

Board of Education Special Meeting  
January 13, 2020

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. in the Suffield High School Media Center. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Susan Mercik Davis, Melissa Finnigan, Glenn Gazdik, Michael Sepko, Scott Lingenfelter, Maureen Sattan, Brian Fry (arr. at 6:38pm), Jamie Drzyzga (arr. at 6:45pm), and Debra Dudack (arr. at 7:14pm); and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, Business Manager Bill Hoff, and Board of Finance Member Brian Kost

Absent: SHS Student Representatives Abigail Sperrazza and Akshita Jindal

Budget Workshop #2:

- A. Ward Spaulding Elementary School, McAlister Intermediate School, Suffield Middle School, Suffield High School and Curriculum and Instruction Proposed 2020-2021 Budget Presentations

Dr. Pangallo reviewed Spaulding School's notable budget changes which include improvements to classroom libraries, investment in the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, and the addition of a STEM teacher. She reviewed the major category items and the dollar and percentage changes of each category, resulting in an overall 5.4% increase over this year's budget. Dr. Pangallo reviewed the after-school expenditures which include library books for all four schools, instructional supplies and classroom libraries for Spaulding, and band instructional supplies for McAlister, for a total of \$98,565.

Ms. Carpenter-Snow reviewed McAlister School's notable budget changes which include the addition of a STEM teacher, professional development through the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, and an increase in band instructional supplies to purchase additional instruments. She reviewed the major category items and the dollar and percentage changes of each category, resulting in an overall 1.8% decrease compared to this year's budget.

Mr. Smith reviewed Suffield Middle School's notable budget changes including the reduction of 4.0 FTE ELA teachers in grades 7 and 8, resulting in one period a day of ELA; the addition of a 0.4 FTE reading interventionist; additional reinforcements to the student support team, which includes an additional special education teacher and social worker; instructional supplies to supplement math instructional materials; and additional various expenses including supports to enhance the SRBI process and funding to support social and emotional learning. The middle school budget is a 1.5% decrease compared to this year's budget.

Mr. Blain reviewed Suffield High School's notable budget changes which include an addition of a guidance counselor to support college and career planning; the addition of four new courses; and staffing reductions of a 0.8 FTE American Sign Language teacher, a 0.2 science teacher, a 0.6 FTE in PE/Life Education due to small class sizes and school need, and a 1.0 FTE reading interventionist. Reading intervention can be done with current special education and general education teachers. He reviewed the major categories and the dollar and percentage changes, resulting in an overall 4.1% decrease compared to this year's budget. Mr. Blain also reviewed the Agriscience budget and major categories in this department, resulting in a 2.1% increase over this year's budget.

Mr. Van Tassel thanked the building principals for their work throughout the year leading up to tonight's presentations. Administrators worked to develop a budget with a district-wide focus. Board members had several questions relative to the schools' budgets:

1. How are the books that were collected at the book drive used in classrooms? Dr. Pangallo said the books were separated between the two elementary schools and are being utilized in each classroom and supplementing the classroom libraries.
2. If four ELA teachers are being eliminated and we are replacing the double block of ELA with something else, how is it possible to not add additional staff? Superintendent Van Tassel said the ELA classes have been mischaracterized as double blocks because the middle school does not have a block schedule. Students currently have two periods of ELA: reading and writing. He said the administration has looked at the schedule and the seven period straight schedule with having one period of ELA will work.
3. Some academic support salaries are being moved to grants. Are these reliably funded grants? Mr. Hoff said that most of the academic support salaries are already paid through grants: Title I and Open Choice. These grant funds are closely monitored and if needed, the salaries will be moved back into the operating budget. Mr. Van Tassel added that the district is not reducing academic support.
4. Is the Teachers College expense in the professional development budget? Mr. Hoff said this expense is in the Curriculum Consultant account.
5. Are the team leader/department head positions serving the schools well? Dr. Pangallo said the team leaders are invaluable to her. They meet outside of the school day and they are a good way to disseminate information between the administration and teachers. Ms. Carpenter-Snow said she meets with the team leaders twice a month and they do a tremendous amount of work, such as helping to develop content for professional development. Mr. Smith said the team leaders are a conduit between the administrators and teachers and also with parents. Their input is integral in establishing school goals and the direction for the school. Mr. Blain said the department heads help to facilitate course recommendations, update the Program of Studies, and determine teaching sections and who will teach each class. Mr. Smith added that team leaders are working with their counterparts between schools which provides greater coherence in programming.
6. Why is there a 70% increase in substitute absence expense at Spaulding? Mr. Hoff said it used to be a district-wide expense, but now this expense has been broken out into each school. There are a higher number of absences at the elementary schools than the older grades. The overall expenditure has not changed, only how it is allocated. In fact, substitute expenses have declined over the last few years. Board members discussed how moving expenses in and out of line items is confusing because it appears there are large increases or decreases in line items. Superintendent Van Tassel discussed sharing a gross budget with the Board to provide more clarity.
7. Board of Finance liaison Brian Kost asked for a simplified class size report for this year and last and how we compare to other districts. Mr. Van Tassel said there is much more to the discussion of class sizes as it relates to student need and philosophy, saying the Board has made efforts to ensure class sizes are appropriate.
8. Where is teacher turnover accounted for in the budget? Mr. Hoff said this budget includes the one retirement that we know of, and the rest is in the turnover/vacancy salary adjustment line, which is budgeted at \$185,000.
9. Where are the McAlister band instruments accounted for in the budget? Mr. Hoff said in the after-school account.

Ms. Zawawi presented the notable changes in the Curriculum and Instruction budget which include a 60% (\$1500) increase in teacher resources, professional reading and new course materials; an increase in curriculum consultants, which is the partnership with Teachers College; new textbooks for the new high school classes, STEM classes, and reading benchmark materials; and professional development. She reviewed the major categories and dollar and percentage changes, resulting in an overall 12% increase over this year's budget.

***Sepko left at 7:18pm, returned at 7:28pm***

***Kost left the meeting at 7:30pm***

10. Why is summer school not being offered? Ms. Zawawi said summer school will be offered for special education students through the Extended School Year (ESY) program. Board member Dudack was concerned with at-risk students. Superintendent Van Tassel said program costs, the number of at-risk students who would qualify and the attendance rates will be reviewed to evaluate what type of program may be offered in the future. Board Chair Mercik Davis said these issues were discussed last year and the Board determined not to offer a summer school program for these reasons.
11. How is Responsive Classroom working? Is there data to show its effectiveness? Dr. Pangallo said you can see the effectiveness of the program in how classes are structured; it is a whole classroom environment. Teachers greet their students each day in hallway, common expectations are used to get students' attention, relationships are established and fostered with students through common Responsive Classroom language. Ms. Carpenter-Snow added that a strong Responsive Classroom has strong student leadership where the classroom runs itself after a lot of front loading by the teacher. McAlister has seen a decrease in office disciplinary referrals. The common language and expectations are very important and provide consistency from grade to grade.

***Sepko left the meeting at 7:43pm***

12. Why is there an increase of 66% in the Curriculum Leaders/Instructional Coaches line item? Mr. Hoff said these were broken out before because they had different titles but now they are all being called the same name so they have been combined into one line item.
13. Why is there an increase of about \$104,000 in salaries at Spaulding? Mr. Hoff said the increase is due to the addition of a STEM teacher, and Spaulding has a good amount of younger teachers who move up on the salary schedule more quickly due to degree changes.

Board member Sattan asked if there currently was extra teaching capacity at the middle school, since the proposal cut four ELA positions without having to hire to cover those twenty sections. The Board and administration discussed the middle school schedule and the impacts of reducing four ELA teachers in grades 7 and 8. Mr. Van Tassel and Mr. Smith explained the seven-period straight schedule. Mr. Van Tassel said moving to one period of ELA could allow for alternative scheduling, providing flexibility for students. ELA teachers could teach four periods of ELA each day and the fifth period could be an additional ELA class for those students who need it. Board member Sattan asked what would be offered to students in place of the second ELA class. Mr. Smith said those students could select a unified or fine arts elective, allowing for more choice and flexibility. Superintendent Van Tassel said the reading interventionist is integral to support Tier III students. Mr. Smith said the schedule focuses on balanced class sizes while providing what students need. He added the focus is also to provide more push-in support for special education students and the proposal to add another special education teacher will help

support that endeavor and result in a special education teacher on each grade level. Mr. Smith explained the difference between the scheduling of core and off-core classes and the proposal allows for more time of unified arts classes. Board members discussed the various ELA structures including one period, two periods, intervention support, and academic and honors classes. Board member Sattan again asked, if the two-block ELA was not cut, could there be cuts to areas that may have extra capacity. Board member Dudack said the discussion tonight was the same during last year's budget deliberations. She was very pleased with the proposal presented this evening, and she was happy to support it. She added that where reductions are made is an operational decision. Board member Sattan said that asking for disclosure of the areas of extra teaching capacity at the middle school directly relates to budget, and, as such, is the purview of the Board. She said she had not advocated for any schedule structure. Mr. Van Tassel noted that over the last six or seven years, student performance on assessments has not improved. Mr. Van Tassel said some students have become disengaged because they do not need two periods of ELA. Many districts only offer one section of ELA. Board member Mercik Davis said it has been determined that the teaming model is best practice, and that administration looked at capacity and ELA was the area that had too many FTEs. Board member Finnigan cautioned on how class size information is presented because if class sizes of similar sized towns are compared to Suffield, other factors must also be reviewed, such as the classroom structure. Some districts with larger class sizes may have additional support staff in those classrooms.

#### Adjournment

Lingenfelter moved, Gazdik seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:57 p.m.

*Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of February 3, 2020.*

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan  
Secretary