

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Conducted Remotely
July 20, 2020

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 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 (joined at 7:40pm), Maureen Sattan, Michael Sepko and Debra Dudack; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tasel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Bill Hoff

Recognition

None

Public Comment

Kristina Hallet, 1211 Newgate Road W. Suffield, is the co-organizer of ABAR (Anti-bias, Anti-Racism) said that, along with Amy Hawkins and Elizabeth Warren, she sent a letter today to all Board members detailing 13 areas of discussion about anti-bias and anti-racism within the schools and requested to be placed on the August agenda.

Amy Hawkins, 57 Third Street, said the Suffield community has a lot to learn about equity and inclusion.

Shamar Kynard, 89 Coach Spring Lane, said they are new to Suffield and have been welcomed and they are happy to be a part of this community.

Board Member Comment

Board member Dudack thanked the members of ABAR for their letter and all who spoke during public comment.

Board member Finnigan said she is looking forward to hearing the reopening of schools plan.

Board member Fry welcomed the Kynard family to Suffield. He thanked the organizers of ABAR for coming to the meeting and sending the correspondence to the Board. He said he would like the Board to consider earlier start times for students.

Board members Drzyzga and Gazdik echoed Board members Fry's and Dudack's comments about the ABAR group.

Discussion/Action Items

- Suffield Public Schools Strategic Reopening and Sustainment Response Plan Presentation
Superintendent Van Tasel said creating a reopening plan has been a challenging endeavor as it is very fluid and will continue to change in response to guidance issued from the Governor's office and the State Department of Education. This Plan will be posted on the district website on Friday, July 24, 2020. The State has required districts to develop a full reopening model, a full remote learning model and a hybrid model. He said the Plan focuses on reducing the risk of exposure to COVID-19 for students and staff. He reviewed the several meetings that have

occurred since May in developing and communicating the Plan to key stakeholders. A parent/guardian feedback survey will be sent this Friday after the parent conference calls later this week. The main operational requirements of the plan as prescribed by the State are cohorting, social distancing measures, transportation protocols, and the use of face coverings. Mr. Van Tassel gave an overview of each of the three models. The State has waived the minimum student day requirement from 180 days to 177 days to allow for additional training for staff on health, safety and revised teaching and learning protocols. In class programming will include wearing of masks for students and staff, cohorting of students for containment and contact tracing, social distancing in classrooms, adjusting school bell schedules to limit transitions, reducing cafeteria and recess to 50% capacity, and enhanced cleaning measures. The remote learning option will include Google and SeeSaw online platforms, follow-up instruction by designated teachers, and grading conducted by classroom teachers. Parents will have the option to keep their children home and access remote learning even if school is in session. In the full remote option, the district will establish student schedules, social emotional lessons, active attendance monitoring, accountability check-ins, Google Classroom and SeeSaw synchronous and asynchronous, embedded assessment strategies and grading, continuity of services for all learners, ongoing training and support for teachers, and ongoing communication with parents. In the hybrid model, 50% of students will be in school and 50% would be remote on a rotation basis (A/B rotation) based alphabetically on last name. The schedule will be determined after the parent survey. Possible schedules would be a daily rotation (alternating MWF/TR or MR/TF with Wed. cleaning) or weekly (alternating one week in session then one week remote).

Special Services Director Diana Kelley explained the health services protocols being put in place which include student and staff illness protocols; student and staff training on hand washing, mask wearing, social distancing, and cough etiquette; communication protocols; contract tracing protocols; coordinated planning with the school medical advisor and the North Central District Health Department (NCDHD); ongoing health and safety planning, health office planning, the addition of nurses' aides in each nurse's office; the development of isolation spaces; and immunization and physical notifications. Dr. Segool said the Plan focuses on getting students back into school in the safest manner possible and the data will constantly be monitored.

Mr. Hoff reviewed the transportation protocols which will include encouraging parent drop-off and pick up to reduce the number of students on buses, adding bus monitors for the first few weeks of school, loading students from back to front, and enhanced cleaning measures. He spoke about reducing the population in cafeterias by 50% by having an alternate space for lunches to spread students out. Lunches will be delivered to alternate spaces, there will be in-school and remote learning lunch options, a limited menu will be served, touchpads will be discontinued, and enhanced cleaning protocols will occur. In terms of facilities, classrooms, office workspaces, cafeterias, nurse's offices and large areas will be reconfigured, enhanced cleaning protocols will occur, and ventilation will be monitored.

Lingenfelter joined the meeting at 7:40 p.m.

Director of Technology Rebecca Osleger said the technology department has planned for all three reopening models. All students will have 1:1 devices: kindergartners will have iPads and students in grades 1-12 will have Chromebooks. The insurance option will be available for Chromebooks and iPads and parents can sign up for the insurance through the PowerSchool parent portal. The department is enhancing the Go Guardian application for monitoring student

activity online and for monitoring the reliability of the devices. Ms. Osleger meets regularly with other technology directors in the state to review new technologies and platforms.

Kathy Carney, Human Resource Specialist, said she will send a communication this week asking for staff to inform us of their intent to return to work. Included in that communication will be information about the federal protections available specific to COVID-19 related reasons under the FFCRA and FMLA. Also, the district is currently looking to recruit four medical assistances or certified nurses' aides (CNA), one for each school to assist the nurses. She noted these positions will likely be difficult to fill as there is currently a high demand for these positions. The Department of Public Health is offering a free temporary nurse's aide program and she encouraged anyone to apply and the district would pay for their time to take the course. The district will also be hiring additional duty clerks to cover the additional lunch and recess waves as well as hiring for substitute coverage through Kelly Services. We will continue the district's wellness initiatives and are looking at virtual options this fall. Superintendent Van Tasel added that personnel coverage is a concern for the district with the heightened monitoring of staff with illnesses and comfort level with returning to work.

Building Principals explained their school operation protocols being put in place for reopening of schools to ensure the health and safety of students and staff. They discussed changes in student schedules to reduce transitions, changes in classroom layouts to ensure physical distancing, student programming and changes to schools' entries and exits to reduce visitors in schools and reduce large groups of children at arrival and dismissal.

Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi gave a summer programming update. In addition, she provided information on the 2020-2021 launch units, professional learning offerings, remote learning platforms, and assessment and grading.

Ms. Kelley reviewed the special services program delivery for both in person and remote learning options. She said staff will work individually with families of students with health conditions with medical documentation, PPT and Section 504 meetings will continue to be conducted virtually, and the department will coordinate with families of out of district placements.

Mr. Van Tasel reviewed communication avenues including School Messenger, district website, a new district app and ill student or staff communication protocols.

Board members asked the following questions which were answered by administration and the school medical advisor:

1. Do you know if there are any Suffield students/families who have the virus?

We are not aware at this point who has the virus unless the family shares the information, and families are not obligated to share this information. The North Central District Health Department (NCDHD) will be integral in contact tracing because they are the organization that be notified of positive cases in the town. A notification will be sent to all families/staff within the district when a case within the Suffield Public School community is confirmed. A second notification will be sent to families/staff whose children are in the same cohort as the affected student/staff member, while protecting the identity of the student or staff member. When and who makes the decision about which of the three models districts will be operating?

2. When and who makes the decision about which model districts will be operating in and when schools open or close?

At this is point, we are uncertain of the direction on opening and closing of schools. Ideally, we would like the decision to be left to local districts in collaboration with local health officials.

3. The plan calls for keeping classroom doors open for ventilation purposes; however, isn't that in conflict with the school safety measure that have been put in place over the last few years?

The rationale to allow for doors to remain open is that the more imminent risk is to virus. In addition, the district is following the guidance set forth by the state.

4. If there is a positive case and a cohort(s) are identified and sent home, will those students have ability to attend school online?

The district will consult with local health officials and just because there is a confirmed case, that does not mean the district will close the school(s). The district will do a heightened monitoring of the cohorts. If we see a cluster within those cohorts, we may keep the cohort home or shut down the school(s). It depends on the situation and from guidance from local health officials. However, distance learning will be provided regardless as some parents may choose to keep their children home at the start of the school year.

5. Will hand sanitizers be used in the classrooms?

Hand sanitizing stations will be in all classrooms and in common areas throughout each school.

6. What is the district's plan if there are not enough teachers to teach the students in person because teachers are not returning to school?

Staffing is a major concern for the district. Many staff members have already reached out with concerns about returning to school. One of the areas of concern is the day-to-day results of illnesses of staff and students with symptoms similar to COVID-19. We will be very cautious and send students/staff home with COVID-like symptoms. We are currently working very hard with Kelley Services to recruit substitutes. If, in the event we do not have enough teacher to teach the students, we will have to move to a distance learning model.

7. If the district is in the hybrid model, how will teachers teach the children in-person and remotely simultaneously?

Teachers will post their lesson plans online for students at home to follow. There will also be other faculty members to check in with these students to see how they are doing. The classroom teachers will be responsible for grading. Students will also have access to their teachers through email. The district is also considering the possibility of live streaming from the classroom.

8. What are the protocols for when a student or staff member presents with COVID-related symptoms and is sent home? When will they be allowed back to school?

School Medical Advisor, Dr. Segool said if a child/staff member is ill and goes home, and if they see their physician and their physician makes a discrete diagnosis, such as strep throat, once that child/staff member is fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication, the individual can return to school. If there is not a discrete diagnosis, then there is the possibility that the individual could have COVID-19. The protocol for returning to school will be 10 days out of school and fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication and symptoms have greatly improved or documentation presented of two negative COVID-19 tests at least 24 hours apart. If a person is asymptomatic but has been exposed to

someone with COVID-19, there is a 14-day quarantine period. If a person is positive for COVID-19, the quarantine period is 10 days plus 72 hours fever-free without fever reducing medication and symptoms are much improved.

9. How will the district handle a COVID-19 outbreak in another town whose students attend Suffield?

We have not been given guidance from the state but will seek further clarification on this topic. We are developing protocols for temperature checks even though the Department of Public Health has advised districts not to take temperatures. Our school medical advisor supports temperature checks as well.

10. There is concern about the feasibility of students wearing masks.

Dr. Segool said the best protection against spreading and contracting COVID-19 is wearing masks, washing hands, social distancing, and not touching your face. There is a 65% higher chance of getting virus if a person is not wearing a mask. The standard should be to wear a mask and it is the guidance set forth by the state for students and staff to wear masks. If we can assure students are 6 feet or more away, then it's possible to remove masks.

11. What is the status of fall sports?

The district is awaiting guidance from the CIAC. If fall sports are cancelled by the CIAC, we could still consider practice time for players with health protocols in place.

MOTION #21-01: Sepko moved to waive the meeting end time of 10:00pm. Drzyzga seconded the motion. Board member Sattan suggested other agenda items be moved to another meeting. Board member Fry suggesting adding an end time to the meeting. Sepko withdrew his motion and Drzyzga seconded.

MOTION #21-02: Sepko moved to waive the meeting end time of 10:00 p.m. but end the meeting no later than 10:30 p.m. Drzyzga seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 9-0.

- Discussion and Possible Approval of Revised 2020-2021 School Calendar
Superintendent Van Tassel requested the Board move the first day of school from August 26 to August 31 to allow time to work with teachers for planning for the upcoming school year.
MOTION #21-03: Mercik Davis moved to approve the revised 2020-2021 school calendar, specifically moving the first day of school for students from August 26, 2020 to August 31, 2020, and August 26, August 27 and August 28 will be teacher professional development days, resulting in 179 student days and 189 teacher days. Fry seconded the motion. A vote by roll call **9-0-0** passed unanimously.
- End of Year Fiscal Status and Approval of Budget Transfers
This item was tabled.
- Discussion and Possible Approval of Non-lapsing Unexpended Funds Account
Mr. Van Tassel said by statute the state legislature determines how much money can be left over at the end of a fiscal year by Boards of Education. This fund allows for Boards of Education to carry over up to 2% but is the decision of the financial board of the town. The Board of Finance has approved this mechanism and now needs the Board of Educations' approval. The Board of Finance has control over the access and use of these funds by the Board of Education for emergency purposes.

MOTION #21-04: Mercik Davis moved to approve the non-lapsing unexpended fund account as presented by administration. Sattan seconded the motion. A vote by roll call **9-0-0** passed unanimously.

MOTION #21-05: Finnigan moved to extend meeting to hold public comment past 10:30p.m. and move Discussion/Action item C and the remaining agenda items to a future meeting. Dudack seconded the motion. All members voted in favor, except Lingenfelter who voted against. The motion carried 8-1.

Agenda items Reports to the Board, Approval of Minutes, Consent Agenda, Subcommittee Reports, Board Liaison Reports, Future Agenda and Board Member Comment were tabled.

Public Comment

Elizabeth Warren, 185 N. Main Street, said she is the diversity coordinator for Suffield Academy, a parent of Suffield students, and a member of ABAR. She noted since there are now 240 signatures on the call to action letter that was sent to the Board. She looks forward to presenting to the Board on August 17.

Julianne Williams, 1870 North Street, would like clarification on what IEP support will look like if students attending school virtually. She also asked if there will be a limit on the number of cohorts of which a student can be a part.

Kathy Muska, 55 Brandywine Ln, asked if teachers were involved in the discussion and development of the reopening plan. Superintendent Van Tassel said teachers were surveyed and regular meetings have occurred with union representatives from each collective bargaining groups who represent their respective groups. There were also meetings with school administrators and their building's team leaders or department heads and collective bargaining group leaders to review the plan and share their concerns. A district-wide staff meeting is scheduled for this Wednesday.

Bryce (last name and address inaudible) said he would also like further clarification on distance learning to support special education students. Mr. Van Tassel said more detail will be given at the parent phone calls this week and he could also contact Ms. Diana Kelley.

Kyle Kwaczala, 396 Hickory Street, said he would like to hear the other questions Board members and the public may have that did not get asked tonight due to the time constraints.

Kathy Muska asked how will the wearing of masks be enforced. Superintendent Van Tassel said those protocols are being developed.

Adjournment

Mercik Davis moved, Fry seconded to adjourn the meeting at 10:59 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of August 17, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan
Secretary