



**BURLINGTON BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS MEETING  
MINUTES  
Hunt Middle School Library  
August 8, 2017  
6 PM**

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m.

**1. Opening Items**

A. Pledge of Allegiance

B. Roll Call

**Commissioners:**

Lauren Berrizbeitia X, Liz Curry X, Susanmarie Harrington X,  
Anne Judson   , David Kirk   , Kat Kleman   , Mark Porter (via phone)  
X, Stephanie Seguino X, Jeff Wick   , Ryan McLaren   , Kathy  
Olwell X, Mark Barlow X

**Student Representatives:**

Isabella Weston X  
Jacob Bucci   

**Administration:**

Yaw Obeng, Superintendent X  
Brittany Nevins, Minute Recorder, Executive Assistant X  
Stephanie Phillips, Senior Director Teaching & Learning     
Nikki Fuller, Senior Director Human Resources & Equity Affairs     
Nathan Lavery, Senior Director of Finance X  
Marty Spaulding, Property Services Director X  
Erik Wells, Communications Specialist X

Barry Gruessner, Grants Director X

*The Board wishes to recognize, welcome and thank those that are providing language interpretation of the Board proceedings. The Board's commitment that all children receive equitable academic services must ensure that New American parents are welcome and can attend meetings, understand the process and be actively engaged. Interpretation of proceedings honors, respects and values our New American parents and students. The Board asks the public and media to respect and understand the importance of this interpretation.*

**2. Approval of Agenda**

- A. Ask Commissioners if anything on the consent agenda needs to be removed.
- B. *Motion to approve agenda (Commissioner Barlow/Commissioner Seguino)*

*Chair Porter makes a motion to add brief discussion regarding question of goals of guidance department prior to public comment.*

*Commissioner Seguino makes a motion to make announcement on negotiations prior to public comment.*

*Unanimous Approval*

Chair Porter: Currently there are no guidance department strategic plan goals that currently exist. In September there will be a discussion on the overall district guidance principles and how they fit within the district goals.

As per resignations in the BHS guidance department, the Board is unable to discuss personnel matters in public forum.

Commissioner Seguino, Chair of Negotiations Committee reads statement:

I would like to update the public here tonight on teacher contract negotiations.

As many of you know, the factfinder advisory report was issued on July 17. This is part of the process required by the statute governing teacher

negotiations. The Board issued a press release on July 27 with comments on the report that can be found on the District's negotiations webpage. To briefly summarize, the report provided a helpful analysis, and some useful recommendations. While there are some deficiencies with the report, it provides a path forward that the Board has acted on in its negotiations with the BEA.

The Board has and will continue to ask for and make itself available for as many meetings in which parties are willing to make such meaningful proposals and concessions as it takes to reach a settlement.

Before the release of the factfinder's report, the Board's negotiation team reached out to the BEA multiple times to identify dates to continue negotiations after the release of the report. After indicating it was unable to meet on several of dates we proposed, the BEA agreed to a session with the Board on July 21. The BEA indicated at that meeting that they were not prepared to discuss salary or health care, two areas where significant differences remain.

The focus of the meeting was therefore on operational items. After the Board provided the BEA with a set of ideas for consideration, the BEA team then informed us that they were ending the session and would get back to us regarding a follow-up meeting date.

The follow-up session was scheduled for August 8 but the Board was subsequently informed yesterday that the only BEA team member in attendance would be their Vermont NEA representative. As a result, we shared additional proposals with the Vermont NEA representative today but no further progress could be made on reaching an agreement.

The next full team bargaining session is scheduled for August 24 and this session will be pivotal.

In negotiations, the Board remains committed to a contract that first and foremost meets the needs of our students, and that is also fair to teachers while respecting the ability of the community to fund our school budget. And we are committed to achieving this goal before August 31.

There is a good deal of misinformation circulating about negotiations. To address that, we will be posting regularly to the district's negotiations webpage, so please check there for updates. We know that this period of time is one of tension and anxiety and worry about school disruption. These tensions can and have led to personal attacks and rapid spread of rumors.

It does not need to be this way. While negotiations can be tough, the Board is committed to respectful, honest engagement and public comments, focused on the issues. These are legitimately difficult issues to solve, and our best selves are needed to work out an agreement. We hope all of the community will support all parties in taking the high road in the coming weeks.

### 3. **Public Comment**

#### A. Comments/Questions from the Public

Adam Holt- Came to discuss to Act 166 determination. He is looking for exception to the entrance rule regarding age for his son.

Mike Fisher- Testimony placed on file with the Burlington School District.

Clare Wool- Testimony placed on file with the Burlington School District.

Patty Wesley- Testimony placed on file with the Burlington School District.

Yvette Amblo-Bose- School counselor at BHS discusses guidance department.

Larissa Urban- Discusses guidance department.

Colleen McSweeney- Testimony placed on file with the Burlington School District.

Jim Holway- Coordinates the Support our Burlington Schools (SOBS) Facebook Forum. He suggests that the School Board make the process of public comment more welcoming to folks who would like to submit public comment, particularly with the manner in which Board members inform the public that their time is up. He also suggests that their should be public wifi at Board meetings. Jim reminds

the Board of an email that he sent to the Board and administration and received minimal response.

B. Board Reflection

Commissioner Curry reminds the public that comments that are made can be submitted to Executive Assistant Brittany Nevins so the Board can review them. She encourages the public to submit comments.

Commissioner Harrington acknowledges the passion and concern expressed regarding the guidance department at Burlington High School and recommends that the Board have a process regarding replying to emails that are sent to the entire board as in the example Jim gave in his testimony.

**4. Board Report**

A. Student Report

Student Representative Isabella Weston says that students are getting ready to head back to school and are holding on to as much summer as they can while they still have it here.

B. Burlington City Council Liaison Report

Commissioner Curry states that there is nothing to report until the Board has more information regarding the health care issue.

C. State Legislative Liaison Report

None

D. PTO Report

None

E. Policy Governance Report

Commissioner Harrington reported that she is working with Executive Assistant Brittany Nevins to ensure that the website page on policy governance is clear and understandable to the public. The Board will be revisiting the Board monitoring calendar at the September Board meeting.

## F. Diversity & Equity Report

Commissioner Berrizbeitia informed the Board regarding plans for community forums this fall. The research and planning has started. Commissioner Berrizbeitia also stated that the committee has a great desire to have consistent data from all of the schools regarding discipline and suspension data. The administration has agreed to start this process this fall.

Commissioner Seguino shares that the the approach the committee is taking with the forums to “Inform, consult, and engage.” She also discusses Commissioner Wick’s previous suggestion to do a Board-wide forum with youth agencies.

Commissioner Harrington asked if there are different ways to structure the engagement to ensure it is productive and quality as each forum may have different communities and different needs.

Commissioner Berrizbeitia stated an update will be given soon and the committee will look into Commissioner Wick’s suggestion on a fourth forum.

G. Negotiations Update- Update had been moved to the beginning of the meeting.

## 5. Superintendent Report

### A. Website and Logo

Communications Specialist Erik Wells gave a presentation on the Website. Erik thanked Stride Creative for their tremendous work as the developer and to the District’s IT team for their help throughout the process. The administration is getting ready for a “soft launch”, which will likely be the week of 8/21/17. There will be a new site for each school and new site for the District. Early Ed will also have its own site. This was identified given that early childhood has become an identified focus in the City of Burlington and in our school district. Erik walked the Board through the elements of the Sustainability Academy website. Some key objectives were:

- Ease of use
- More robust means of information sharing and calendar access (calendar is tied directly to a google calendar).
- Showcase our schools and learning taking place

- Built into navigation and design features and information asked for from parent survey and meetings with PTOs last spring- for example lunch menu and calendar.
- Accessibility features using national standards / translation

Developer has built into site to ensure these main areas are included:

1. Perceivable (can't be invisible to the senses), for example text alternatives for non-text content (like photos).
2. Operable – make sure all users can operate the interface. For example, make all functionality available by keyboard.
3. Understandable – information and the interface. For example, make text readable and understandable.
4. Robust – make sure content is accessible as technology evolves. Dynamic – news posts/calendar. More static – policy, resources, FAQs

Erik states that he is happy to give the Board a tour of the website once the site has been launched as the website is still being developed.

Executive Assistant Brittany Nevins gave a presentation on the District's new logo.

- Given our work on building the new website we saw this time as a perfect opportunity to rebrand ourselves and design a new logo. We've had many iterations of a logo that both Erik and Brittany have observed and we felt it was a great time to give the District a fresh look. Having an up-to-date logo is essential in the design process for building a new website.
- Brittany echoes Erik's comments that Stride Creative have been an incredible partner here as well and they have relied on their expertise throughout this process. They have an extensive portfolio and have worked with the District for many years on our Calendar/Handbook, as well as through the Burlington School Food Project Website. They are familiar with our vision and image we want to express to the world.
- Brittany describes main elements that lead to this logo particular logo:
  - Wanting something that stood out.
  - Wanted a recognizable image- Something that folks could see without the words "Burlington School District" and know what the

image meant. The District felt that this symbol is clearly an image of Burlington, VT.

- The Geographical connection here was important and allowed the District to achieve other goals the District had.
- The District wanted to show a message of hope and inspiration, of a place with endless possibilities. We did this through our use of color. Additionally, through the use of color we identified the importance of celebrating diversity, having multiple layers of color and different sizes of the image.
- We wanted to find a way to incorporate our Vision without having it within the logo: Cultivating Caring, Creative, and Courageous People. Join the Journey! Through the fluidity of the shapes we felt that the logo exemplified our continuous movement forward and an invitation to all to join us on this journey.
- Showing this complexity was importance, while also maintaining a sense of simplicity and clarity of who we are.

Commissioner Curry gave feedback on the logo, mentioning that it would have been good to have people, perhaps silhouettes instead of trees, to show that the school District focuses on people.

Executive Assistant Brittany Nevins thanked Commissioner Curry for the comment and agreed that this was an important consideration in this process. The District had a logo with people and many other Districts have as well and we thought it was important to be unique and do something different.

**B. Wellness Policy (motion within) -**

Grants Director Barry Gruessner presented the Wellness Policy information. Please see [boarddocs.com](http://boarddocs.com) for more information in the information presented.

Commissioner Harrington provided clarity that this is not a policy governance policy. This is a mandated policy that requires Board approval.

Superintendent Obeng shares that the District will have operational procedures and mandatory policies separated and understandable on the new District site. This is a work in progress.

Commissioner Curry reminds the Board that the Board must abide by federal requirements no matter how they fit into the policy governance structure.

Chair Porter asks if there was any financial implications with this policy change. Barry states no.

Commissioner Curry states that according to state law a policy must be read for first reading 10 days in advance.

Executive Assistant Brittany Nevins asked how a policy can be warned 10 days in advance when board meetings are warned 48 hours in advance of a meeting.

Commissioner Curry stated that she would send Brittany information on the policy warn process.

The policy has been warned on August 4, 2017 via [boarddocs.com](http://boarddocs.com) and will be placed on the agenda for the September Board meeting.

- C. Transportation (motions within)- *Motion/Recommendation: 1.) To award daily South to North Route and Athletic & Field Trip services for FY18 to Mountain Transit (STA). 2.) To authorize administration to award Mountain Transit (STA) the Wednesday early release routes in the event GMT is not able to perform this service.*

Property Services Director Marty Spaulding presented to the Board. Please see [boarddocs.com](http://boarddocs.com) for more information.

The Board engaged in discussion regarding cost and savings of the various options and the nuances of this particular set of recommendations.

Chair Porter is concerned about the language of this motion as it involves a hypothetical situation, or an understood “if” statement.

Superintendent Obeng wanted the Board to know that the District is pursuing this option and wanted the flexibility of this motion due to the time sensitive nature of school starting soon.

Superintendent Obeng and Property Services Director Marty Spaulding express the time sensitivity of the issue given that school is starting in the coming weeks.

Commissioner Curry expresses comfort of this motion and sees it as an opportunity for collaboration with the City. She says this issue has been brought up before and believes that the City would have expressed concern by now.

Commissioner Harrington applauds the creativity in cost-savings here and is not concerned with the language of the motion.

*Motion to authorize the District to 1.) To award daily South to North Route and Athletic & Field Trip services for FY18 to Mountain Transit (STA) and 2.) To authorize administration to award Mountain Transit (STA) the Wednesday early release routes in the event GMT is not able to perform this service.  
(Commissioner Curry/Commissioner Barlow)*

*6 in favor, Commissioner Kirk and Chair Porter voted against the motion*

D. Mower Bid (motion within)-

*Motion/Recommendation: Based on all factors of cost, availability and service locations, administration recommends that the BDS Board award BSD Commercial Mower Bid to MTE Turf Equipment Solutions for the amount of \$28,500.33. (Chair Porter / Commissioner Barlow)*

*Unanimous Approval*

**6. Consent Agenda**

*Motion to Approve Consent Agenda (Chair Porter/Commissioner Harrington)*

*Unanimous Approval*

A. Licensed Employment Contracts

B. Routine Financial Reports

Commissioner Seguino calls attention to the July 2017 Variance Report and acknowledges how far the Board has come in three years.

**7. Executive Session**

*A. Motion to consider personnel matter (Commissioner Porter/Commissioner Kirk)*

*Passes Unanimously*

*Motion to leave executive session (Commissioner /Commissioner)*

*B. Motion to consider Executive Session to discuss Contract Negotiations where premature disclosure to the public could put the District at a disadvantage (Commissioner/Commissioner)*

**8. Adjournment**

*Motion to adjourn \_\_\_ p.m. (Commissioner/Commissioner)*

*Unanimously Approved*

Respectfully Submitted by Brittany Nevins

School board 8/8/17

Mike Fisher

8/8/17 5:58 PM

As you head into the crucial part of teacher contract negotiations

You can be tough negotiators AND be respectful.

No union bashing. The union is the teachers. They have help from state and union officials. You have help from your consultants and lawyers.

Most importantly, I urge you to not impose working conditions. As we experienced last year, that is an escalation and instigation.

And I have the same message for the teachers.

I am a taxpayer and a parent. I don't know what the end result should be of the negotiations

Except that there should be no strike.

Clare Wool

Thank you Diversity and Equity Committee members along with BSD Administration for allowing public comment at tonight's meeting.

My name is Clare Wool and also present is Larisa Urban a BHS Guidance Counselor that resigned July 29<sup>th</sup> Patty Wesley former BHS Guidance Director and Yvette Amblo-Bose a BHS Guidance Counselor that resigned June 22<sup>nd</sup>

**In the words of our BSD Equity Council: WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING THAT EVERYONE IN OUR DISTRICT FEELS VALUED, SAFE and RESPECTED.**

When 3 licensed professionals resign and 1 qualified school registrar resigns at the busiest time of the school year to become CVU's Registrar – our community would like to ask our Guidance Director, our BHS Principal, our HR Director and our district Superintendent do you know WHY?

Our community concern is that if our leadership does not model equity to their own colleagues how can they model it to our students or be respected in a district that strives to be equitable.

We cannot develop a strategic plan for a student centered guidance dept with a top down approach without student input or staff collaboration.

**If the vision and guiding principals of the department are being re-established. GREAT then state the vision - Show us the skill set.**

Engage our student body and enlighten & ignite our team of guidance counselors

Tonight it must be acknowledged that our community and our colleagues here in the State of Vermont are privy to our situation and are also concerned with the impact these resignations have on our students and faculty.  
Is BHS leadership modeling equity and inclusion.

It has been suggested that an impartial investigator could in essence report on the climate in our guidance department.

If a cleansing is what the district and school board goal was then you succeed.

**But know the impact of this is falls on ALL of our high school students**

The breadth & depth of services for all at BHS has been seriously diminished and with 3 weeks until the start of school an entire department must be up and running with licensed professionals ready to meet for the first time and serve our 1,010 students.

To reiterate four qualified and respected guidance professionals have resigned from one department in our largest school in the district serving our greatest students population at a critical time in their lives.

It is time for our district leaders ask....."Why did they all resign?"

Hello, my name is Patty Wesley and I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you tonight. I am a long time Burlington resident and the parent of a 2013 BHS graduate. I was also a school counselor at BHS for 26 years and the Director of the Guidance and Counseling department for 9 years. I retired last summer in July 2016.

Like others speaking tonight, I am concerned by the resignations of four valued employees from the BHS Counseling office this year. Especially since I knew that these fine people had no thoughts of leaving BHS, a school they loved and a place to which they were fiercely committed. Why did they leave?

One narrative that has surfaced in the school and the community is that they somehow could not cope with my retirement and that they sabotaged the success of the new leadership at the school and in the department. I want to interrupt this narrative tonight. Frankly, I find this idea deeply offensive to me as a leader and to them as competent and caring professionals. I also find it inherently sexist. I cannot imagine this being said about a group of male employees.

There are many reasons I find this suggestion ridiculous. Three out of four of them had already experienced changes in department leadership in their years at BHS, as well as changes in administration- without stress or discord. They participated in the hiring of the new director last year and were perfectly prepared to work with him. These are not people who are resistant to or unwilling to cope with change. Counselors are intimately involved in not only supporting, but facilitating change in all aspects of their jobs. They care deeply about their students, colleagues and their school. What motivation would they have to "not make it work?" They had every reason to support the new department and school leadership.

Here are the facts. Four people left the Counseling Department within three months. That calls out for the school board and district management to do a serious review of what led these people to leave. Personal interviews would seem essential. Any well-run organization would do an objective review of how this could possibly have happened. The community needs to know that these concerns have been reviewed and are not being easily brushed aside. The community needs to know the outcome of the review and what steps are being taken so that it does not happen again.

A new school year looms ahead. A strong, caring and supportive counseling department is essential at a high school. Our school will also be coping with the additional impact of a recent tragic death of a student this summer. Research clearly shows that the whole school community-students and adults alike- will experience

additional stress related to recovery from that trauma. And those stress symptoms will surface throughout the year ahead and beyond. I think it is important to ask, "How will the care-givers in the school- counselors and teachers- be supported so that they can be there for the students?"

I suggest that a climate of collaboration, respect and good communication is key. People need to feel safe to do good work. That is not what happened last year at BHS. It is critical that this be addressed before more good people leave.

Thank you for your time.

August 8, 2017

Hello, My Name is Colleen McSweeney and I worked in the BHS Guidance and Counseling Department as the Registrar for 9 years I would like to share with you what I witnessed and experienced this past school year.

The new Guidance Director made little to no effort to communicate with Guidance Counselors and guidance staff all year. He was not a team player and was hostile to certain counselors on an almost daily basis.

I witnessed firsthand, student frustration about not being able to schedule appointments with the Guidance Director who refused to clarify how students were expected to make appointment with him. When students managed to connect with him and make an appointment, he very often missed the scheduled appointment. The Guidance Director was very rarely in his office and never communicated where he was going and how long he would be gone. I could never find him.

As the Director he shirked responsibility, leaving big projects and evening events to the last minute, and then expected the Guidance Counselors to pick up his slack. There was no attention to detail. He never took responsibility for anything and always blamed everyone else for situations that would arise from his lack follow through.

On several occasions, I tried to inform the Guidance Director about the basic workings and knowledge of the Guidance and Counseling Department. I really wanted to work with the new Guidance Director and help him be successful however, it became very apparent that he was not willing to learn from us. Change is good and as a department we were open to change, but before effective change can happen it is really important to see how we functioned with systems already in place. The Guidance Director had no interest in finding out how things were done, and it became clear he was incapable of implementing thoughtful change.

For the first time in my 9 years in the BHS Guidance Office I had a pit in my stomach when coming to work in the morning. I never knew what to expect from him, he acknowledged me in the morning but rarely spoke to me throughout the day. The Guidance Office didn't feel like a safe place to me anymore. It was with great sadness that I came to the decision that I had to look for another job.

One more thing then I will be done. With the 4 of us leaving the Guidance and Counseling Department, BHS has lost 54 years of institutional and historical knowledge and experience. They now have two people with only one year each of institutional and historical knowledge of BHS.