

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Conducted Remotely
August 17, 2020

Call to Order

Vice Chair Sepko called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m. via Zoom teleconference call. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Jamie Drzyzga, Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik, Scott Lingenfelter (joined at 6:38pm), Maureen Sattan, Michael Sepko; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tasel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Bill Hoff

Absent: Board Chair Susan Mercik Davis

Recognition

None

Public Comment

Ted Ruddock, 15 High Street, said the public was having trouble logging onto the meeting. They could only attend via audio. It was indicated that only audio was available to the public.

Board Member Comment

None

Lingenfelter joined the meeting at 6:38pm

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
 - Mr. Van Tasel said there is a temporary full remote-only option that families can choose if they do not want to send their children back to school.
 - Superintendent Van Tasel said Assistant Superintendent Zawawi will be hosting three distance learning trainings for parents and students via Zoom to inform parents and students of what distance learning will look like this fall. These meetings will all have the same content.
 - Mr. Van Tasel said Director of Special Services Diana Kelley will be conducting a parent conference call for special education parents this Wednesday evening.
 - He stated a parent survey will be sent out on Wednesday asking parents to inform the district on their intent to send their children to school and their transportation needs.
 - Superintendent Van Tasel reviewed the schedule for professional development the week of August 24th for faculty and staff.
- Board Chair's Report
 - None
- Business Manager's Report
 - Mr. Hoff said the district is currently collecting information on bussing through Infosnap, and he encouraged parents who have not done so, to complete this information. To date about 40% of families who have filled out the information are choosing not to send their students on busses. All 18 buses will be operating as usual.

- Mr. Hoff said the food service department is preparing for providing food for all students whether they are in school or attending remotely. Logistics on lunch distribution is currently being planned.
- His office is working on state reports that are due by September 1.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) continues to be delivered to the district and the PPE will be distributed to staff and students.
- Mr. Hoff said his department is also working on grant applications associated with COVID-19.
- Board of Selectmen's Report
None
- Board of Finance Liaison's Report
None

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #21-07: Finnigan moved to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of July 20, 2020, August 3, 2020, and August 8, 2020. Sattan seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously **8-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #21-08: Fry moved to approve the following on the consent agenda:

Approval of Revisions to:

1. Policy #0521 – Equal Opportunity Plan
2. Policy #2111 – Equal Opportunity Employment
3. Policy #3320 – Purchasing Procedures
4. Policy #4111.1/4211.1 – Equal Employment Opportunity
5. Policy #4118.11/4218.11 – Nondiscrimination
6. Policy #5000 – Concept of Roles in Student Policies
7. Policy #3514 – Equipment
8. Policy #1110.1 – Parent Involvement
9. Policy #6174 – Summer School

Drzyzga seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously **8-0-0**.

Discussion/Action Items

- Update on Reopening of Schools
Mr. Van Tassel said the district will reopen on August 31 in a hybrid model for the first three weeks of school. Superintendent Van Tassel will notify families by September 16 whether the district will then move to a full in-person model. He noted the ability to open school could be impacted by personnel issues. A recent staff survey found that a larger than expected number of teachers may be requesting leave. Mr. Van Tassel said health and safety training and social emotional training will be provided to staff during the professional development week. In response to Board members' questions, Mr. Van Tassel said the distance learning trainings are for all parents, whether they choose to be full remote or will be in the hybrid model. The district will work with individual families if they need to alter their choice before school begins or within the three-week timeframe. Mr. Van Tassel said he is hoping to know by the end of this week the status of most staff returning to work, but he would like staff to attend the health and safety protocol trainings next week before making a final decision. The district is also looking to staff a daycare option for teachers who have indicated childcare is an issue for them returning to work. In response to a Board member's question relative to the number of families who will be homeschooling due to the pandemic, Mr. Van Tassel said he will get that information. In

response to a board member's question about the required technology needed for remote learning, Mr. Van Tassel said devices are on back order and expected mid-September. Ms. Zawawi added that currently the district has technology in place to conduct hybrid learning.

- End of Year Fiscal Status and Approval of Budget Transfers

Mr. Hoff said the financial reports include May and June, and the end-of-year surplus was \$158,826. Open Choice expenditures were reduced to zero for 2019-20 leaving a balance of \$1,150,445. The DSS grant awarded to the district was returned to state because the district was not able to secure appropriate service providers to carry out the expectations of the grant. Mr. Hoff said there was an end-of-year loss of \$9,515 in food service. He provided a report to the Board on the After School Program. The district will be using a large part of the surplus in this fund to purchase classroom libraries. Mr. Hoff said the Board needs to approve the budget transfers.

MOTION #21-09: Sattan moved to approve the budget transfers as presented by administration. Lingenfelter seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously **8-0-0**.

- Adoption of 2020-2021 Board of Education Goals

The Board met over several meetings this summer to discuss and develop the Board goals, which are: (1) Establish healthy channels of outreach, communication, engagement, and collaboration with town government and the community; (2) Systematically use meaningful data to drive, improve and track student success and instructional practices; (3) Continue to design and implement an integrated plan for professional learning aligned with district needs; (4) Revise curriculum and programming with an emphasis on alignment and fidelity of implementation; (5) Engage in a process to develop a five-year Strategic Plan; and (6) Promote diversity, equity and inclusion for students, faculty and staff by fostering acceptance, mutual respect, civility and non-discrimination, per BOE Policies 4118.11 and 5145.4, across all areas of our District including employment, policy, curriculum and instruction, professional development, and the working and learning environment. Board goals guide the work of the district through the District and School Advancement Plans, resulting in actionable, measurable objectives.

MOTION #21-10: Dudack moved to approve the 2020-2021 BOE goals as presented. Fry seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried unanimously **8-0-0**.

- Acceptance of the Completion of the McAlister Roof Replacement Project #139-0061 RR

Mr. Hoff said this project was completed last August and in order to get state reimbursement the Board must accept the project as complete.

MOTION #21-11: Sattan moved to accept the completion of the McAlister Roof Replacement Project #139-0061RR. Finnigan seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried unanimously **8-0-0**.

- Update on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council – ABAR Presentation

Mr. Van Tassel said ABAR requested to make a presentation to the Board on their efforts for an anti-biased, anti-racist community. Mr. Van Tassel said the district has developed a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion council and held its first meeting on August 4. The focus will be to look at ways to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in our schools. Ms. Elizabeth Warren, Dr. Kristina Hallett and Ms. Amy Hawkins, ABAR members, presented their group's intent which is to seek inclusion and equity in our schools and they shared their strategies for Suffield to be a more inclusive environment for all students. A Board member asked about the statewide difficulties surrounding the hiring of diverse staff, and Superintendent Van Tassel confirmed the

relative scarcity of certified teachers of color in Connecticut, citing CT state initiatives to promote the profession to underrepresented populations. Board members thanked ABAR for their presentation, asked for quarterly updates on district progress, asked that students be included in these discussions, and encouraged open dialogue. A Board member stated that the town of Suffield and the school district are not racist systems and the current curriculum is very diverse.

Subcommittee Reports

- June 5, 2020 – Community Engagement & Public Relations subcommittee meeting – Board member Fry said the committee finalized their first BOE flyer, which was sent out in early June. At the next meeting, the committee will work on its back to school flyer.
- June 9, 2020 – Curriculum & Instruction subcommittee meeting – Board member Drzyzga said the committee met with the Capstone committee who presented the different options students will have to complete the course, which is a graduation requirement. They also discussed grading and distance learning, which will also be discussed at the next meeting this Thursday.
- June 15 & July 27, 2020 – Policy subcommittee meetings – Board member Dudack said the committee is placing many policies and a bylaw on a 30-day read. The bylaw pertains to minutes, and the policies are temporary policies related to COVID-19. These temporary policies will be placed in a separate section in the policy binder until they expire.
- July 9, July 14, July 23, July 20 & Aug. 6, 2020 – COVID-19 Ad hoc committee meetings – Board member Dudack said the meetings have been very productive and collaborative, and the role of the board members is to offer guidance on the reopening of school. Another meeting is scheduled next week. Board member Lingenfelter added that serving on this committee has informed him of the great amount of work that has been done by the administration and staff to make sure Suffield is in the best possible position for our students to get back to school. He was appreciative of everyone's efforts.
- August 13 Finance and Facilities – Board member Sepko said the focus of the meeting was reviewing COVID-19 expenses, specifically discussing what has been spent and planning moving forward. The committee will be meeting with the Board of Finance on September 14 to discuss these expenses.

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – Board member Sattan said the last CREC meeting topic revolved around the hiring of a Director of Head Start. The next CREC meeting is this Wednesday.
- Agriscience – nothing to report
- CABA – Board member Drzyzga said CABA's guidance on the topic of who has the authority on when and how to reopen schools is that the decision lies with Superintendents as it is an operational decision.

Future Business

None

Public Comment

Annie Hornish, 584 Thrall Avenue, strongly supports ABAR Suffield and agrees that the Board should make a public statement supporting anti-biased, anti-racist endeavors. She was concerned that the Board has not acted on issuing a public statement and has not been more proactive.

Kristina Hallett, 1211 Newgate Road, appreciated the opportunity to make the presentation, but more appreciates the opportunity to dialog on difficult subjects to grow as a community.

**Due to a technical issue with Zoom, Ms. Linda Cunningham, 789 Bridge Street, was unable to offer her public comment. She submitted her comment via email to the BOE, which is attached as an appendix to these minutes.*

Board Member Comment

Board member Fry read aloud the Board's diversity goal that was adopted this evening.

Board member Dudack thanked ABAR for their presentation and dialog.

Board member Sattan asked if further changes need to be made to the reopening of schools, will a Board meeting be scheduled to discuss the issue. Superintendent Van Tassel answered in the affirmative.

Board member Finnigan said if the school reopening decision has a financial implication, it would become a Board issue.

Adjournment

Dudack moved, Sattan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:11 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of September 8, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan
Secretary

APPENDIX to AUGUST 17, 2020 BOE MINUTES

Dear Suffield Board of Education Members,

I am Linda Cunningham, 789 Bridge Street. I attempted to offer comment during the time announced for public comment near the end of the BOE meeting and followed the instructions to press *9.

Unfortunately, I was never recognized. This may have been due to the new technology or a phone mishap on my part, but either way, I would like to offer my comments and have them added to the record. It was very difficult following the meeting only having phone access to the meeting. Not having access to the visual aspect of Zoom may have deprived me and others the opportunity to provide public comment. I provide my comment below:

Thank you in advance for receiving this email as public comment to the BOR meeting of August 17, 2020.

I am a product of white privilege however, I personally know students who have experienced racism in the Suffield schools. They are not alone and Suffield is not unique. For us to deny this is for us to put our heads in the sand.

I support ABAR's efforts and applaud their recommendations. There is no reason that these important actions should be delayed. I believe, there needs to be an immediate statement by the BOE, the Suffield School system, the Suffield Police Department and the Town of Suffield committing to making Suffield an Anti-Bias, Anti-Racist community. There should be on-going diversity training for staff and continued instruction on ways to incorporate diversity, biases, acceptance, and anti-racism into the daily curriculum for student learning. Such learning should not be superficial or saved for "special days/months".

I appreciate the fact that the BOE and the Superintendent of Schools is taking up these very important issues. And, that they realize we are multidimensional and can work at accomplishing many important matters at one time considering re-opening, and diversity issues. Now is the time to make meaningful change!

I greatly appreciated many of the comments by both BOE members and the Superintendent however I was dismayed and concerned to hear that there is a belief that these problems do not exist in Suffield particularly after the comments and experiences that have been collected by various groups in Suffield were shared. When people express that they are afraid to speak out of fear for their children and themselves we have a problem. We all have biases and we can all do better. The recommendations made by ABAR is clearly a good start. Other towns in CT are way ahead of us. I ask you not to let Suffield fall behind but be a leader.

Respectfully,

Linda Cunningham

789 Bridge Street