

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Suffield Middle School Chorus Room
(Public attended Remotely)
October 5, 2020

Call to Order

Board Chair Davis called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

Absent: None

Board Chair Davis acknowledged that this is the first in-person/hybrid BOE meeting since COVID forced all meetings to be remote.

MOTION #21-15: Dudack made a motion to move Discussion/Action Item IX. A. on the agenda to V.A.. Sepko seconded the motion and all voted in favor. The motion carried 9-0-0.

Recognition

None

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Dudack said she appreciated the recent message that was sent by Principal Blain denouncing discriminatory symbols being used at the high school and promoting an environment of non-discrimination.

Discussion and Action Item

- Educator Evaluation Flexibilities as Recommended by the Professional Development Education Committee (PDEC)

Mr. Van Tassel said the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is recommending districts adopt temporary flexibilities to the educator evaluation plan this year due to COVID-19. PDEC members, Melissa Fortunato, Mark Janick and Shannon Picard, were in attendance and explained the work of the committee and highlighted the flexibilities to the plan. Based on district and building data, teachers will develop one Student Learning Objective with two Indicators of Academic Growth. For teachers in their first and second year, evaluators will conduct three informal observations and one review of practice. For all other teachers, evaluators will conduct two informal observations and one review of practice. Administrators will receive two observations, except for new administrators who will receive four observations. The CSDE has waived observation and summative ratings for the 2020-2021 school year. Mr. Van Tassel said the proposed evaluation plan requires Board approval as there are substantive changes to the plan.

MOTION #21-16: Sattan moved to approve the Educator Evaluation Flexibilities as recommended by the PDEC. Finnigan seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously **9-0-0**.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
 - Mr. Van Tassel thanked Board members for attending the initial planning session with Isobel Stevenson, consultant with the Center for School Change, who will be working with the Board and district to develop the Portrait of a Graduate and Strategic Plan.
 - Superintendent Van Tassel said the DEI Council information is on our website and includes council members, agendas, and minutes. CREC Director, Debra Borrero will be attending the next meeting on October 13. Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi will be meeting with a subgroup of the council this week to develop goals to present to the full council on October 13.
 - He stated the October 19 Board workshop topics are distance learning and the district and school advancement plans.
 - Mr. Van Tassel noted the CAFE convention has been cancelled this year due to the pandemic.
- Board Chair's Report
 - Board Chair Mercik Davis said she was pleased to see the high school's proactive message addressing discrimination. The district and Board of Education fully support and foster a non-discriminatory, inclusive and equitable environment for all.
 - Board Chair Mercik Davis commended the community for their social responsiveness and responsibility as it relates to school reopening. She thanked everyone for their partnership and patience.
 - Board member Mercik Davis thanked Board members for the investment of their time in participating in many meetings during this time.
- Business Manager's Report
 - Mr. Hoff said we have started the national school lunch program that is available to all students under 18, both in person and full distance learners. Last week, the district provided 132 breakfasts and 309 lunches to distance learners.
 - He noted the 2021-2022 budget process has begun.
- Board of Selectmen's Report
 - First Selectwoman Melissa Mack thanked the Board of Education for piloting a hybrid/in person meeting.
 - Ms. Mack said the Charter Revision Commission recently convened, which is required every 5 years. Its charge is to complete a review of the town's governance model. This review will include soliciting input from town departments and the public. The Commission will hold public hearings and make recommendations to the Board of Selectmen.
 - She reported the \$10,535,000 bond issuance will close tomorrow, which was issued at the lowest interest rate in the town's history. There were a total of eight bids, and the winning bid came in at 1.95%, resulting in a bond premium of over \$840,000. The proceeds will fund the Remington Street bridge, the Town Hall renovations, the street lighting project, three fire engines and road improvements.
 - Town Planner, Bill Hawkins, will be issuing a RFP for the town-wide and school-wide facilities plan, which will assess current use and space needs for the town and school buildings and establish priorities, schedules and a budget for replacement or improvement that will provide a framework to the town's long-term capital plan and help to forecast future bond issuances. A joint facilities committee will be formed and will be comprised of town and school employees and Board members. The Town Hall renovations are underway

and are going well. Ms. Mack stated significant physical improvements have not been made to our schools in about 20 years.

- Board of Finance Liaison's Report
 - None

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #21-17: Finnigan moved to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of September 14, 2020, September 21, 2020, and September 28, 2020. Drzyzga seconded the motion. A Board member expressed that the September 14 minutes should have been more of a summary of the discussion items instead of a documentation of Board members' comments. All members voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously **9-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #21-18: Dudack moved to approve the following on the consent agenda:

1. Revisions to Bylaw #9326; and
2. Add temporary COVID-19 related revisions to current policies.

Finnigan seconded the motion. Board members asked for clarification in the proposed changes to Bylaw #9326 which addresses meeting minutes, and discussed summary minutes versus more detailed minutes. Policy Subcommittee Chair Dudack stated that there is a complete record of the meetings in the meeting recordings, so summary minutes are sufficient. Board Chair Mercik Davis called for a vote. Sepko, Dudack, Finnigan, Gazdik, Drzyzga, Mercik Davis, and Fry voted favor. Lingenfelter and Sattan voted against. The motion carried **7-2-0**.

Discussion/Action Items

- COVID-19 Update

The Board heard updates relative to COVID-19 operations from the business office, facilities, special services, curriculum and instruction, and technology departments, and human resources. Superintendent Van Tassel said the current hybrid model has been successful in getting children in-person learning while ensuring their safety. As of October 2nd, 79 students and 20 staff members are on quarantine. Since the start of the school year, 121 students have been on quarantine due to COVID-19 exposure, and another 74 students have been on quarantine for COVID-19 like symptoms. If the district was operating in full in-person learning, those numbers could possibly be doubled. Mr. Van Tassel noted we had another COVID-19 positive case reported in the district today. While contact tracing is time consuming and labor intensive, because cohorts are in place and student numbers are small, school administrators and nurses have been able to identify these contacts in a very short period of time and notifications to affected families have been timely. John Spencer, Town Emergency Management Director, reported to Mr. Van Tassel that there is an uptick in confirmed positive cases in Suffield and that is not characteristic of other NCDHD towns. Superintendent Van Tassel said the best way to continue to enable students to attend in-person and avoid more quarantines or possibly school closures, is to remain in a hybrid model through at least the month of October. He understands that families need a timeframe for planning for daycare and work schedules. The Board will meet at the end of October to reassess the school model and review current health metrics. Board members expressed support for remaining in a hybrid model. Board members asked for data on how other districts are handling exposures and what models they are in. Board members asked if there are trends in Suffield's exposures. Mr. Van Tassel said all exposures have occurred outside of the district in other activities such as town sports. He noted it is most important for parents to keep the line of communication open with the schools regarding exposure and student involvement.

- Approval of Proposed 2021 BOE Meeting Schedule
MOTION #21-19: Sepko moved to approve the 2021 BOE meeting schedule. Dudack seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried unanimously **9-0-0**.
- August Financial Report
Mr. Hoff said the projected end of year surplus is \$155,816, but this only represents 0.4% of the budget. There is almost a \$300,000 surplus in salaries due to hiring savings, salary increases lower than budgeted, vacancies, and lower than budgeted summer school salaries. Special Education Tuition and Special Education Transportation are projected as expected costs are still being finalized. There is an increase in the total grant funds due to \$400,000 in COVID-19 grants and the amount we rolled over from last year to this year. Mr. Hoff noted the district is on the 2% reimbursement rate threshold for Open Choice students enrolled in Suffield. Mr. Hoff reviewed the COVID-19 expenses incurred for 2020 and 2021, for a total of \$422,467. He explained the five funding sources of these expenses: the ESSER grant; the COVID Relief Fund; FEMA funds; the BOE/Open Choice funds, and the Suffield Capital Plan funds.

Subcommittee Reports

- September 11 & 25, 2020 – Community Engagement & Public Relations subcommittee meeting – Board member Fry said the committee discussed and finalized the content for the Back to School Flyer which was sent to families on October 2.
- October 1, 2020 Finance and Facilities – Board member Sepko said the committee discussed the budget and expenses that Mr. Hoff reviewed tonight. They also reviewed the work to be done in the Agriscience classrooms, discussed the CIRMA lawsuit, and the fiscal 2022 budget planning.

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – Board member Sattan said CREC Council is incorporating more Council member discussion into their meetings, in addition to the regular Council business.
- Agriscience – Board member Fry said he attended the Sept.28 Consulting Committee meeting and they discussed future planning, lab renovations, the food science room and Agriscience room renovations. The ASTE evaluation indicated a need to improve recruitment efforts. The faculty is making a concerted effort in recruiting new students. Suffield Regional Agriscience has a Facebook page and he encouraged Board members to follow it.
- CABB – nothing to report

Future Business

None

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Board member Fry said he was pleased with the partnership with the town as it relates to the town-wide facilities plan. He noted the technology hotline was personally invaluable to him and he hoped it remained available on a fluid basis. He asked the community to be forthcoming with information regarding COVID-19 exposures.

Board member Finnigan suggested our district help other districts livestream athletic games like is being done in Suffield.

Adjournment

Dudack moved, Finnigan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:01 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of November 2, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan
Secretary