

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Conducted Remotely
June 1, 2020

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:38 p.m. via Zoom teleconference call.

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

Executive Session

Fry moved to go into executive session for the purpose of holding a discussion concerning attorney client privilege information and invited Superintendent Van Tassel to join the session. Sattan seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

The executive session ended at 6:36 pm. The regular meeting resumed and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, Director of Special Services Diana Kelley, and Business Manager Bill Hoff joined the regular meeting in addition to those listed above.

Recognition

The Board of Education recognized middle school students; Aidan Connors and Kaylee Kudas, and high school students; Chris Margiatto and Karissa Stanio, who are the recipients of this year's CABE Student Leadership Award. Mr. Smith, Suffield Middle School Principal, and Mr. Blain, Suffield High School Principal shared the personal attributes and academic and extracurricular achievements each of these students possess that led to them being chosen for this award. Board members and the Superintendent congratulated the students.

The Board of Education recognized this year's Valedictorian, Vansh Patel and Salutatorian, Gabriella Santaniello. Miss Santaniello will be studying pre-med at UCONN in the fall, and Mr. Patel will be studying pre-med at Brown University. Mr. Blain said they will both be speaking at graduation on Saturday. Board members and the Superintendent congratulated Miss Santaniello and Mr. Patel.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

None

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
 - Mr. Van Tassel said over the past week we have experienced a difficult time across the country as it relates to race relations. As a district, we have always promoted diversity and value the richness in which it provides. He wants the Board and families to know that we recognize that we have more work to do and have a role in teaching our students about

- diversity. The district is committed to addressing this with our school community. With that, the Superintendent will be developing a cultural council with the focus on celebrating diversity and opening the lines of communication.
- Superintendent Van Tassel said this is the last regular board meeting in June and he wanted to take this opportunity to thank the community, administration, teachers and staff for their support and said it is an honor to serve as your Superintendent of School. He added that the administrative team has been so responsive to him and his initiatives since he joined the district. The last three months have been incredibly difficult, but everyone has risen to the challenge. He said he looks forward to the future in the district. He also thanked families for their support during the school closure period.
 - He congratulated the senior class of 2020 and is excited for the unique graduation ceremony this Saturday. He thanked everyone for their patience and understanding. He reminded everyone that school does not end until June 18.
 - Board Chair's Report
 - Board Chair Mercik Davis congratulated the senior class of 2020 and she is looking forward to the graduation ceremony.
 - Board Chair Mercik Davis said the death of George Floyd has spurred protests across the country. Our country has much to do and Suffield Public Schools has to foster kindness and acceptance for all. The unrest we are witnessing provides us all with an opportunity for reflection and growth. It is not how react, but how we respond to these situations that make the difference. Suffield Public Schools has policies in place to celebrate differences, treat one another with dignity and respect, and provide safe spaces for our students. She said we are steadfast in our committed where all people are celebrated and understood.
 - Business Manager's Report
 - Mr. Hoff shared that the food program has produced 53,000 meals since March 16. He thanked the food service workers and non-certified staff for their hard work during this time. The food program will continue through the end of the school year.
 - Board of Selectmen's Report
None
 - Board of Finance Liaison's Report
None

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #20-60: Finnigan moved to approve the May 4, 2020 and May 18, 2020 regular meeting minutes and the May 20, 2020 special meeting minutes. Fry seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 9-0.

Consent Agenda

None

Discussion/Action Items

- EASTCONN Update
Ms. Kelley introduced Dr. Ravit Stein and Dr. Rose Jaffrey, EASTCONN consultants, who presented an update to the Board on the work they have engaged in with the district relative to the Achieve program. Dr. Stein reviewed the firm's core values and Dr. Jaffrey reviewed the needs assessment conducted in the fall, which focused on the elementary, intermediate and middle schools. She reviewed the areas of high need: systems, transition, behavior, training for staff and teaming. Dr. Jaffrey said the consultation timeline was made up of six meetings held every two to three weeks with district and building administrators, and 14 meetings every one to two weeks with the BCBA team. Dr. Stein said the entire district administrative team committed to many meetings to build the foundation to implement the systems that have been

established. Dr. Jaffrey shared the deliverables that were accomplished during this time. A mission statement was created, an entry and exit process was developed, and roles and responsibilities were established. She next reviewed the process for facilitating student transitions between schools and a transition planning guide was developed with a clearly defined timeline and plan of action. In terms of teaming, the focus was on action planning to facilitate meeting efficiency. She highlighted deliverables, which are behavior and training domains. For the behavior domain, a BCBA consultation referral form was created. For training, a webinar series of virtual trainings was provided to paraeducators during this school closure period. Dr. Jaffrey reviewed next steps for further development and implementation for each of the targeted areas, as well as the role of the consultants in the 2020-21 school year, which includes the continuation of teaming with the district's BCBAs, conducting a needs assessment at the high school, and supporting the development of multi-tiered systems to support students. Mr. Van Tassel said this is a research-driven process with measures of accountability included. The foundation has been established to start the next level of work, and this is what was hoped for when the district engaged with EASTCONN last fall. He is impressed with the work that has already been accomplished. He and Ms. Kelley thanked Dr. Stein and Dr. Jaffrey for the structure they have provided. In response to a Board member's questions, Ms. Kelley said the teacher on the team is a special education teacher, and if the new entrance criteria result in a student who was in the program but now will no longer qualify, Ms. Kelley said other supports will be provided to those students. In response to a Board member's question asking if there is a target number of students in the program or a cap per building or grade level, Ms. Kelley said there is no target number or cap, and the number of students is based on the student need. In response to a Board member's question relative to how much of the next steps list can be conducted remotely, Ms. Kelley said we have been very productive remotely to this point and she foresees the work can continue remotely. Dr. Stein noted that EASTCONN provides a robust distance learning in their autism program and that could be done in Suffield as well. In response to a Board member's question relative to whether the work has been compromised because you have been unable to be in classrooms with students, Dr. Stein said the first phase of the work was to get administrator and staff buy-in and work on building the foundation of the program. That work has been done during the school closure period. She also noted that Dr. Jaffrey was able to be in classrooms for a few weeks before schools closed. In response to a Board member's questions relative to reducing out of district placements, Dr. Stein said the next frontier is to address the behavior issues. She said when behavior gets out of hand, that is the main reason for outplacements. A multi-tiered system of supports and building a more rigorous and comprehensive program will reduce student outplacements.

- Distance Learning Update

Ms. Zawawi updated the Board on distance learning. She reviewed the distance learning Phases I-IV since schools closed. Starting on June 8 and continuing through June 18, the district will move into Phase V, which will eliminate the live lessons and be replaced with pre-recorded lessons. During this time, teachers will still post daily lessons, continue to respond to student and parent questions, collecting data to finish report cards, as well as attend to end of year close out tasks and plan for next year. She noted that interventionist, academic support, and special education teachers will continue to hold live group lessons. Teachers also want to continue morning meetings and end of year celebrations. End of year tasks for teachers include analyzing student data, and attending transition meetings, parent meetings and vertical team meetings. Teaching and learning will continue during this phase but reducing live instruction allows for more flexibility for families. Ms. Zawawi described the two summer school offerings that are open to all students exiting grades K-11. Summer school will run from July 6-31. One

offering is an independent student learning program where students will use Dreambox and Lexia online platforms. One teacher will maintain and progress monitor student work. The other offering is a virtual summer school with two teachers per grade level in ELA and math providing two live lessons per week and 3 pre-recorded lessons per week, for a total of 20 ELA and 20 math lessons during the four-week program. Live lessons will be scheduled at the same time each day. She noted this program is not for credit recovery. Ms. Zawawi also highlighted other learning opportunities being offered this summer which includes reading programs/challenges throughout the summer, the Governor's reading challenge, and summer book clubs at the high school conducted through Google Meets.

- Discussion & Possible Action to Rescind Non-Renewal of Non-Tenured Teachers in accordance with CT Statute 10-151 (Handout)
Mr. Van Tassel said call back notices may happen each year after teachers are non-renewed. Call back notices are based on seniority.
MOTION #20-61: Finnigan moved to rescind the non-renewal of the non-tenured teachers as presented to the Board and in accordance with CT Statute 10-151. Gazdik seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 9-0.
- Approval of Revised 2020-2021 BOE Budget
MOTION #20-62: Dudack moved to approved the revised 2020-2021 Board of Education budget in the amount of \$35,901,023, which represents a 0.99% increase over this year's budget. Sepko seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 9-0.
- Healthy Foods Certification
Mr. Hoff said participation in the program results in the district receiving \$0.10 per reimbursable lunch and only imposes minor restrictions. Suffield Schools has participated in the program since 2015 and provides approximately \$15,000 a year in revenue to the food service program.
MOTION #20-63: Drzyzga moved that the Board approve participation in the Healthy Food Certification program for 2020-2021, with an exemption for food sold at events after the end of the school day at the location of the event. Fry seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 9-0.
- Appointment of a BOE Member to the Cable Advisory Council
Board Chair Mercik Davis said Debra Dudack has been acting in this position for over 2 years. The Cable Advisory Council represents residents in the Cox Communications franchise area and a board member from each town is appointed to serve on this council.
MOTION #20-64: Sepko moved to appoint Debra Dudack as a member of the Cable Advisory Council. Finnigan seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 9-0.
- April Financial Report
Mr. Hoff said there are significant changes to all the reports due to the closing of schools for the year and the changes reduced the 2020-21 budget by \$400,000 as requested by the Board of Finance. Last month's surplus and approximately \$400,000 in additional savings from the school closure were used to move \$400,000 from Open Choice to the BOE budget for this year and \$277,428 was moved from the Title, IDEA, and Choice Academic Support grants to the BOE budget as the 2019-20 minimum spending requirements for those grants were waived. Mr. Hoff noted that the district projected the Excess Cost Reimbursement at 75%; however, the actual reimbursement rate was 70.9%. We have realized a \$127,000 savings in transportation, but he anticipates further savings and that will be known after negotiations have been settled

with M&J. The food service report shows a surplus of \$11,746 for April and a year to date loss of \$3,917. We will make transfers to line items as needed, and the Board will need to approve those transfers at its July or August meeting. We will continue to monitor expenses in June and wrap up the fiscal year.

Subcommittee Reports

- May 8 & 22, 2020 – Community Engagement & Public Relations subcommittee meeting – Board member Fry said the committee discussed the year end flyer. Each of the committee chairs have written highlights of the work done this year. Board member Dudack editing the narratives and these will be included in the end of year newsletter. Committee members determined that a minimum of three annual publications will be sent out to families. The committee also discussed having a presence in the Town’s Memorial Day parade in the future.
- May 18, 2020 – Policy subcommittee meeting – Board member Dudack said the committee reviewed ten policies which are being placed on 30-day read. The first eight policies are due to statutory changes in language as it relates to protected classes, and the last two involve revisions to the parent involvement policy as well as proposing a new summer school policy to be implemented in 2021. Mr. Van Tassel said the intent of the summer school policy is to define and implement areas of accountability in student performance and increase communication relative to student performance with families.
- May 28, 2020 – Finance & Facilities subcommittee meeting – Board member Sepko said the committee reviewed the budget report Mr. Hoff gave this evening. The committee also reviewed architectural plans for the high school Agriscience classrooms, the front columns at the entrance of the high school that are in disrepair, and the plans to update the preschool classrooms. All initiatives were well supported and Superintendent Van Tassel and Mr. Hoff will take next steps on these projects. Superintendent Van Tassel said all these projects were previously approved: the renovations to the Agriscience classrooms is being funded through the ASTE grant; and the high school columns and preschool renovations were approved through the Capital budget. Bids will be brought back to the subcommittee for review.

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – Board member Sattan said there was nothing significant to report.
- Agriscience – Board member Fry said the FFA hosted their award ceremony online and was very well done. He noted Mr. Hoff was recognized for his support of the Agriscience program.
- CABA – Board member Drzyzga said CABA shared the four-year graduation rates for the State of Connecticut, which has increased from 87.2% to 88.5% over this period. CABA is focusing its efforts around reopening of schools, distance learning, and the social emotional toll the closure has taken on both students and teachers.

Future Business

Board member Lingenfelter would like the Board to discuss advocating for the reopening of schools as soon as possible with State officials.

Board member Finnigan would like the Board and administration to discuss the possibility of offering distance learning after schools reopen as an option for students who struggle with attending school due to anxiety or other issues.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Board member Fry commented on students who are struggling during this time of school closure. He hoped that decisions made specific to grades do not negatively impact students. Mr. Van Tassel said the district has taken added measures to make sure that does not happen and the administrative team is working with families. Board member Sattan countered that equity does not exist if a student with distance learning advantages can improve their grade while another without those advantages opts for Pass/Fail with no grade improvement possibilities.

Adjournment

Dudack moved, Finnigan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:05 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of July 20, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan
Secretary