

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Conducted Remotely
May 4, 2020

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m. via Zoom teleconference call and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Susan Mercik Davis, Jamie Drzyzga, Brian Fry, Melissa Finnigan, Glenn Gazdik, Scott Lingenfelter, Maureen Sattan, Michael Sepko and Debra Dudack; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, Director of Special Services Diana Kelley, and Business Manager Bill Hoff

Recognition

None

Action Item

- Acceptance of Donation from the Suffield Elementary PTO
Mr. Van Tassel stated, in accordance with Board policy, any donation over \$2,500 needs the Board's approval. This donation is for \$6,000. Melissa DeGray and Courtney Vincent, PTO presidents, approached Rebecca Osleger to offer funds from the PTO to support the district in securing devices for students. Ms. Osleger said she is working with 17 other districts to get cooperative pricing for additional Chromebooks. She thanked Ms. DeGray and Ms. Vincent for their donation. Ms. DeGray said the idea came from PTO treasurer, Liz Diana.
MOTION #20-57: Finnigan moved to accept the donation from the PTO. Drzyzga seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 9-0. Board members thanked the PTO for their generous donation and the work the PTO committee does throughout the year.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

None

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
 - Mr. Van Tassel congratulated Soren Nelson, a sixth grade student, who was one of 60 middle school students participating in the Scholastic Challenge. Soren won the state title.
 - Superintendent Van Tassel hosted a second parent conference call last Friday, one in the morning for PreK-5 parents and one in the afternoon for 6-12 parents. He noted a few parents have reached out that they could not attend, and he will reach out to those individuals.
 - He thanked the Board for their continued leadership during this time. He also thanked administrators, teachers and staff for the work they are doing.
 - Superintendent Van Tassel said he met with PTO, PTAC and SFES members to discuss end of year events and alternative ideas. They are willing to help support in any way they can. He also introduced the new administrators at McAlister, Ms. Pryce and Ms. Todd.

- This Thursday the high school is hosting its World Language Honors Society ceremony virtually. Mr. Van Tassel attended the FFA chapter meeting last week.
- He thanked the Technology department for all the work they have been involved in during this time. The Go Guardian app for parents was made available last week and 67% have already activated their accounts.
- Superintendent Van Tassel said the Teamsters negotiations is on hold because of the closure.
- This week is Teacher Appreciation Week and May is Mental Health Awareness month. We have several social emotional resources that have been provided by our school staff and Town Youth Services Director, Nikki Lengyel.
- Board Chair's Report
 - Board Chair Mercik Davis acknowledged and expressed gratitude to administrative assistants in recognition of administrative assistants' day and she extending the Board's sincerest appreciation for all the work teachers do in recognition of Teacher Appreciation week.
 - Board Chair Mercik Davis said she has participated in several virtual meetings of her Board Chairs Listserv. Many Board Chairs have shared thoughts and concerns relative to graduation, distance learning, negotiations, transportation contracts, transitioning to reopening schools, and budget implications due to COVID-19.
 - She noted the parent conference calls were well received. There were many questions and productive suggestions.
 - Board Chair Mercik Davis said the Board of Finance (BOF) asked if the Board of Education will realize any savings due to the school closure, and if the BOE budget request could be reduced to alleviate the impact of COVID-19 on the entire town. The Board has realized about \$400,000 in savings due to the school closure and has reduced its budget request by that amount, resulting in a proposed 2020-2021 budget of \$35,901,034. She noted that the \$400,000 will be placed in the Open Choice funds to be used next year. There should not be any further cuts to programming or staffing. The public hearing for the town budget is May 7 at 7:00 p.m. The Town meeting and vote is scheduled for May 21. After the BOF adopts the budget, the BOE can no longer comment on the budget but should encourage people to attend the town meeting and vote. Board Chair Mercik Davis said she was pleased overall with the budget process and the Board has presented a solid, fiscally responsible budget. She thanked Brian Kost, the Board of Finance's liaison to the Board, for his involvement and collaboration during the Board of Education's budget process.
- Business Manager's Report
 - Mr. Hoff shared a document with the Board that he sent to the town detailing the expenditures the district has incurred due to COVID-19, as well as revenue losses. Some figures are projected as all expenses have not yet been incurred. Included in some of the revenue losses are rebates of preschool tuitions, after-school program payments, and food service revenue loss of about \$38,000.
- Board of Selectmen's Report
 - None
- Board of Finance Liaison's Report
 - None

Board member Sepko left the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #20-58: Finnigan moved to approve the April 7, 2020 regular meeting minutes. Fry seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #20-59: Dudack moved to approve the following on the consent agenda:

1. Revisions to Policy #1180 – Memorials to Deceased Students and Staff
2. Revisions to Bylaw #9120 – Board Officers

Sattan seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

Discussion/Action Items

- COVID-19 Update

Mr. Van Tassel said he anticipates the Governor will announce this week, as early as tomorrow, the decision of whether to reopen schools or keep them closed through the end of the school year. The district has begun planning for the reopening of schools whether that is this school year or next. Superintendent Van Tassel has developed a Strategic School Reopening and Pandemic Response Plan which includes the development of core functions within the district. Within each of the eight core functions that have been identified, sustainment initiatives will be established. The Plan has been shared with the full leadership team and building administrators will be working on their specific core function, school operations, over the next couple of weeks. This Plan will be reviewed by the Department of Public Health and the North Central District Health Department, and once the Plan is finalized, it will be shared with the Board and families.

- World Language Program Review

Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, SHS teacher Carl Casinghino, SMS teacher Devlyn Bent, SHS Humanities Curriculum Coach Stephannie Holland, and SMS Humanities Curriculum Coach, Jeanine Rose gave a World Language program update to the Board. Ms. Zawawi reviewed the program for grades 3-5 Spanish, Grade 6 Exploratory Spanish/French, Grade 7/8 Spanish or French, and high school level 2, 3, 4, 5 Academic/Honors and Advanced Placement (11 and 12) Spanish and French. She said courses are aligned with 21st century language learning standards with learning outcomes at each level. Ms. Holland reviewed the curriculum writing process. She explained the proficiency benchmarks for world language and the benchmarks are meeting a national standard. She reviewed the pacing guides of what it looks like from novice to superior world language learners. Mr. Casinghino added that learning a language is very difficult so student expectations must be realistic. Students going through the world language program grades 3 through 12 will be at the intermediate level in their senior year. Ms. Holland said the department uses the pacing guides to map out expectations at each grade level for every discipline (reading, writing, speaking, etc.). Teachers and students are using target language for norms and routines. The target language is also visually posted around the classroom. Mr. Casinghino reviewed how often the target language will be used at each level to set clear expectations for teachers, administrators and students. Ms. Rose explained how students are assessed and reviewed the rubrics for each class in reading, writing and oral communication. Ms. Bent spoke about the middle school program. She said next year, students will have world language class each day instead of on the rotational basis they are taking classes this year. She said the classroom expectations are speaking, listening, writing and reading in the language. Mr. Casinghino reviewed the courses offered in high school, starting at Level 2 French and Spanish and offered at both academic and honors levels. AP courses are offered in AP Spanish Language, AP Spanish Literature, and AP French for students in grades 11 and 12. The department would like to adopt the Connecticut Seal of Biliteracy. In 2017, a law went into effect allowing for school districts to affix the Connecticut Seal of Biliteracy on a student's diploma who has achieved a high level of proficiency in English and one or more foreign languages. Students can achieve the Seal by getting a 3 or better on AP exam or through other approved exams. In response to a Board member's question

about increasing the time students receive Spanish instruction at McAlister, Superintendent Van Tasel said the new administration at McAlister is looking at changing the schedule and will be looking at ways to increase Spanish instructional time. In response to a Board member's question, will other languages be offered at the high school, Ms. Zawawi said this is the desire of the district as well once the world language program is well established. Board members asked that objective measures be established to measure success of the program and this data be reported to the Board.

- **Graduation Update**

Mr. Van Tasel and Board Chair Mercik Davis acknowledged that seniors are missing out on so many special end of year events. The high school administration, Central Office administrators, and Board members Gazdik, Sattan and Mercik Davis have been meeting to discuss and plan for this year's graduation. Because of the strict limitations on gatherings, a typical graduation ceremony may not be possible. Even still, the committee is planning for a live ceremony with appropriate social distancing but also an alternative ceremony in case a live ceremony cannot be held in June or later in the summer. Superintendent Van Tasel thanked the Board members and administrators for their work on this committee. He noted graduation is a function of the Board and going forward, a Board member will serve on the graduation committee as the Board liaison. The committee decided to get seniors' and their parents' feedback on what they would like for a ceremony. Mr. Blain sent a survey to students and parents last week. The options were (1) live ceremony in June with social distancing and limited family attendance, (2) live ceremony later in the summer with social distancing and limited family attendance, (3), virtual ceremony, and (4) a drive through format. Mr. Blain said 83 students and 99 parents responded to the survey. The first choice of both students and parents is a live ceremony in June even if it involves social distancing measures. The second choice was a live ceremony later in the summer followed by a drive through format. The least desirable option was the virtual ceremony. Mr. Blain will send a reminder to students and families to complete the survey if they have not already done so. Mr. Van Tasel asked the NCDHD on the possibility of holding a typical graduation ceremony. The NCDHD referred the question to the DPH, who stated holding a graduation ceremony would not be permitted at this time because it would violate the Governor's executive order of no more than 5 people allowed at a gathering. However, this order may change at a later date.

Subcommittee Reports

- April 16, 2020 Finance & Facilities subcommittee meeting – Board Chair Mercik Davis said that meeting was held to discuss the Board of Finance's request to reduce the Board of Education's budget.
- April 20 & May 4, 2020 Curriculum & Instruction subcommittee meeting – Board member Drzyzga said committee members were given an overview of how distance learning is going from the administrators', parents' and students' perspectives. She thanked all who met with the committee and for adjusting the distance learning based on stakeholder feedback. The committee discussed the new courses being offered at the high school as well as the elementary STEM positions. The committee also discussed the world language program and received an update about the high school internship program.
- April 24, 2020 Community Engagement & Public Relations subcommittee meeting – Board member Fry said the committee discussed the parent conference calls, the budget, COVID-19 response and planning, and the Board's end-of-year flyer. Each subcommittee chair will provide a brief highlight of the work done in their subcommittee over the year to include in the flyer. The committee will meet again this Friday to review the content for the flyer and then again on May 22 and June 5 to finalize the flyer.

- April 27, 2020 – Policy subcommittee meeting – Board member Dudack said the committee discussed the graduation policy #6146 with new language around The Connecticut Seal of Biliteracy and it is being placed on 30-day read tonight along with special education policy #6159, which has revisions due to legislative changes in the timeline for initial evaluations. The subcommittee will be reviewing the parental involvement policy further at its next meeting as well as reviewing a proposed summer school policy.

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – Board member Sattan said topics at CREC meetings have been concerns expressed about equity issues relative to the availability of technology for students during distance learning, guidance that CREC is providing to the Department of Education, and expressions of gratitude to all the CREC schools for their support during this time.
- Agriscience – Board member Fry said Laura LaFlamme, Sara Oliver, Rebecca Ferguson, Stephannie Holland, and Brendan Canny went on a bus tour to 11 towns to visit the 52 incoming students accepted into the Agriscience program next year. This act shows the level of commitment and enthusiasm these staff members have for the program and their students. The Suffield Garden Club will distribute geraniums this Friday that were grown by Agriscience students. The FFA held its chapter meeting last week and the FFA ceremony will be held virtually later this month.
- CAFE – Board member Drzyzga had nothing to report.

Future Business

Establish the Board workshop on Strategic Planning and Portrait of a Graduate

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Board member Finnigan said if the decision is school will not reopen this year, planning needs to be done about the transitioning of students going from one school to another, and communicate the plan to families as soon as possible. Superintendent Van Tassel said the administrative team is already working on a plan for this.

Adjournment

Sattan moved, Gazdik seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:38 p.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan
Secretary