

Board of Education Regular Meeting  
January 21, 2020

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m. in the Suffield High School Media Center. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Susan Mercik Davis, Jamie Drzyzga, Maureen Sattan, Brian Fry, Melissa Finnigan, Glenn Gazdik, Scott Lingenfelter, Michael Sepko and Debra Dudack (arr. 6:54 pm); 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

**MOTION #20-36:** Fry moved to change the order of the Discussion/Action Items to move Item D., the 2020-2021 School Calendar Proposal Discussion, to Item A. Sepko seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

Discussion/Action Items

● 2020-2021 School Calendar Proposal

Ms. Zawawi reviewed the process for creating next year's school calendar including the goals, the members of the calendar committee, committee meeting dates, and topics discussed at each meeting. She showed data from other districts for the first day of school, the dates of winter break, and April vacation week. She shared information comparing this year's calendar to next year's proposed calendar, which has the same number of school days, teacher days, professional development days and early dismissal days. Ms. Zawawi compared the conference schedule for this year and the proposed schedule for next year. This year's conference schedule includes two evenings and one early dismissal day for each school in both the fall and spring. Next year, conferences are proposed to all occur after contractual hours and there are no early dismissal days. Mid-terms and finals will operate on an early dismissal schedule, and the tentative last day of school is June 9. Board members discussed April vacation and the conference schedule. Some board members noted concern over not offering any afternoon conferences. Superintendent Van Tassel acknowledged there is not as much flexibility for families in not offering early release conferences and all evening conferences are long days for teachers. Ms. Zawawi said in having two evenings and one early release day for conferences, the district was in violation of the teachers' contract. She added that the feedback received from teachers this year was having consecutive evening conferences was very tiring, so next year's conference schedule has the three evening conference dates spread out over three weeks. Ms. Zawawi said conference times will not necessarily be all evening hours but could occur any time after teachers' contractual day ends. The specific schedule will be determined by the building administrators. Board members discussed how attendance is affected on early release Fridays before a holiday weekend and having a three-hour delay as an option next year for inclement weather.

- Budget Workshop #3: Proposed 2020-2021 Budget Presentations: Athletics, Special Education/Pupil Services, General Services and Insurance

Mr. Bosworth, Athletic Director, gave some highlights of initiatives and accolades the athletic department has been involved in this year. Suffield has won the Michaels Achievement Cup, a sportsmanship award, three years in a row. Students will be donating gently used sports equipment to the Granby YMCA. During Official's Appreciation month; students have been giving cards to team officials at home games. February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness month and facts and information will be shared with students. Suffield hosted a unified basketball game last week. Mr. Bosworth said there are no major projects proposed for the 2020-2021 budget; however, the track pole vault, the high jump mats, and the soccer goals on the turf field will all need replacement in the near future. He highlighted the notable drivers which are contractual stipends, transportation, participation and rental fees and purchased services. He explained the costs of using other schools' facilities such as renting the Windsor Locks pool. He is working on a co-op with other towns to defray some of these costs. The football co-op includes Suffield, East Granby and Windsor Locks, and cost is broken down by student for reimbursement. Mr. Van Tassel noted that Mr. Bosworth has developed a replacement schedule for all team uniforms. Mr. Bosworth shared the number of students participating in high school and middle school sports. In response to Board members' questions, Mr. Bosworth said the golf van is used for both the boy's and the girl's teams; coaches receive training before each season on philosophy, expectations, sportsmanship, CPR, and First Aid; a 25% increase in coach salaries was due to an adjustment in stipends to be more competitive with other districts. Mr. Kost suggested removing the pay-to-play fees from this year's approved budget, as they were not put into place last year. Mr. Hoff said \$42,000 of revenue was budgeted to offset athletic costs. Since athletic fees were not instituted, that amount needs to be taken out of the budget. In response to a Board members' questions, Mr. Bosworth said golf athletes have to provide their own transportation to practices. Attendance fees generated approximately \$5,000 last year, including approximately \$1500 from students. He anticipates requesting the replacement of the future projects mentioned earlier in the 2021-2022 budget; however, some funds could be raised through fundraising. Mr. Van Tassel asked Mr. Bosworth to survey the other districts in our conference to see who charges fees for games.

Ms. Kelley reviewed the notable budget changes in special education including the addition of one special education teacher at the middle school, three additional paraprofessionals, and reductions in professional services due to ending the contractual agreement with CCSN. Mr. Van Tassel noted that paraprofessional staffing is constantly reviewed due to unanticipated needs of students. She reviewed the major category items and the dollar and percentage changes of each category, resulting in an overall 2.1% increase over this year's budget. Ms. Kelley explained how excess cost reimbursement is calculated. The state sets the reimbursement rate percentage. Ms. Kelley reviewed the pupil services notable proposed budget changes including the addition of one school counselor at the high school; one social worker, which would bring the total of four social workers district-wide; and reductions in evaluations and consultations based on current expenses. She explained the major category items and the dollar and percentage changes of each category, resulting in an overall 8.7% increase over this year's budget. In response to Board members' questions, Ms. Kelley said there is a \$10,000 increase in special education equipment for upgrades to the preschool classrooms, there is a 100% decrease in physical therapy services because physical therapy services used to be provided by a contractor, but now that individual is an employee, and Extended School Year (ESY) services are determined through the PPT process.

*Drzyzga left at 7:34pm, returned 7:36pm.*

Board members asked for an explanation and rationale for the additional staffing request, specifically an additional school counselor. Mr. Van Tassel explained that Mr. Brintle was hired as the 6-12 guidance coordinator but carries a caseload of over 100 high school students, making it difficult to oversee both guidance departments. An additional guidance counselor would allow Mr. Brintle to oversee a developmental guidance department in grades 6-12. This will foster more coherence between middle and high school. Board members asked for more information on what the role of a guidance counselor does and what their day-to-day responsibilities look like to better understand the need and help inform their decision of possibly approving this additional position. Board Chair Mercik Davis said the guidance coordinator position was proposed and approved for the 2017-2018 school year, but Mr. Brintle's role was changed to be only in grades 9-12 without informing the Board of this change. Board members asked if the department and what the counselors are doing have been evaluated, and if a reorganization of the department could help. They also questioned if the addition of a social worker would take some of the workload off of the counselors. Mr. Hoff said that when the curriculum coordinator position was created, the required structures were not put in place to make the guidance coordinator work. Superintendent Van Tassel said the expectations of the position were not established when the position was created. He also noted that student success plans are required to be developed starting in sixth grade. This proposal would put a formal development guidance model in place. Mr. Blain said he has been focusing on the school counselor role and has been working with his Parent Advisory Council to develop and administer a survey to parents on how they perceive the counseling department. He added the high school is doing a SWAT analysis of the guidance department. In response to a Board members' questions, Ms. Kelley said the role of a social worker is a very different than the role of a guidance counselor, and currently there are no special education teacher vacancies, with the exception of one position at the middle school.

Mr. Hoff reviewed the notable budget changes in general services including the elimination of the parking fee revenue, a reduction in degree changes, savings in the turnover/vacancy line item, an increase in salary changes due to pending negotiations, a level pension contribution budget pending information from the town, and an increase in 401(a) contribution due to more participants. He reviewed the major category items and the dollar and percentage changes of each category, resulting in an overall 5.2% increase over this year's budget. Mr. Hoff reviewed the health insurance rates, noting a 12% increase in rates for medical and dental insurance. He highlighted cost reduction initiatives which are wellness programs, insurance incentives to promote wellness and cost savings, and care management programs. Mr. Hoff said there are 261 employees, not including retirees, enrolled in the health insurance plan. Mr. Kost suggested the district gets quotes for an insurance policy instead of being self-insured.

***Sattan left at 8:06pm, returned at 8:15pm***

- Elementary STEM/Enrichment Workshop

Mr. Van Tassel, Ms. Zawawi, Ms. Kelley, Mr. Ferraro and Ms. Pryce presented the elementary STEM/Enrichment workshop. Mr. Van Tassel said this proposal will provide both enrichment through STEM (K-5) and a gifted and talented segment (3-5) Ms. Zawawi reviewed the experiential benefits of enrichment programs and it will be provided for all students through interdisciplinary instruction in STEM, providing a standards-based structured inquiry-based and real world problem-based learning for one period each week. The STEM teacher will teach STEM classes but also utilize additional periods to provide enrichment. Ms. Kelley reviewed the gifted and talented model. She explained the laws concerning gifted and talented students. Students would be identified by those who have above average ability, creativity and task commitment. Mr. Van Tassel said this hybrid system would provide school-wide enrichment for all students,

foundational emotional intelligence programming, 21st century knowledge and skills development, and advance teaching and learning instructional practices. Ms. Pryce reviewed what the program would look like at Spaulding. There will be a weekly STEM class for K-2 students, collaboration with classroom teachers, the library media specialist and the STEM teacher to develop the program, and a focus on student social and emotional well-being. Program considerations are the developing the schedule with future considerations for preschool students, a classroom location, developing a handbook of program highlights for family communication, curriculum development and professional development for staff, and determining what resources are needed. Mr. Ferraro said program highlights for McAlister are similar to those at Spaulding. A dedicated lab classroom for STEM classes will be identified. The STEM teacher will be working in collaboration with the classroom teacher, which will raise the level of rigor and achievement for all students, and raise instructional practices for staff. The difference from Spaulding's program is the delivery of small group individualized gifted and talented instruction. A small percentage of high achieving students will be chosen for additional enrichment and challenging opportunities. Students will be identified using multiple criteria using a holistic view of the student. Students who qualify would be offered additional opportunities two to three times per week. The STEM enrichment class would be built into the schedule with lab-type activities covering a wide range of topics. Board members cautioned that the process for identifying gifted and talented students needs to be very well defined so that the criteria can be defended. Mr. Ferraro noted that the STEM program will provide enrichment to all students. Board members discussed how students will be identified and the possibility of partnering with the PTO on enrichment opportunities. In response to a Board member's questions, Ms. Kelley said the testing will be done starting in third grade and conducted by the school psychologist. Board members requested another opportunity, outside of the budget discussions, to discuss this program further where the administration can share the specific criteria being used to identify students.

*Sepko left at 8:56pm, returned at 8:58pm*

*Zawawi left at 8:56pm, returned at 8:59pm*

- Budget Workshop #2: Follow-up

Mr. Smith said based on feedback and questions at the last board meeting, he developed a presentation to show how the school schedule will look with the proposed one period of ELA for next year. He showed a schedule for a 7th grade team and the number of students in each class. He shared three different schedules from a student perspective. Core classes meet every day in the six-day rotation. The off-team classes meet four days out of the six-day rotation and include PE, band/chorus, general music and Unified Arts (FACS, Tech ed., Art and Health). He explained the off-team schedule to show the band, PE and unified arts schedules on the six-day rotation. This is where an enrichment class could fit for those students who have been identified. The schedule allows for options within the day to address all student needs. This model will also allow for more push-in instruction for special education students through a co-teaching model. Health class will be separated out from PE and will be an opportunity for developmental guidance to be embedded in the schedule. Mr. Kost noted the small class sizes. Mr. Van Tassel said the classes are too large to go to one team. Board members thanked Mr. Smith for the information and found it very helpful. Board Chair Mercik Davis noted that if the Board does not support this middle school model, the administration will have to change the budget proposal as the current proposal includes the elimination of four middle school ELA positions. Board member Sattan said Mr. Smith's presentation had still not answered her questions. In response to a Board member's question, Mr. Van Tassel said a simulation of the schedule could not be run in time for this meeting to determine the unified arts class sizes, but he trusts that we have the staffing to offer these classes to students.

Board Chair Mercik Davis called for a straw poll on this topic. All members indicated their support for this model, with the exception of Board member Sattan.

***Lingenfelter left the meeting at 9:12pm.***

- Discussion and Possible Action on the Establishment of a Firm Graduation Date  
Board member Mercik Davis said the Board has discussed this topic at previous Board meetings this year due to a change in state law on when Boards of Education can set the firm graduation date. The graduation date can be set at the 182<sup>nd</sup> school day of the approved school calendar, resulting in a graduation date of June 13, 2020. The last day of school remains June 18, barring any more school closings. Board members discussed holding graduation on June 13 or June 20. Board member Drzyzga noted that if graduation is held on June 20 some seniors may not be able to attend due to college orientation conflicts or others who are entering into the armed forces at that time. Superintendent Van Tasel's recommendation is that the Board establish the graduation date tonight and his recommendation would be June 13.

**MOTION #20-37:** Dudack moved to hold the high school graduation on June 13, 2020. Sepko seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

***Kost left at 9:22pm, returned at 9:24pm***

- Approval of the Capital Improvement Plan  
Mr. Hoff said there are revisions to the plan that is in Board members' packets. Priority 3 – SMS Program Enhancements and Building Renovations' cost was \$1.4 million but needs to be increase to \$2.0 million after meeting with the architects last week. Also Priority 10 – MIS Bathroom Renovation's cost is increasing from \$25,000 to \$35,000 so all the bathrooms with the exception of one, can be upgraded.

**MOTION #20-38:** Dudack moved to approve the Capital Improvement Plan, Drzyzga seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

Executive Session

At 9:38 p.m. Fry moved to go into executive session for discussion concerning a personnel matter regarding administrator compensation, and invite Superintendent Van Tasel to join the session. Sattan seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

The Board came out of executive session at 9:54 p.m.

**MOTION #20-39:** Fry moved, Sepko seconded to permit the Superintendent to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) relative to a personnel matter regarding administrator compensation. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

Adjournment

Sepko moved, Sattan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:57 p.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan  
Secretary