

Board of Education Regular Meeting
December 16, 2019

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m. in the Suffield High School Media Center. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, Jamie Drzyzga, Brian Fry, Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Glenn Gazdik, and Michael Sepko; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Bill Hoff

Absent: Scott Lingenfelter; and SHS Student Representatives Abigail Sperrazza and Akshita Jindal

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Board member Dudack thanked everyone for their participation in the book drive.

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #20-27: Dudack moved to approve the minutes of November 4 and November 18, 2019. Fry seconded the motion and all members voted in favor except for Gazdik, who abstained. The motion carried 7-0-1.

Discussion/Action Items

- Approval of SHS course Proposals: ECE Popular Music and Diversity in American Society; Computer Aided Drafting and Design; and Anatomy and Physiology

Board Mercik Davis noted the curriculum and instruction subcommittee has reviewed these course proposals. Ms. Zawawi said the Anatomy and Physiology course was proposed by SHS teacher Mark Beigel and was originally proposed as a half year course, but now will be offered as a full year course. The Computer Aided Drafting and Design course was proposed by SHS teacher Michael Sanchez and the course is aligned with Asnuntuck Community College. ECE Popular Music and Diversity in American Society offers students some diversity in course offerings in the music department and students can earn UCONN credit. All of these courses are included in the 2020-2021 budget request.

MOTION #20-28: Sattan moved to approve the SHS course proposals: ECE Popular Music and Diversity in American Society; Computer Aided Drafting and Design; and Anatomy and Physiology as presented. Drzyzga seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

- Approval of the Resolution Authorizing Issuance of Individual Procurement Cards
Mr. Van Tassel said Mr. Hoff wanted to identify a mechanism for district purchases outside of a credit card. Mr. Hoff said the district had a credit card but credit cards need to be issued in an individual's name, which has been the Superintendent. With a credit card there is only one physical card, but those who need to make district purchases had access to the card number. Having a procurement card (p-Card), allows for better management of purchases as there can be more than

one card and individual credit limits can be set for each authorized individual. Having p-Cards will also eliminate employees having to use their personal credit cards for district purchases. Mr. Hoff added that not only can total card purchases be limited, but daily purchasing limits can be set. These could be easily overridden by the Superintendent or himself if needed. Mr. Hoff said using p-Cards are safer, more efficient, and will eliminate sales tax on purchases. In response to a board member's question, Mr. Hoff said employees who are issued p-Cards will still need to get prior approval before making purchases and receipts are required. Mr. Van Tassel said p-Card activity will be included in the monthly finance report to the Board.

MOTION #20-29: Dudack moved to authorize the Superintendent and the Business Manager to execute a p-Card program agreement on the Board's behalf. Sattan seconded the motion. In response to Board members' questions, Mr. Hoff said only a select few employees will be issued cards and there are no fees associated with the p-Card. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

- Discussion of Graduation Date and School Calendar

Board Chair Mercik Davis said the Board is looking at this tonight to again discuss this year's graduation date and the new State statute. Mr. Van Tassel confirmed for the Board, after seeking the Board's legal counsel, that the graduation date must be set no earlier than the 180th day of school of the approved school calendar. The last day of school for students was June 11, but factoring in the four snow days to date, the last day would now be June 17. Board members discussed the possible graduation dates of June 13, June 20 and June 27. If June 13 was set, a different senior exam schedule would need to occur, and theoretically seniors would have to return to attend school to June 17 or whenever the last day of school will be. Mr. Blain said there is a challenge with having a different exam schedule for seniors since many classes have multiple grade levels in them. He also added the administration would have to review the attendance protocols for seniors who do not return after graduation to fulfill the 180-day requirement. The Board discussed forgiving two days for seniors, the possibility of having to look at shortening April vacation if there are more snow days, and whether to set the graduation date at this meeting or wait to a later date. In response to a board member's question, Mr. Van Tassel said he did not have a formal recommendation at this time but wanted to make the Board aware of the situation. He said he would like to see the assessment schedule and believed June 20 would be the best option for graduation at this point. Board members were in agreement to postpone setting the graduation date until late January or early February.

Mr. Van Tassel said the administration is exploring a three-hour delay schedule and said some districts have instituted three-hour delays in an effort to reduce school closings. Ms. Zawawi shared the current two-hour delay schedule for each school and presented a proposed three-hour delay schedule for each school. She discussed the timing of providing lunches for students on three-hour delay schedule. Breakfast would not be served on three hour delayed openings. Mr. Smith shared how a middle school schedule would work on a three-hour delay, resulting in all seven periods at about 25 minutes long including lunch waves. In response to a Board member's question, Mr. Van Tassel said a three-hour delay schedule could have been used instead of closing school last week. Board members and administrators discussed the effectiveness of instruction when classes are significantly shortened, the possibility of instituting virtual days when there are snow days, and the possibility of extending the dismissal time on delayed openings. Mr. Van Tassel said he will look further into the two virtual day pilots being conducted in two Connecticut districts. Mr. Van Tassel said the ultimate three-hour delay decision is the Board's, as this is a calendar issue, but many districts are using them. He wanted to make the Board aware of this option and suggested putting it on a future agenda as an action item. Board members discussed surveying parents on the topic.

Mr. Van Tassel said the Board approved this year's school calendar last February and eliminated the half day schedule at the high school during mid-term exams at the recommendation of the administration. However, it has come to his attention that the full day schedule has logistical issues and upon further investigation realized the implications of this change was not fully explored. He said a communication has already been sent to high school families announcing a half-day exam schedule, and he apologized for that communication being sent to families before having a discussion with the Board. Superintendent Van Tassel is recommending to reverse last year's decision because the high school staff and administration are not prepared to handle this change. Mr. Van Tassel said it is the Board's prerogative to reverse his decision, but until a full day exam schedule is fully vetted, he cannot recommend keeping the calendar as it was approved. Board members expressed concern about being informed of this issue at such late date, and they approved the calendar based on the recommendations of administration last year. Ms. Zawawi said that the calendar committee did not want to eliminate mid-term exams, but instead look at how exams are being administered. Several teachers were giving performance-based assessments or presentations over time so they didn't feel they needed two hours for mid-term exams. Also, several teachers were giving quarter or unit exams right before midterms were being administered. In October, Mr. Blain met with a representative group of faculty and students to discuss what a full day exam schedule would look like. Two two-hour exams would occur on each day, leaving about two and a half hours to schedule. The group could not come to a consensus on what would be appropriate to do with students during that time frame. Mr. Van Tassel said his recommendation last year would have been to have a structured plan on implementing a change of this magnitude. From there, a review of the assessments and assessment structure should have occurred, a schedule developed, and then a proposal regarding the calendar presented to the Board. He would like to reverse the Board's decision right now and then thoroughly explore the merits of a full day mid-term exam schedule. Mr. Blain added all sixteen districts in our conference run a half day schedule. Board members expressed their dissatisfaction with the late notice but supported the Superintendent's decision to go back to a half day mid-term exam schedule this year. Mr. Van Tassel said the administration will put a committee together and ensure a plan is completely mapped out. With next year's school calendar coming to the Board in the next month or so, the full day schedule will not be ready before the Board will approve next year's calendar; however, the Board can revise the calendar in time to execute a change in the plan if desired.

- October 2019 and November 2019 Financial Reports

Mr. Hoff reviewed the financial reports. He said in October end of year net surplus was \$22, 269 and November's end of year net surplus was \$41,357. These are very low balances for this point in the year. Mr. Hoff focused on the November financial report and noted the \$431,028 deficit in special education tuition. He stated that the Open Choice end of year balance should be maintained at or above \$388,677 because that is the carry over amount included in the 2020-2021 budget. The current projection is \$390,227. Mr. Hoff said food service improved this year compared to last year at the same time, and the sharing table will begin in January in all schools. In response to a Board member's question, Mr. Hoff said Open Choice funds have been used for all facility repair costs this year. For next year's budget those expenses will be paid out of the general fund because there will not be enough money in Open Choice next year. In response to a Board member's question, Mr. Hoff said the Open Choice fund has been used as a contingency but there are also budgeted items allocated in the Open Choice fund. The Board discussed the Town's contingency fund and that the Board could request money from that fund if needed. Mr. Van Tassel clarified that the Board has to expend its funds before going to the Town. Mr. Hoff reviewed the special education tuition deficit analysis he provided to the Board. The deficit is due to increases in tuition, some tuition costs being higher than budgeted, more services needed for students than anticipated, and

lower excess cost reimbursement than budgeted. In response to Board members' questions, Mr. Hoff said the CCSN savings is included in the net surplus; however, EASTCONN is not, and the biggest factors that will affect this year's budget are utility costs this winter and any major repairs. Mr. Van Tassel said he will continue to communicate to the Board of Finance, so they are aware of the district's financial situation.

- EASTCONN Proposal

Ms. Diana Kelley presented the EASTCONN proposal for their services from January 1-June 30, 2020. The proposed focused areas are to develop a clear mission statement, establish vertical alignment as it relates to transitions, develop a program-wide behavior plan, provide a flexible model of ongoing training for all staff, provide planned collaboration time, and develop a model program for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Their responsive consultation model would include a half day per week from January through March for technical assistance and coaching and then a half day every other week through the end of the school year. This time would include a 45-60 minute meeting with stakeholder groups for action planning, 30-60 minutes of direct observation and feedback, and 60-90 minutes of off-site follow up work. The cost of these services is \$33,600: \$31,500 for consultation time from January through June and \$2,100 for an evaluation to guide the 2020-2021 school year. Other items to consider would be environmental (classroom setup, equipment and instructional materials), assistive technology (a staff member to oversee), and the development of programming for students with social/emotional needs. Mr. Van Tassel reiterated that EASTCONN is a regional education service center; a quasi-public service agency, not a private agency. Their role is to support school districts on a consultative basis; not to run the district's program, which allows the staff to take ownership. The district has internal capacity but the structures are not in place, which is what EASTCONN will provide. Board member Sepko said at the last Finance subcommittee meeting, Mr. Van Tassel and subcommittee members conducted a reference check with a district who is currently using EASTCONN and the feedback was very positive. In a response to a Board member's question relative to how long the district would require EASTCONN's services, Ms. Kelley said it should be about two to three years. In response to a Board member's question, Ms. Kelley said she has not had a formal conversation relative to costs of services in years two and three, but there is some front loading of costs and the service model will not be as intense going forward. Board members discussed the need for clear objectives and deliverables to measure the effectiveness of their services. Ms. Kelley said there is a framework to measure effectiveness as well as accountability measures in place. Mr. Van Tassel added that with the significant savings from ending the contract with CCSN, the administration is looking at developing an evening program for special education students with attendance issues. In response to a Board member's question, Mr. Hoff said \$75,000 is budgeted for EASTCONN in next year's budget. Board members discussed the importance of communicating the changes in special education to parents as well as using data on student-centered outcomes to measure effectiveness. Superintendent Van Tassel requested that the Board formally vote to approve the EASTCONN proposal.

MOTION #20-30: Sattan moved to add the EASTCONN proposal as an action item on the agenda. Sepko seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

MOTION #20-31: Dudack moved to approve the EASTCONN proposal as presented for a total of \$33,600 for their services from January through June 2020. Sepko seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

Subcommittee Reports

- November 18, 2019 and December 16, 2019 Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee Meetings - Board member Drzyzga said the committee discussed the courses approved this evening. Tonight's meeting focused on the high school Family Consumer Science course proposal, Farm to Fork, which will be a semester course. This proposal will be placed on the January Board agenda for approval. She thanked the teachers for presenting to the committee and putting the proposals together.
- November 27, 2019 Finance, Facilities and Negotiations Subcommittee Meeting - Board member Sepko said the committee discussed the procurement card and conducted a reference check on EASTCONN.
- December 16, 2019 Policy Subcommittee Meeting - Board member Dudack said the committee discussed six policies and bylaws. Policies #6159 and #6146, and Bylaws #9120 and #9130 will move to the full Board on a 30-day read.

Future Business

Board Chair Mercik Davis said at the last meeting it was asked by a Board member why specific future business items are no longer notated on the agenda. The topics have been notated in the meeting minutes and are maintained in Central Office. They may be scheduled as items on future meetings or addressed and updated to the Board by the Superintendent. Agendas are developed by the Superintendent in consultation with the Board Chair. Board member Sattan said she has been approached by parents who were following these items listed, and said it is a helpful tracking tool. Board member Dudack said the Board used to have a long list that stayed on the agenda for a long time. Board members were asked to select the items they wanted addressed and many of those are now scheduled as workshops. She was comfortable not having future agenda items listed on the agenda. Board Chair Mercik Davis said the future agenda items will continue to be accounted for in the minutes and in Central Office.

Board member Dudack suggested changing the last Board goal to “beginning the process of developing a strategic plan” instead of “developing a strategic plan.” Mr. Van Tassel said the Board can discuss this at an upcoming Board retreat.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Board member Sepko said there have been big changes in the district over the last three years and he believed the right people are in place and he is proud of the district's awesome staff.

Board Chair Mercik Davis said committee lists will be sent out by the end of the week. If there are any concerns it can be modified. She also agreed with Board member Sepko that the district is moving in the right direction but she cautioned not to burn people out, including board members, staff and administrators.

Adjournment

Dudack moved, Fry seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:57 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of January 6, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan
Secretary