressed gratitude for their insight.

Commissioner Olwell would like the the Board to consider meeting twice a month.

Superintendent Obeng included that if the Board choose to go to two meetings a month, there should be tight limitations to ensure the meetings do not run over their allocated time.

B. Future Agenda Item Suggestions

12. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn. Motion approved by Commissioner Barlow/ second Commissioner Curry

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