

Board of Education Regular Meeting
November 18, 2019

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:38 p.m. in the Suffield High School Media Center and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, Jamie Drzyzga, James Mol, Brian Fry, and Debra Dudack; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tasel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, Business Manager Bill Hoff

Absent: Michael Sepko, Matt Service, John Richter, SHS Student Representatives Abigail Sperrazza and Akshita Jindal

Board of Education Workshop #3: Special Education Program Review by EASTCONN

Mr. Van Tasel reviewed tonight's workshop topic and said with the significant changes in leadership the special education program began to lose the direction. He added it has been difficult for him and Ms. Kelley to come into the district inheriting a program they did not put in place. Ms. Kelley, Director of Special Services introduced Dr. Ravit Stein and Dr. Jennifer Connolly from EASTCONN who presented the needs assessment of the Achieve program, which was conducted by Dr. Stein, Dr. Connolly and Dr. Rose Jaffery. Dr. Stein reviewed their professional backgrounds and roles at EASTCONN. EASTCONN is a Regional Educational Service Center (RESC) and its purpose is to work with districts to improve outcomes for students and provide support to staff, and she shared EASTCONN's core values. The methods used in conducting the needs assessment included stakeholder interviews in the elementary schools and middle school where Achieve is currently implemented, permanent product review, observations, and administering a rating scale survey given to district staff. The ratings scale asked participants to rate different areas of best practice in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) programs as being "in place", "partially in place", "not in place". The results of the rating scale were displayed in a bar graph and categorized into effective practices in ABA programming components. The components that resulted in the areas of high priority were systems, transitions, behavior, training and teaming. In looking at each of these areas, problems and potential solutions were identified. Dr. Stein and Dr. Connolly reviewed the identified problems in each of the high priority areas and discussed potential solutions to address each of these areas. Dr. Connolly also noted the areas of strength within each of these high priority areas. Dr. Stein explained the long-term vision for a model program for students on the autism spectrum which included establishing a clear mission statement for Tier III behavior supports that is understood and supported by all staff, developing an effective process for providing consistent individualized supports for students from preschool through graduation, developing a strong continuum of evidenced-based behavior supports for all students, having a confident and competent staff with an internal system of training for new staff, and providing an efficient and meaningful process of team collaboration. Dr. Stein closed by stating the goal of their consultation services is to create systems that build internal capacity within the district and to support sustainability and accountability of behavior supports over time. The process involves collaboration, teaming and strength-based, data-based and evidence-based problem solving. She added operation goals and objectives with measurables will be designed and a framework developed. Quarterly progress reports will be provided.

Board members asked questions relative to accountability measures, training of staff to build capacity, the role of the consultants, the service delivery model for students, consultants' engagement with parents, and how long EASTCONN is anticipated to be in the district. Dr. Stein explained their role in the district as consultants to build capacity through developing frameworks and staff training, but they are not direct service providers. They can act as both consultants and coaches for staff as they are Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs). She added her opinion is that BCBAs' roles are that of indirect support to staff but are not direct service providers. The consultants help to establish goals and identify priorities to reach those goals. Consultants will not have direct communication with parents except for initial meetings to explain to parents the consultants' role in the district. In order to build internal capacity, district staff are the appropriate people to communicate with parents; however, the consultants can help to build a communication framework for staff to use. Dr. Stein said she does not have an expectation of how long EASTCONN would be in district; it all depends on how much the stakeholders need their support. However, she said typically and realistically it takes three years to put systems in place. She added that within three months of being in the district, she would have a better idea of a timeframe because she will know the rate of progress after reviewing the first quarter deliverables. The model would have consultants in each school weekly and meet with the district team regularly. Superintendent Van Tassel said a formal service model will be provided to the Board. Dr. Stein said they will work closely with the building principals and team members in each school.

Board Chair Mercik Davis opened the meeting up to questions from the public attending. Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi said she was excited to hear the training for staff would be for all staff, not just special education staff. This will lead to not only improving Tier III interventions but also Tier I and II. Ms. Kelley added that there are many positive things happening in the district and this provides a framework to move forward. She was pleased with the work done by EASTCONN. Parents in the audience expressed concern with Dr. Stein's philosophy of the hands-off approach of BCBAs. Superintendent Van Tassel said currently there is a dependency on BCBAs in district, but other providers are capable of providing the service delivery model to students. The BCBAs are not being utilized for their expertise. Parents also noted that the staffing capacity was not addressed in the presentation. Superintendent Van Tassel said the goal is to have all stakeholders who interact with a student to know how to work with that specific student and the district is looking at increasing support staff. Ms. Kelley added that the vision is to have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) classroom in each school staffed with a strong core team of service providers to support those students on an individualized basis. Mr. Van Tassel added that a steering committee will be formed to map out a continuum of services in the district.

Executive Session

At 8:47 p.m., Sattan moved, Mol seconded to go into executive session for the purpose of discussion and review of the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the Suffield Administrators Group and invited Superintendent Tim Van Tassel and Business Manager Bill Hoff to join the executive session.

The executive session ended at 9:38 p.m.

Discussion/Action Items

- Approval of the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the Suffield Administrators Group
MOTION #20-17: Mol moved, Fry seconded to approve the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the Suffield Administrators Group as presented. All members voted in favor.

Adjournment

Drzyzga moved, Dudack seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:43 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of December 2, 2019.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary