

Board of Education Emergency Meeting  
March 10, 2020

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m. in the Suffield Middle School Media Center.

Present: Board members Susan Mercik Davis, Jamie Drzyzga, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik (via phone until 6:39 pm, then attended in person), Scott Lingenfelter, Michael Sepko, Maureen Sattan, Melissa Finnigan, and Debra Dudack; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Business Manager Bill Hoff; and Director of Special Services Diana Kelley

Discussion Items

- Discussion of Governor's COVID-19 Declaration of a State of Emergency and Board of Education Response to Such Declaration, including but not limited to: Field Trips, School Calendar, and CSDE Waiver

Board Chair Mercik Davis discussed the need to have this meeting to have an open discussion concerning the district's efforts to prepare for any and all situations which may arise from the coronavirus. The coronavirus epidemic is unprecedented in recent history and Governor Lamont's Declaration of Public Health and Civil Preparedness Emergencies necessitated calling this meeting. Mr. Van Tassel added that he spoke with the FOIA Commission to ensure the Board could hold the emergency meeting without violating FOIA rules. The FOIA representative stated this is an unprecedented event and recommended that the district post the meeting on the website and through local media sources as soon as possible, which was done.

Superintendent Van Tassel reviewed several correspondences with the Board from the State and from Shipman and Goodwin regarding guidelines and recommendations to school districts in regards to the coronavirus. Superintendent Van Tassel detailed the district's preparation regarding the coronavirus and the proactive steps the district has taken to prepare the district on how to best protect students, staff and the community against the risks of the coronavirus.

Discussion ensued about three upcoming field trips within the district. Mr. Hoff reviewed location of field trips, the number of students attending, insurance options given to families for cancellation of trips and deadlines for reimbursements. Mr. Van Tassel said he would recommend cancelling the 8<sup>th</sup> grade trip to Quebec since it is an international trip. Administration stated that they would contact the companies involved in booking these field trip and discuss extending deadlines for cancellation and/or the possibility of postponing the trips to a later date. Board members discussed the value of field trips to the student experience, the need to ensure student and staff safety during this outbreak and limit financial costs to family if the need to cancel occurs.

Superintendent Van Tassel and Ms. Kelley reviewed the CSDE waiver of school days, the possible implementation of distance learning, and its effects on requirements for access, equity and Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Mr. Van Tassel expressed concerns with filing a waiver request at this time due to FAPE requirements.

Discussion was had with administration and Board members concerning the possible ramifications of a prolonged school closure and the effects on the school calendar. At this time, the state is leaving the decision of school closures to local districts.

Mr. Van Tassel identified upcoming district events where 100 or more people would be expected to be in attendance. A limited number of districts have already made the decision to cancel these events, and others were considering this move. Mr. Van Tassel stated his position has always been to err on the side of caution and recommended taking the necessary precautions and postpone the drama event to another date. He further stated he has enough communications that suggest why the guidance should be followed. Board members then shared their comments/concerns regarding event cancellation or postponement. Board members discussed the fact that there were no diagnosed cases in close proximity to Suffield; State guidance left district decision-making at the local level, and that there was no directive to close schools at this time due to no imminent threat to students/faculty. Regarding the upcoming SHS musical, a Board member noted an inconsistency of having up to 400 students/staff in a building all day but restricting an evening activity with significantly the same population and their families, which they are also exposed to daily. Other Board members voiced the desire to cancel the play as a precautionary measure per state recommendations. A straw poll was taken of the Board to cancel or postpone events beginning as soon as tomorrow morning, with the Board not recommending the postponing or canceling events yet. The Board Chair indicated that if something comes up, a decision to cancel or postpone could be made by the Superintendent. The Board acknowledged the situation was extremely fluid and decisions should be reconsidered regularly.

#### Adjournment

Lingenfelter moved, Drzyzga seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:38 p.m.

*Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of April 7, 2020.*

Respectfully submitted,

Sue Mercik Davis  
Board of Education Chair