

Board of Education Regular Meeting
February 3, 2020

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:42 p.m. in the Central Office Conference Room.

Present: Board members Susan Mercik Davis, Jamie Drzyzga, Brian Fry, Melissa Finnigan, Glenn Gazdik, Scott Lingenfelter, and Debra Dudack; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, and Director of Special Services Diana Kelley

Absent: Maureen Sattan and Michael Sepko

Executive Session

Lingenfelter moved to go into executive session for the purpose of interviewing finalist candidates for the Secondary Special Education Supervisor position and invited Superintendent Tim Van Tassel and Director of Special Services Diana Kelley to join the executive session. Fry seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 7-0.

The Board came out of executive session at 6:30 p.m.

Regular Session

The regular session began at 6:46 p.m. and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Susan Mercik Davis, Jamie Drzyzga, Brian Fry, Melissa Finnigan, Glenn Gazdik, Scott Lingenfelter, Michael Sepko and Debra Dudack; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, Business Manager Bill Hoff; and SHS Student Representatives Abigail Sperrazza and Akshita Jindal

Absent: Maureen Sattan

MOTION #20-40: Lingenfelter moved to amend the agenda to move Discussion/Action Item C. – Possible appointment of a Secondary Special Education Supervisor to after Recognition. Dudack seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

Recognition

● Schools in the Spotlight - QPR/Gizmos

Ms. Kelley said Suffield has received a grant through the United Way for suicide prevention and mental health promotion. Karen Lawrence and Lori O'Neil were also present and integral in securing the grant. Ms. Kelley explained that many staff members have received QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Gatekeeper training, which helps staff recognize the signs of suicide crisis and how to get someone the help they need. She reviewed the strategies for screening for mental health and she explained the mental health curriculum being taught to McAlister students, which is an interactive book told by a therapy dog, Gizmo. Timothy Johnson, a fifth grader at McAlister, spoke about what Gizmo has taught him and strategies he can use when he is feeling sad, angry or anxious. Ms. Lawrence explained how the curriculum is being taught to students.

Action Item

- Possible Appointment of a Secondary Special Education Supervisor

MOTION #20-41: Finnigan moved to appoint Dr. Sharon Goulet as the Secondary Special Education Supervisor and authorize the Superintendent to complete the hiring process. Lingenfelter seconded the motion and all members voted in favor except for Sepko, who abstained. The motion carried 7-0-1.

Suffield High School Student Representatives

Miss Sperrazza said Suffield High School has received College Board's Female Diversity Award in computer science for 2019; Nick Sinofsky has been nominated as a finalist for the Hartford Courant Connecticut Varsity Athlete of the Week; the high school musical, Sound of Music, performances are March 12-14; course selections for eighth through eleventh grader students begins next week and current eighth graders will be attending a Program of Studies night on February 5. The middle school drama club will be performing Peter Pan Jr. on February 20-22. Miss Jindal said Spaulding held a food drive benefitting the Suffield Community Aid. At McAlister, fourth grade students participated in Collaboration Day which fosters student leadership and collaboration; and McAlister is holding its TGIS event on February 8th.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

None

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report - Mr. Van Tassel sent formal correspondence regarding the Novel Coronavirus to families and staff today, and a meeting with Town officials to discuss a pandemic plan is being held this week. The district continues to monitor absence rates and classrooms and other areas are being sanitized regularly. He congratulated the high school on receiving the College Board's Female Diversity Award in computer science. Superintendent Van Tassel said Teamsters negotiations are underway and Board members Davis, Sepko and Finnigan are serving on the negotiations committee. He thanked Mr. Ferraro and Ms. Zawawi for being the TEAM facilitators. He said all 20 mentees presented their portfolios or papers on one of the four modules as part of the TEAM mentor process for new teachers.
- Board Chair's Report – Board Chair Mercik Davis said Board Member Fry has agreed to be the Board liaison to Agriscience. She encouraged Board members to regularly check their board emails and calendar for time sensitive information. The SFES auction is being held on March 21 at Springfield Country Club and she encouraged Board members and administrators to attend.
- Business Manager's Report - None
- Board of Selectmen Liaison's Report - Selectman Mahoney asked the Board to pay close attention to staffing as it relates to declining enrollment over the past 10 years. He said there may be good reasons why staffing has remained relatively unchanged while enrollment has decreased by about 17%, but the Board needs to be able to explain those reasons to the Board of Finance.
- Board of Finance Liaison's Report - None

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #20-42: Lingenfelter moved to approve the January 3, 2020 special meeting minutes, the January 6, 2020 regular meeting minutes, the January 13, 2020 special meeting minutes, and the January 21, 2020 regular meeting minutes. Drzyzga seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #20-43: Dudack moved to approve the consent agenda item: SHS Agriscience Field Trip Request to Washington, DC - March 19-21, 2020. Fry seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

Miss Sperrazza and Miss Jindal left the meeting at 7:37 p.m.

Discussion/Action Items

MOTION 20-#44: Dudack moved to amend the agenda to move Discussion/Action Item B – Open Choice Presentation to Item A. Lingenfelter seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

- **Open Choice Presentation**

Mr. Van Tassel thanked both Ms. Borrero of CREC and Mr. Norton from the State Department of Education (CSDE) for presenting tonight. Ms. Borrero reviewed the history of the Hartford Region Open Choice Program which has been in existence since 1966, and today has 27 participating districts serving over 2,300 students in 140 schools across the region. Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) oversees the application, placement and waitlist process. There are multiple partners of the RSCO including the CSDE, Sheff Office, Choice Division, CREC, CT Technical High School and other public school districts. Ms. Borrero reviewed the application and placement process for Hartford residents. Districts will receive a letter from Commissioner of Education to declare the number of Open Choice seats they will accept for next year. She noted it is important for students to be enrolled by June 30 in order to secure transportation for students in time for the first day of school. Ms. Borrero reviewed the Open Choice service delivery model and professional development available to participating districts. Mr. Norton reviewed the different program funding available to participating districts. The attendance grant amount is based on the percentage of Open Choice students enrolled in a district as compared to the entire student population. There is also an early beginnings grant which is available to preschool and kindergarten students enrolled in a full day program. Another grant available is the Welcoming and Culturally Responsive Environments grant that provides additional funds to districts whose action plans enhance the social and emotional learning of Open Choice students. The Academic and Social Support grant provides funds for academic, student and social support activities to Open Choice districts. There are also several Bonus Set-Aside grants available to Open Choice districts that qualify. These grants are in addition to the attendance grant. Ms. Borrero reviewed the funding history for Suffield for the last five years. Currently there are 43 Open Choice students enrolled in Suffield as compared to 96 students in 2015-2016. Mr. Norton noted that comparing the five years the attendance grant percentage was maximized in 2015-2016 with the district receiving \$8000 per student as compared to receiving \$3,000 per student this year. Board member Dudack said former leadership had concerns over program and lack of supports for districts and asked what is being done to address those concerns. Ms. Borrero said the staffing structure has changed by using a team approach, providing supports at each level, and additional professional development for staff.

- Discussion and Possible Action on IT Personnel Proposal

Mr. Van Tassel said the Board and Town share services as it relates to technology and Ms. Osleger is present to inform the Board of technology needs. Most recently, she was interviewing for a vacant position and had two highly qualified candidates. The technology budget for next year proposes an additional staff member. Ms. Osleger would like to hire for that position now and has received approval from the First Selectwoman. Since this is a shared position she is coming to the Board to seek the same approval. Ms. Osleger noted that while she was going to offer the candidate the job pending the Board's approval, the applicant pulled out of the process. Ms. Osleger explained the position is needed now due to increased demands of work at both the town and school district. She and her network administrators are having to do some of the work that would be done by this new position. She also noted it is difficult to hire after July 1 because by the time the interviewing and hiring processes are complete, it is the beginning of the school year which is very hectic and difficult to train a new employee. She would like to post the position now and get a person trained and acclimated to the position before the start of the school year. The upgraded servers and increased infrastructure in the district and town are a large time commitment for the network administrators. She also noted that many of the town systems are 24 hours a day, seven days a week, such as the police and fire departments. There are large projects also occurring on the town side, such as implementing an online permitting system in the building department and redoing the entire dispatching system at the police department. Ms. Osleger said on the school side her department works on curriculum resources, and various software, such as Infospap and Powerschool. She reviewed her current staffing and noted that when a network administrator retired last August, she did not fill that position as she wanted to determine the needs of both the district and town moving forward since the integration just occurred. Ms. Osleger said in hiring this person to handle projects, it will allow her network administrators the ability to be proactive instead of reactive. Mr. Van Tassel said he is concerned with staff burnout due to the heavy workload. This is a shared position and 30% of the salary will be paid by the town. Board and administration discussed funding sources to hire this position in this budget year.

MOTION #20-45: Dudack moved to approve the IT personnel proposal as presented. Sepko seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

- December Financial Report and Approval of Budget Transfers

Mr. Hoff said the end of year projected net surplus is \$20,051. There are no significant changes over last month's report. He is still concerned about utility costs and the excess cost reimbursement rate the district will receive. He explained the need for the Board to approve the budget transfers and noted that budget transfers are usually done three to four times a year.

MOTION #20-46: Sepko moved to approve the budget transfers as presented. Finnigan seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

- Discussion and Possible Action on the 2020-2021 Proposed Budget

Mr. Van Tassel said in response to Board members' questions related to the budget, he has provided some additional information for the Board. Mr. Van Tassel reviewed historical trends relative to the budget since 2007-2008. The data included the total budget and the total budget broken out by regular education and special education expenditures, as well as the percentage of special education expenditures, the percentage increase overall and broken out by regular education and special education, student enrollment, per pupil expenditures and state rank. Mr. Hoff said the state report takes into account such things as grants but excludes other things like food service and in-kind items. He noted the 6.6% overall increase in 2015-2016 was due to a school construction project. Mr. Van Tassel noted Suffield is ranked 83 out of 169 for per pupil expenditures. The Board discussed the increase in special education expenditures. Board member Gazdik suggesting adding the Consumer Price Inflation to the data sheet and breaking out health care costs. Mr. Van Tassel reviewed student enrollment trend over the last five years, which shows a cumulative decrease of

12.44%. However, for the same time period, overall staffing has decreased by 9.08%. He next reviewed special education enrollment and special education staffing. Special education student enrollment has increased by almost 18% in the same time period, yet the overall special education staffing has decreased by 4.2%. Certified staff has increased by 33.15%, yet non-certified staff has decreased by 13.41%. Board members suggested including a narrative explaining the budget drivers, especially in special education. Mr. Van Tassel shared the most recent Open Choice enrollment notification for Suffield; seven students have selected Suffield as their first choice for next year. Thirteen Open Choice students are budgeted in the 2020-2021 proposed budget. Board members discussed the guidance counselor position at the high school and the elimination of the summer program. If an additional guidance counselor was not approved, it would mean that the counseling coordinator would not be able to focus as much on 6-12 due to his student caseload. Board members discussed looking at the capacity of the counselor roles in the middle and high schools. They also discussed the impact on the budget of eliminating the guidance counselor position. The Board discussed the teaming model at the middle school and class sizes. The Board will review the data presented tonight and vote on the budget at a future meeting.

Subcommittee Reports

- January 21, 2020 Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee Meeting - Board member Drzyzga said Stephannie Holland and Tim Percoski presented SAT data and how Suffield compared to other towns, our DRG and the state. They also shared their short-term and long-term plans.
- January 27, 2020 Finance, Facilities, & Negotiations Subcommittee Meeting - Board member Sepko said Teamsters negotiations have begun with an initial ground rules meeting and additional meeting dates were selected to begin negotiations.

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC - None
- Agriscience - Board Chair Mercik Davis said she, Board member Fry and Superintendent Van Tassel toured the Agriscience facility last week because the department has received funds through the ASTE grant and they would like to use those funds to purchase a plasma metal cutting machine for the technology education room, provide for a more mobile workspace in the biology classroom, and purchase additional appliances for the food science classroom.
- CABA - None

Future Business

None

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

None

Adjournment

Dudack moved, Fry seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:49 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of March 2, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Guerrette
Secretary Pro Tem