

Board of Education Special Meeting
Conducted Remotely
May 20, 2020

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. via Zoom teleconference call.

Present: Board members Susan Mercik Davis, Jamie Drzyzga, Brian Fry, Melissa Finnigan, Glenn Gazdik, Scott Lingenfelter (joined 7:15pm), Maureen Sattan, Michael Sepko (joined 7:55 pm) and Debra Dudack; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi and Business Manager Bill Hoff

Presentation of Suffield High School 2020 Graduation Plans

Board Chair Mercik Davis said the Board wanted to hold this special meeting to share with parents and students the process and intention for graduation this year. The Board is very aware of the disappointment for students in all that they are missing with schools being closed, but no more so than the seniors, who are missing the culminating celebrations of their senior year. The Board and administration have taken into consideration the desires of the senior students and their families, while being mindful of restrictions imposed by the Governor's executive orders. The Board acknowledges and understands the emotion and disappointment that students and families are experiencing; however, the situation does not take away from all these students have accomplished.

Superintendent Van Tassel extended sympathies for loss of life to those who have lost loved ones to the coronavirus or have endured hardships. He addressed the senior students and expressed that he wished there was more that could be done for the seniors, but he is hopeful after the presentation they will be encouraged. Mr. Van Tassel reviewed the graduation planning process which included several meetings occurring beginning in April. The committee was made up of the High School Administration, Central Office Administration, the Director of Technology and three Board members: Sue Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan and Glenn Gazdik. He acknowledged the work of the high school administration as well as senior students. Two stakeholder surveys were administered to senior students and their parents, and he appreciated their feedback. He reviewed the Governor's executive orders that affect social events and gatherings (Ex. Order 7N, 7X and 7PP). The district is also monitoring and taking into consideration the Town's response.

Mr. Blain thanked Superintendent Van Tassel and committee members for their work in planning for graduation and said this has been difficult knowing they can't give the students what they deserve. He reviewed the survey results: of the 103 parent responses, 61% expressed a need to have a live ceremony for formal closure for students. Parents' first choice was to have a live ceremony with social distancing in June and their second choice was a live ceremony with social distancing later in the summer. 117 students responded to the survey and their first and second choices were the same as the parent results, and also expressing the need for a live graduation. 37% of the students responded that a virtual ceremony would be valuable, and 22% had no preference. Mr. Blain explained that they are planning two parallel paths: a live ceremony on August 7th (rain date Aug. 8th) in the evening. It will be a traditional graduation format and will adhere to the Governor's executive orders and local official advisements. There will also be a graduation held the week of June 8th. Students will come to Beneski field with their parents and family members in their

household. District and school administrators will be present. Two locations will be set up on the field and parents will present the diploma cover to their child. A professional photographer will take pictures and a video will be created. Speeches will be recorded at the high school and will be streamed live on New England Cable News. The district is also working on a live stream of this event so students can see each other get their diplomas. The estimated time to conduct this is two days, but we are hoping to do it in one day. Extra days will be built into the schedule for inclement weather. He said this class is extremely special and has reshaped Suffield High School, and we are going to give them our very best in this situation.

Board Chair Davis thanked the committee and the High School and Central Office Administration for their work in these plans and for their collaboration and partnership. In response to a Board member's question relative to the five-person limit in social gatherings, John Spencer, Town Director of Emergency Management, said that restriction is in place until at least June 20 per the Governor's executive order. The restriction should ease going into Phase II and III; however, that is dependent on the infection rate during Phase I of reopening. It is also dependent on the local communities' ability to do conduct contact tracing, which is not in place at this time. In response to a Board member's question relative to the impact to graduation during Phase II, Mr. Spencer said he has not seen Phase II of the plan, but he thinks Phase II will focus on adding in other businesses to open and not so much to expanding the amount of people allowed in a social gathering. It is all dependent on how the State responds to reopening and the infection rate. Decisions may be left to local communities. Right now, Phase II states that 50 people will be allowed to gather, and in Phase III that number increases to 100, but these are projections. Mr. Spencer said are many variables that could impact these phases. Board member Dudack thanked the graduation committee and said it is an impressive plan in a difficult time.

Public Comment

Heidi Huhn Partain, 9 Oxford Drive, asked how will split households be managed at the June 8 virtual ceremony. Will the group limit of 5 mandate apply? Mr. Van Tassel will seek further guidance on this issue with the Director of the North Central District Health Department, and parents will be notified of the guidance received.

Meredith Oliveira, 390 Boston Neck Road, had the same concerns about split households.

Karissa Stanio, 39 Wisteria Lane, asked how will seniors be getting their caps and gowns before the ceremony. Mr. Blain said students will use Pick-a-Time for students to pick up their caps and gowns and senior gifts as well as return items the week of June 1. This will give students a week to prepare their gowns and decorate their caps.

Barbara McVey, 115 Randall Drive, asked if masks will be required. Superintendent Van Tassel said masks will be required at the June ceremony, with the exception of photos being taken and the receiving of the diploma. We will have to wait and see for August as we do not have those guidelines yet, but they may be required then as well.

Marsie (no last name or address given) asked what about students who leave for the military over the summer and will not be here for the August graduation. Mr. Van Tassel congratulated these students and he said the Board and administration are very committed to doing something for this class next fall or spring since they missed all their end of year celebrations.

Lindsay Holcomb, 168 South Road East Hartland, said she was at the FFA awards ceremony and asked for a recap of the graduation plans. Mr. Blain will be sending the presentation to all families tomorrow in his weekly update.

Cindy Ofsuryk, 837 Burbank Ave, asked if a drive through ceremony was a consideration. Mr. Van Tassel said there are safety concerns with a drive through as there will be a large group of people in close proximity and while they will be in their cars, it would be difficult to manage if people got out of their cars.

Katie Davis, 42 Wisteria Lane, asked if the phases get extended or back tracked is there a plan for a later graduation in fall or winter break. Mr. Van Tassel, if we cannot do a ceremony in August and there is interest, then there is the potential of a graduation ceremony at a later date. The only issue would be the availability of students next fall.

Dave O'Connell, 220 Fairhill Lane, asked what was the rationale for holding graduation the week of June 8. Mr. Blain said that is the last week of school for seniors and we wanted to recognize them in the week of their original graduation date of June 13. Holding it starting on Monday allows for rain dates.

Callie Dougherty, 878 North Street, asked how do seniors get updated transcripts once they graduate. Mr. Blain said final transcripts will be completed by the school counseling office and will be included in seniors' packets.

Mandy (no last name or address given), asked when will students be receiving their yearbooks. Mr. Blain said yearbooks are due in between June 8-11.

Barbara McVey asked if the valedictorian will be giving their speech the June 8 ceremony. Mr. Blain said that all speeches will be recorded at the high school this week

Jen Bombard, 6 Whitfield Way, asked if there was any thought to doing a drive-in type graduation in June. The school where she teaches is exploring this as a June option with a later date in the summer. Avon and Farmington are doing this as well. It would give the kids a chance to all be in the same place as the same time one last time. Mr. Van Tassel said the idea was explored, but there are safety concerns. The focus is to work within a standard to take every safety precaution to keep groups to a minimum.

Sandra Bascove, 63 Redstone Road, asked how scholarships and honors awards will be given to students. Mr. Blain said the senior scholarship night is being held on June 2 via zoom, and the senior banquet is being held on June 4 also via Zoom.

Karissa Stanio, 39 Wisteria Lane, asked how will students view the graduation video that will be made. Mr. Blain said the video will be put together and it will be made available to students as soon as possible.

Steve Mitzel, 266 North Main, asked for clarification on the June 8 ceremony as it is confusing. Is it limited to 5 people total? How many school officials will be there and are they included in the 5-person total? Mr. Van Tassel said he will get further guidance from the local health department.

Marsie (no last name or address given), asked instead of a drive-in graduation, could there be a drive through graduation with a parade. Mr. Van Tassel said this was considered, but there are

concerns with parades in terms of having a lot of students together and making sure everyone stays in their cars.

Barbara McVey asked if it would be possible to have a senior parade in their cars, decorated, prior to the graduation. Mr. Van Tasel said it would not be in our best interest but will look at it for the future.

Melissa Thurston, 763 North Street, asked if grandparents live in household can they attend. Mr. Van Tasel will inquire of the local health department.

Mallory Mitzel, 173 Kent Avenue, asked if we are continuously driving and not leaving the cars, is this workable? MY family has over 12 people with all siblings and parents, are they all allowed since they're immediate family? Mr. Van Tasel will inquire of the local health department as to family limits for graduation.

Adam Leighton, 18 Chestnut Hill Simsbury, asked if there are any updates with the prom. Mr. Blain said the same venue has been reserved for July but it is unlikely it can take place due to restrictions on the number of people at social gatherings. We are looking at possibly holding an event during Thanksgiving weekend when many students are home for the holiday.

Susan Dubocq, 5 Whitfield Way, if the governor permits live graduations, who is responsible for making that decision. Mr. Van Tasel said that decision will not be made in isolation but in consultation with the local health department and town officials.

Lindsay Holcomb, 168 South Road East Hartland, asked if prom gets pushed to next year, how will students be notified? Mr. Blain said he will send a survey to seniors and in that survey he will ask for personal emails.

Barbara Versace said she does not understand the idea that seniors cannot have a graduation and stand on a lawn six feet apart yet malls, restaurants and grocery stores are open. Mr. Van Tasel that has been the frustration of the administration as well and it is hard to make sense of the guidelines in place, but the administration is working hard to provide what we can within the guidelines.

Adjournment

Dudack moved, Sepko seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:23 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of June 1, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan
Secretary

Addendum to Board of Education Meeting Minutes

May 20, 2020

These comments were added in the Zoom Chat during the meeting:

From Heidi's 1 iPhone to Everyone: 07:33 PM

how will split households be managed with the 6/8 distant ceremony? does a group of 5 mandate apply?

From Rebecca Osleger - Technology Director to Everyone: 07:44 PM

Heidi can you state your address?

From Laura Guerrette to Everyone: 07:45 PM

and last name please.

From Rebecca Osleger - Technology Director to Everyone: 07:45 PM

9 Oxford Dr. Suffield

From Meredith Oliveira (she/her/hers) to Everyone: 07:46 PM

I'd also need to know for my family; we have 2 households (Senior, Taylor Suto) mother, Meredith Oliveira, 390 Boston Neck Rd. Thank you!

From Lindsay to Everyone: 07:47 PM

A split household is also a concern of mine as well.

From Cindy Ofsuryk to Everyone: 07:50 PM

I don't think *9 works on my laptop> Cindy Ofsuryk

From Barbara- Mother of Kaily Versace to Everyone: 07:50 PM

Are masks going to be required

From Rebecca Osleger - Technology Director to Everyone: 07:50 PM

Cindy you can type your question here

From Marsie to Everyone: 07:50 PM

Students going to military? What about them? If they leave during the summer.

From Lindsay to Everyone: 07:50 PM

I was on the FFA award ceremony zoom meeting. Can you please quickly review what the current plan is?

From Cindy Ofsuryk to Everyone: 07:51 PM

Was the "live"/by car option considered if the August gathering can't happen? Like Farmington at the Polo Grounds in June, as a class, all together

From Ross Davis to Everyone: 07:52 PM

Kati Davis 42 Wisteria Lane has a question.

From Rebecca Osleger - Technology Director to Everyone: 07:52 PM

Ok ross one second

From bcanny to Everyone: 07:52 PM

As an Assistant Principal and going into my 7th year serving Suffield High School I have never been more proud and honored to be a part of this Senior class.

From Carolyn to Everyone: 07:52 PM

What was the rationale for the 6/8 date? Dave O'Connell 220 Fairhill Lane

From Cindy Ofsuryk to Everyone: 07:52 PM

837 Burbank Ave is my address, btw

From bcanny to Everyone: 07:52 PM

Thanks you!

From Mandy to Everyone: 07:52 PM

I was wondering when we're getting the yearbooks?

From Barbara- Mother of Kaily Versace to Everyone: 07:52 PM

will the valedictorian be able to do their speech at the potential june 8

From Jen Bombard to Everyone: 07:52 PM

Jen Bombard, 6 Whitfield Way, Was there any thought to doing a drive in type graduation in June? The school where I teach is expiring this as a June option with a later date in the summer. Avon and Farmington are doing this as well. It would give the kids a chance to all be in the same place as the same time one last time.

From Barbara- Mother of Kaily Versace to Everyone: 07:53 PM

not working for us

From Jen Bombard to Everyone: 07:53 PM

Also, thank you very much to all involved!!!

From Steve to Me: (Privately) 07:54 PM

it's hard to believe you didn't think about split families and have an answer tonight. these kids want their whole families together. and we shouldn't have to wear masks if it's immediate families bc we don't wear them when we are together

From Lindsay to Everyone: 07:54 PM

Lindsay Holcomb 168 South Road East Hartland

From Sandra Bascove to Everyone: 07:57 PM

How will scholarships, honor recognitions get to the seniors? 63 Redstone Road Suffield

From Steve to Everyone: 07:58 PM

the June ceremony is confusing. Is it limited to 5 people total including who? how many school officials would be there and are they included. please clarify

Steve Mitzel 266 North Main

From Mandy to Everyone: 08:00 PM

thank you

From Marsie to Everyone: 08:01 PM

Instead of a drive-in graduation could it be possible to do a drive thru graduation with a parade?

Like Granby

Emma Luckenbach 46 First Street

From Barbara- Mother of Kaily Versace to Everyone: 08:05 PM

Is it possible to have a senior parade in their cars, decorated, prior to the graduation

115 Randall Drive

From Melissa Thurston to Everyone: 08:07 PM

Melissa Thurston, 763 North St, Suffield. For the ceremony in June, if grandparents live with the senior will they be allowed at that ceremony too?

From wendy_mitzel to Everyone: 08:11 PM

Mallory Mitzel 173 Kent Avenue. I have a couple of questions. I am a little perplexed about the parade situation; if we are continuously driving and not leaving the cars, is this workable? Personally, my family has over 12 people with all siblings and parents, are they all allowed since they're immediate? Thank you for your help

From Adam to Everyone: 08:11 PM

Adam Leighton 18 Chestnut Hill Simsbury, any updates on senior prom?

From Susan Dubocq to Everyone: 08:14 PM

Susan Dubocq, 5 Whitfield Way. If Governor Lamont's guidelines allow for a live graduation in August, who in Suffield is ultimately responsible for making that decision?

From Lindsay to Everyone: 08:15 PM

Lindsay Holcomb 168 South Road East Hartland

If prom gets pushed till next year how will they notify the 2020 class?

From Rebecca Osleger - Technology Director to Everyone: 08:15 PM

Lindsay do you have a question?

Got it, thanks

From Lindsay to Everyone: 08:17 PM

Thank you!

From Barbara- Mother of Kaily Versace to Everyone: 08:17 PM

I appreciate all your work and effort and the hard decisions, but I am not understanding the idea that these seniors cannot have a graduation and stand on a lawn 6 ft apart yet malls, restaurants and grocery stores are open

From. to Everyone: 08:18 PM

where's my time capsule from 6th grade

thank you Barbara

From loriraupach to Everyone: 08:23 PM

Is there an email coming out as to what students need to return before they can get their cap and gowns

From Barbara- Mother of Kaily Versace to Everyone: 08:23 PM

Thank you. this is a very difficult for all. Thank you for all your efforts