

## The Board of Education

Town of Brooklyn  
119 Gorman Road  
Brooklyn, CT 06234

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Mae Lyons, Board Chair  
Justin Phaiah, Secretary  
Isaias Sostre

Melissa Perkins-Banas, Vice-Chair  
Kayla Burgess  
Rick Ives

**Mission:** The Brooklyn Schools will foster a drive for learning within each student to reach his/her greatest potential. To achieve this mission, the school will continually improve its educational programs and services to meet this community's expectations for a quality education for all.

The Brooklyn Board of Education held a meeting in the Central Office Community Room and virtually on July 26, 2023 via Zoom. In attendance were Mrs. Lyons, Dr. Perkins-Banas, Mr. Phaiah, Mrs. Burgess, and Mr. Ives (arrive at 6:10 p.m.) and Mr. Sostre. Mrs. Buell, Superintendent was also present.

To support public participation the documents will be posted on the Town of Brooklyn Website as well as the Brooklyn Public Schools Website. You are encouraged to send questions or comments to [buell@brooklynschools.org](mailto:buell@brooklynschools.org) prior to the meeting.

1. Attendance, Establishment of a Quorum, Call to Order

Mrs. Lyons stated that a Quorum has been established. Board members that were present: Melissa Perkins-Banas, Justin Phaiah, Kayla Burgess, Isaias Sostre and herself, Mae Lyons.

Mrs. Lyons called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Public Comment

None

4. Approval of Minutes

a. May 24, 2023 BOE Regular Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes for May 24, 2023.  
(Perkins-Banas/Burgess)

No discussion

**Vote Count:** 5, 0

Unanimous vote to approve

Rick Ives joined via Zoom at 6:10 p.m.

5. Correspondence and Communication

a. Current Special Education Enrollment/Needs

Current staffing and decision making process:

- Beginning 22-23 Special Education Teachers District-wide
  - 5 BES Resource SPED
  - 2 BES High-Needs Program
  - 4 BMS Resource SPED
  - 2 BMS High-Needs Program
- Related Services:
  - 2 SLPs, 1 SLPA
  - 1 OT
  - 1 PT (Contracted)
  - 1 School Psychologist
  - 1 BCBA
- 3 Social Workers
  - 1 BES Social Worker
  - 2 BMS Social Workers
- January 2023 Changes:
  - Reduced BCBA (.45)
  - Added Special Education Supervisor (.55 FTE)
  - Reallocated Resources for .5 IIC Prek SPED Teacher
  - Added 1 Full-time Social Worker for 23-24 School Year
- Due to the following increases:
  - Student numbers/needs in our High-Needs Programs
  - Special Education Referrals
  - Students qualifying for an IEP
- Proposed Changes for 23-24 School Year:
  - 1 FT BCBA
  - 1 FT Special Education Supervisor

Changes in our District High-Needs Programming

- 54% increase from January 2023 to June 2023 (IIC Program)
- 80% increase in our Pre-K IIC Population from January 2023 to June 2023
  - Due to this, we reallocated resources to add .5 IIC Pre-K Teacher in January and plan on a full-time Pre-K IIC teacher in the Fall 2023

Changes in our District High-Needs Programming

- 73% increase from January 2023 to June 2023
- Middle School TLC Program doubled from January to June

- Have found a large Social/Emotional impact on this age group since COVID

#### BPS Needs Support a full-time BCBA

- 63% Total High-Needs Program increase from January 2023 to June 2023
- All Students in these programs receive BCBA Support including but not limited to:
  - Weekly/Bi-Weekly Classroom/Student Observations
  - Data Analysis (Behavioral, Academic, etc.)
  - Weekly/Bi-Weekly Collaborations with Teachers
  - Functional Behavior Assessments
  - Whole Program Behavior Intervention Plans
  - Individual Behavior Intervention Plans
  - Parent Meetings/Collaboration
  - Academic Programming Support (ACE, Teachtown, PECS, etc.)

#### School Psychologist Role

- In January 2023 we hired a new school psychologist. We had hoped she could provide behavioral support for our TLC program due to the decrease in our BCBA position.
- Our school psychologist is responsible for:
  - Testing and reviewing test results for each child who is referred to special education.
  - Testing and reviewing test results for each child who is due for a three year reevaluation.
- Each new referral and reevaluation requires the school psychologist to attend a minimum of two PPT meetings in addition to testing the student.

#### Increase in Psychologist testing at BES & BMS

- We have seen a steady increase in referrals to special education at BES and BMS: 64% increase in 3 years
- Every three years a student with an IEP requires a reevaluation to continue to qualify for special education.

#### Special Education Child Count

- Increase in Special Education Child Count October 2016- October 2023: 43%
- Due to Child Count Increase, Special Education Teachers have increased by: 54% (2016-2023)
- Both increases require additional support and resources from Special Education Administration

#### BPS Needs Support increase in Special Education Administration

- Brooklyn Public Schools special education administration is responsible for all Brooklyn students preschool through post graduate (22). This includes students who are placed in Out of District Placements. We have seen a steady increase in referrals to special education District wide with a 58% increase in 3 years. Student's who are due for the three reevaluations require an additional PPT meeting as well as testing.

#### Maintaining High Quality Programs

- Importance of maintaining high quality programming with the proper support
- Bringing students back from out of district placements
  - Within the past 3 years, 3 students returned to Brooklyn
- Maintaining students least restrictive environments
  - Time with typical peers
- Partnering with other districts to offer least restrictive environment
  - Tuition student for 23-24 school year
- Families returning to Brooklyn due to quality programing
- Average cost per student of ODP plus transportation is \$120,000 for similar programs.
- Brooklyn's current cost per student: \$36,000
- Average cost savings per student per year: \$84,000

Impact on Budget & Possible Solutions

- Special Education Supervisor Salary: \$96,838
  - Local Funds already in budget:\$43,837
  - 22-24 IDEA Grant: \$5,714
  - 23-25 IDEA Grant (Yearly): \$6,000
  - CT SEDS Implementation Grant (one time): \$2,262
  - Tuition Funds: \$39,025
- BCBA Projected Salary: \$65,000 MA 6
  - Local Funds already in budget:\$36,623
  - IDEA Grant Funds (Yearly): \$15,000
  - Tuition Funds: \$13,377
- Funds needed FY 24
  - BCBA hired above MA 6
- Possible Funding for sustainability:
  - IDEA Grant
  - Physical Therapist position moving from a contracted service to an employee.
    - \$20,000 - \$25,000 savings

Dr. Perkins-Banas made a motion to support the addition of 1.0 FTE special education supervisor from .55 and 1 FTE BCBA from .45 as proposed.

(Perkins-Banas/Phaiah)

Discussion on the BCBA request

**Vote Count:** 6, 0

Unanimous vote to approve

b. Thank You Letter - The Powell Family

Mrs. Buell stated she sent a thank you letter to the Powell Family for building the beautiful courtyard bench. She stated that the beautiful craftsmanship of the bench

will be enjoyed for years to come by students and staff at the Brooklyn Middle School.

c. Thank You Letter - Walmart #2022

Mrs. Buell stated she sent a thank you letter to Walmart Store #2022 for awarding Brooklyn Public Schools the Community Grant in the amount of \$500. This will help with the Community Fitness Course.

d. June 15, 2023 - Woodstock Academy Correspondence

Mrs. Buell that she received an end of the year letter from Woodstock Academy stating some of their successes for this year. There were 320 students that graduated, which included six students from Ukraine. The letter discussed commencement, continuation of the restoration work that they have been doing on the Historic Academy Building, which will house a small museum display highlighting the inner workings of the original clock tower.

e. Woodstock Correspondence - June Head of School Awards

Mrs. Buell stated that she received notification from Mr. Christopher Sandford, Head of School at Woodstock Academy, that Luke Kirkland and Violet Young both received the June Head of School Award.

6. Administrative Reports

a. Recognition

Mrs. Buell wanted to say congratulations to the following retirees:

- Kathi Dumaine-Savage, Grade 5 hired in 1986
- Kathleen Green, Grade 6 hired in 1994
- Christie Clark, Grade 1 hired in 1999

Mrs. Buell stated that together these teachers served the Brooklyn Public Schools for 89 years and touched the lives of over 1,700 students! She stated she would like to publicly thank them and wish them the best in retirement. On the last day of school she and Chuck joined Mrs. Lyons and Ms. Burgess in wishing them the best and giving them a small token of appreciation. They received a clock from the Brooklyn Board of Education and we want them to know that as they retire they are appreciated and their time spent as teachers and enhancing the lives of the students of Brooklyn will live on and enhance the lives of each child and those around them. They have touched the future and that will never be forgotten.

b. FY23 Financial Reports

Donna DiBenedetto is the new finance director and has been a part of the school system since 2008. She has her bachelor's degree in accounting along with years experience in the financial office.

Mrs. Buell stated that invoices are still open in last fiscal year, phone system failure has been expensed from the budget and that expense will be put towards the ARPA grant the school was awarded. Mrs. Buell stated the school is anticipating to return \$50,000 to \$60,000 to the Town.

Mrs. Burgess made a motion for a transfer request in the amount \$348,250.00 from 5 different object codes to cover the requests of other object codes.

(Burgess/Perkins-Banas)

No discussion

**Vote Count:** 6, 0

Unanimous vote to approve

c. Brooklyn's Best

**BES**

- Fun Day was a huge success! We had over 60 volunteers help with the event. The PTO purchased lunch for the volunteers and provided the dunk tank for a station.
- The PreK team held a well attended Ice Cream Social. Families had the opportunity to get to know one another and enjoy watching their child with other classmates. We have the absolute best early childhood staff around!
- The Kindergarten Team, with the help of paraprofessional Jan Franklin, organized a "SNAP Words Around the World" activity that was so much fun! We thank all of our parent volunteers who helped facilitate each station for our students.
- Grade 3 held their annual Research Nights. Families came out to see all of the hard work that the children did. Thank you to our amazing 3rd grade teachers for such a wonderful event!

**BMS**

- Thank you to the PTO for providing beautiful carnations for our 8th-grade students as part of their promotion ceremony.
- Thank you to the elementary school for inviting our grade 8 students to walk the hallways one final time.
- Thank you to the 11 parent volunteers who helped to make our Field Day a huge success!
- Thank you to the PTO for providing ice cream for students at our field day!
- Thank you to the PTO for providing ice cream at the 8th-grade dance.

- We enjoyed a ribbon-cutting ceremony for our new and improved courtyard.
- The 8th grade field trip to Nature's Classroom was a huge success with perfect weather!
- Honor's Night allowed us to celebrate the academic achievements of our students and the induction of new members of our NJHS.
- We are excited about our new entrance sign "Home of the Bobcats"!
- Band and Chorus performances at the adjudication both received Gold recognition.
- The band did a great job marching at the Memorial Day Parade event.
- Tomas Gutierrez recited the Gettysburg Address and Ronan read a poem at the Memorial Day event. They both did an amazing job!
- Our 8th-grade students demonstrated what it means to be a bobcat during the 8th-grade promotion. We will miss them and look forward to hearing about all of their successes!
- We have ordered 2 additional stations for our Community Fitness Course.

#### **District Project Updates**

- The BMS auditorium floor has been refinished and the stairs have been repaired.
- The BES gym and stage floor has been refinished with a painted BES Bear at ½ court. Painted by Ashley Paille and Mrs. Graef.
- The BES stage has new curtains.
- The new math program has been received and distributed. Initial overview of materials was given.
- The gutters have been repaired at the preschool.
- The gym, door and pillars of BMS have been painted.
- The new sign at the auditorium entrance of BMS has been installed.
- We have new entryway carpets.
- The tractor is being repaired, and we did not need to purchase a new one.
- The fuel pump has been changed out.
- The window film has been installed at both schools and the central office.
  - Grant applied for this project
- Phone project update includes PA, 911 and the security alarm are still in progress.
- Although leaks have continued and they are almost all fixed.
- Cleaning, waxing, and varnishing of the floors has been going very smoothly.

#### **Pending projects include:**

- New gym mats
- Snow guards for the preschool walkway and entrance

d. Best Wishes

Mrs. Buell stated that as the Board knows, Mr. Chuck Carey is leaving to take a job closer to home as the business manager and HR Director. She is very happy for him and wishes him well in his new position and best wishes as he begins his 093 course of study. He has done an outstanding job for Brooklyn in his short time here. Mrs. Buell stated that she has begun the process of planning for a new business manager in Brooklyn.

e. New Hires and Resignations:

- Sara Guimont, Grade 5 Social Studies
- Ester Peterson, Grade 5 Writing
- Kaylie Bissonnette, Grade 6 Science
- Jonathan DiPippo, Grade 7 Science
- Loryn Cole, BES Social Worker
- Samantha Felice, Resignation from Grade 3

7. Board of Education Committee Reports

None to report

8. Board Representatives to Other Committees

None to report

9. Old Business

a. Follow up questions regarding climate surveys

No additional question from the Board

10. New Business

a. District Advancement Plan Update

Mrs. Buell stated that the enhancement of communication from the school to families has grown.

- Reading
  - Heggerty has been introduced and implemented in all K-2 classrooms.
  - Professional learning for K-3 classroom teachers on phonemic awareness and phonics instruction
  - Professional Learning provided to our paraprofessional staff
- Mathematics
  - Math pilot is completed and all classroom teachers and special education teachers have gone through the initial overview of the program with a consultant from Curriculum Associates. Professional development is scheduled for August and October for

the upcoming school year. The math interventionists and Instructional coach have ordered manipulatives and prepared a monthly professional learning schedule with each team.

- Math vocabulary lists are being developed and will be modified with the new mathematics program. Grades 3 and 4 created targeted interventions for math vocabulary using the SBAC vocabulary lists.
- Math data has begun to be analyzed to provide targeted interventions for students.
- We will be piloting the MTSS module of CT SEDS for the 23-24 school year. This will support
- our alignment.

Mrs. Buell stated that although we have seen growth in the STAR assessment, it is not as aggressive as she would have hoped. She stated there is individual growth among students.

b. An Act Concerning Assorted Revisions and Additions to the Education Status

Mrs. Buell stated that the new kindergarten age needs to be 5 on or before September 1st:

- Student can be tested to see into kindergarten
- There is no assignment that is state wide to support the test out
- Multiple discussion about this law
- Law has been delayed a year
- Possible small kindergarten to start then bigger the next
- Concern over staffing issues that will coincide with this bill
- Legislature talking about phases for this new bill

Mrs. Buell stated it has been postponed until September, 2024

c. Discussion regarding Board Attorney

Mrs. Buell discussed the Board Attorney Rates: Jessica Ritter is now a partner and her hourly rate is much higher. I will begin using one of her associates, Julie Jaquays for smaller matters that can be handled by an associate.

One Board member indicated an interest in considering a change. If the Board would like to discuss who represents them, that could be a discussion which would include setting up meetings to interview different agencies. This would occur outside of a Board of Education meeting and be scheduled over two or more evenings if this is what the Board would like to do.

Mr. Sostre wanted to bring the Board's attention to Bill 6638 and that one of the attorneys for the school voted in support of the bill. The Board held a discussion and tabled further discussion until the Board has time to review the bill.

Mr. Sostre made a motion to seek new legal representation.

Dr. Perkins-Banas wanted to make a modification to reword Mr. Sostre's motion to explore different firms and explore our options.

Mr. Sostre made a motion to explore other options regarding hiring other law firms.

(Sostre/Perkins-Banas)

**Vote Count: 5 in favor; 1 Nay**

Mrs. Lyons: Yes

Dr. Perkins-Banas: Yes

Mr. Phaiah: Yes

Yes Mrs. Burgess: Yes

Mr. Sostre: Yes

Mr. Ives: No

Motion Granted: Yes

Mrs. Buell will draft a letter for the Board to review to send to other law firms. She will then schedule two nights of interviews.

- d. Discussion regarding the cost to fund free meals for all students in Brooklyn

Mrs Buell stated Information from EASTCONN food services: based on the participation rate this year, the cost to the Brooklyn Board of Education would be \$22,000-\$28,000 monthly to offer free meals. (estimated \$220,000 annually) to subsidize the meals that are not covered by federal reimbursement

- e. Primary Mental Health Grant Program

Mrs. Buell proposed a grant to assist Connecticut school districts to better serve at-risk primary grade children through the availability of an early intervention mental health program for the detection and prevention of emotional, behavioral and learning problems.

Dr. Perkins-Banas made a motion to approve the grant submission for the Connecticut Primary Mental Health Grant Program for the next two years through the CT State Department of Education

(Perkins-Banas/Phaiah)

No discussion

**Vote Count: 6, 0**

Unanimous vote to approve

- f. Discussion of homework policy

- District Policies:

- National PTA & National NEA suggest K-2 students not exceed 10-20 minutes of homework per day.
- Grades 3-6 mainly benefit from 30-60 minutes of daily homework.
- Junior High/High School homework time can vary from night to night, depending on the task or project.
- Most districts (including Brooklyn) adhere to these guidelines, but with variations even among schools within the same district.
- Current Homework Policy:
  - Grades K-2 – The process of homework assignments begins in kindergarten, however homework at this level is at the discretion of the teacher. It is suggested that students in grades one and two have an average of 10-20 minutes of homework each night.
  - Grades 3-4 - Students at this level are expected to have, at a minimum, weekly assignments to be completed at home. It is suggested that students in grades three and four have an average of 30-40 minutes of homework each night. Reading should take place every night, whether it is with a parent or independently.
  - Students in Middle School are expected to have homework nightly. Grades 5 and 6 will have assignments 50 – 60 minutes in length. Students in grades 7 and 8 should expect to have nightly assignments of 70-80 minutes. Long range assignments may also be given. Grade level teams have other policies that students must adhere to in the areas of homework and behavior.
- New Proposed Policy - 2021:
  - BES
    - Reading/Math practice 10 - 30 minutes
  - BMS
    - Grades 5-6: 25 min Reading, 25 min Math
    - Grades 7-8: 30 min Reading, 30 min Math
- Current Handbook Language - Role of Administrator
  - Communicate the purpose of homework with staff
    - In grades Pre-K through 4, homework should nurture childhood development outside of the school day through authentic learning experiences, including reading on a daily basis, play, creativity, conversations, and interactions with peers and adults.
    - In grades 5 through 8, homework should also support the development, reinforcement and practice of academic skills; foster initiative, responsibility, and self-discipline; extend and enrich classroom learning.
  - At the middle school, homework will not exceed a weight of 5% of a student's grade in any class.
  - Be familiar with & enforce the time recommendations for each grade level.

- Monitor quality, quantity, feedback and opportunity for improvement of homework given to ensure that assignments are meaningful and can be accomplished successfully.
- New Policy Language: Role of the Teacher
  - Communicate clear expectations of homework & guidelines with students/parents at the beginning of the school year
  - Adjust/modify homework expectations as necessary, according to individual student needs - working collaboratively with the team
  - Ensure homework is meaningful and directly connected to curriculum standards
  - Provide specific, timely feedback to students on all homework assignments and opportunity for students to rework
  - Communicate regularly with parents/families regarding homework as it pertains to student progress
- New Policy Language: Role of the Parents
 

\*Parent involvement and support is crucial if homework initiatives are to be implemented successfully.

  - Communicate regularly with teachers regarding student
  - Reinforce and promote responsibility and strong study habits
  - Provide a positive, calm, and quiet reading & study environment for the child.
- New Policy Language: Role of the Student
  - Practice reading and math skills
  - Set a strong homework routine
  - Speak to the teacher if you need help/enrichment
  - Be responsible and put your best effort into your work

The Board held a discussion in regards to homework and Mrs. Buell will discuss with administrators.

- g. Request to increase Chromebook insurance from \$20 to \$25 per child/device

Mrs. Buell stated the current Chromebook insurance cost is \$20 and would like to increase it to \$25.

Mr. Phaiah made a motion to increase the Chromebook insurance from \$20 to \$25 per child/device.

(Phaiah/Burgess)

No discussion

**Vote Count:** 6, 0

Unanimous vote to approve

## 11. Public Comment

Ang Covington would like to know why home school children cannot be on school sports teams?

Mrs. Buell stated the rules of public comment during Board meetings, that is a place to hear public comment and not a place for discussion with the Board. The Board stated they heard his comments and will add it as a future agenda item to discuss.

## 12. Executive Session

### a. Superintendent Evaluation

Dr. Perkins-Banas made a motion for the Board of Education to enter into executive session at 8:22 p.m. to discuss the Superintendent's evaluation for the 2022-2023 school year and invite Mrs. Buell, Superintendent. There will be no further action taken once the executive action ends.

(Perkins-Banas/Burgess)

No discussion

Vote Count: 6, 0

Unanimous vote to approve

Dr. Perkins-Banas made a motion to come out of executive session at 9:10 p.m.

(Perkins-Banas/Phiah)

No discussion

Vote Count: 6, 0

Unanimous vote to approve

## 13. Adjournment

Dr. Perkins-Banas made a motion to adjourn at 9:11 p.m.

(Perkins-Banas/Burgess)

No Discussion

**Vote Count:** 6, 0

Unanimous vote to approve

Respectfully Submitted,

***Laura R. Cota***

Laura R. Cota

Board Clerk

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Justin Phaiah, Board of Education Secretary

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Date