

Board of Education Regular Meeting  
Held Remotely via Zoom  
December 7, 2020

Call to Order

Board Chair Davis called the meeting to order at 6:44 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Jamie Drzyzga (joined at 6:46pm), Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik (joined at 6:46pm), Scott Lingenfelter, Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan (joined at 6:46pm), Michael Sepko; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Bill Hoff

Late arriving Board members joined from a Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee meeting immediately prior to the BOE Regular Meeting.

Recognition

None

SHS Student Representative

Board Chair Mercik Davis and Mr. Blain introduced the student representatives, Akshita Jindal and Connor Shaw. Miss Jindal is a senior serving in her second year as BOE student representative. Mr. Shaw is a junior who was selected after a competitive interview process.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Board member Fry welcomed Mr. Shaw to the Board and he enjoyed being a part of the interview process.

Board member Dudack welcomed the high school student representatives and was pleased to hear of the great interest by the student body.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
  - Mr. Van Tassel welcomed the high school student representatives to the Board.
  - He thanked members of the BOE, BOS and ACCE who toured all four schools on Saturday as part of annual capital walk through. He also thanked Mr. Hoff and Mr. Plano for facilitating the event.
  - Superintendent Van Tassel said Mr. Stevens, Chair of ACCE, requested the Board submit its Capital Improvement Plan to ACCE earlier than past years.
  - Mr. Van Tassel reminded families that there will be no school on December 23. The last day of school is now tentatively scheduled for June 10, 2021.
- Board Chair's Report
  - Board Chair Mercik Davis thanked all who participated in the facilities walk through.
  - Agriscience had their holiday bazaar where holiday decorations made by students are sold.
  - She thanked Kathy Carney and those from the town who organized the walking challenge.

- Educational consultant Isobel Stevenson will be facilitating stakeholder meetings with parents to aid in developing the district's Portrait of a Graduate. All families are encouraged to participate.
- Business Manager's Report
  - Mr. Hoff said the food service program is providing free meals to all children 18 years of age and younger. Meal distribution is on Tuesdays and Fridays. He encouraged all to take advantage of this program.
- Board of Selectmen's Report
  - None
- Board of Finance Liaison's Report
  - None

#### Approval of Minutes

**MOTION #21-23:** Dudack moved to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of November 2, 2020, November 16, 2020 and November 23, 2020. Finnigan seconded the motion. All members voted in favor of approving the minutes. The motion passed unanimously **9-0-0**.

#### Consent Agenda

**MOTION #21-24:** Dudack moved to approve the following on the consent agenda:

1. Policy #0200 – Goals and Objectives;
2. Policy #4118.112/4218.112 – Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment;
3. Policy #5145.5 – Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment;
4. Temporary COVID-19 policy regarding use of face masks;
5. Bylaw #9311 – Formulation, Adoption, Amendment and Suspension of Policies, Bylaws and Regulations;
6. Bylaw #9312 – Formulation, Adoption, Amendment of Bylaws (Proposed for dissolution); and
7. Bylaw #9314 – Suspension of Policies, Bylaws, Regulations (Proposed for dissolution)

Finnigan seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried **9-0-0**.

#### Discussion/Action Items

- Superintendent's Proposed 2021-2022 Budget Presentation  
 Superintendent Van Tassel reviewed the development of the Superintendent's budget proposal. The 2021-2022 proposal of \$36,887,270 is a net increase of \$986,248, or a 2.75% increase, over the current budget of \$35,901,023. Mr. Van Tassel reviewed the proposed personnel reductions, the proposed personnel increases, the proposed item increases (key programs and services), and proposed budget reallocations between grants and the district operating budget. He outlined potential additional savings and liabilities not yet included in the budget. Several Board workshops are scheduled to thoroughly cover the budget drivers, and Board members will be asked to submit questions of interest.
- October Financial Report  
 The projected end of year net surplus is \$181,748, a \$48,207 increase over last month. Mr. Hoff said there are savings in health insurance due to less people enrolling; however, the district has incurred increased expenses in equipment repair for HVAC repairs and in custodial supplies due to COVID-19. Mr. Hoff said the Food Service deficit is concerning and sales remain low due to hybrid and distance learners. Meals will be offered seven days a week starting next week. Superintendent Van Tassel added that the State Department of Education may re-designate funding to help districts make up the deficit.

- Suffield High School Midterm Update

Mr. Blain said the high school is looking to move away from midterm exams toward more authentic forms of assessment and project-based learning. The decision was made to address social emotional impacts on students and increase instructional time. The high school administration held focus groups with students to get their input and will be researching what other districts are doing. In response to a Board member's question, Mr. Blain said the decision is not limited to this year with its Covid-19 impacts, and that the high school has been considering this for over a year. Mr. Blain said final exams will still occur for half year courses as well as full year courses. Mr. Shaw and Miss Jindal said eliminating midterm exams would cause less stress, and many students do not test well which is not indicative of their knowledge of the material.

Board members had concerns over making this change without examining supporting data, having some sense of what other districts are doing, and seeing the impact of this change in those districts. Board members also had concerns over the timing of bringing this to the Board as mid-terms are scheduled next month. Many Board members see value in midterm exams while some acknowledged student emotional impacts. Board members expressed concern at the loss of rigor and said that well-written tests can be instructive, fair, and help prepare students for college.

Superintendent Van Tassel recommended the Curriculum and Instruction subcommittee discuss this topic further and then move to the full Board for a possible revision in the school calendar at its meeting on January 4.

- COVID-19 Update

Superintendent Van Tassel said the data for Hartford County and Suffield is posted on our website. He anticipates increased cases over the next week due to Thanksgiving. Mr. Van Tassel said the CDC is reducing the quarantine period to 7 days after a negative test and no symptoms and 10 days with no testing and no symptoms. The district will not change its quarantine protocols unless the State Department of Education modifies Addendum #5 which outlines the 10-day and 14-day quarantine periods. Mr. Van Tassel said he has no indication that the State plans on making any decisions relative to schools. In response to a Board member's question concerning what thresholds will be used to move schools to full remote learning, Mr. Van Tassel said all factors including number of cases in the community, internal cases, and staffing levels will all be considered to evaluate our ability to operate. Board members had concerns over the district level communications sent to families when there are confirmed cases in the district. Superintendent Van Tassel said those district communications are not mandated but are sent to inform our community to give a level of awareness. Families are notified when their child(ren) have been identified through contact tracing as a close contact. The Superintendent and the Board discussed the impact of staff quarantines. It has been challenging and teachers are permitted to work from home when quarantined and healthy to maintain continuity for teaching and learning for students.

#### Subcommittee Reports

- December 3, 2020 Finance and Facilities Subcommittee meeting – Board Member Sepko said the committee discussed the financial report shared this evening, the Capital Improvement Plan and priorities, the Long-term Town Facilities Plan, and the middle school band room. Mr. Sepko will serve as the Board liaison on the Long-term Town Facilities Plan committee.
- December 7, 2020 – Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee meeting – Board member Drzyzga said the committee discussed student engagement at the high school and middle school,

reviewing data on attendance and grades. The also discussed staff's efforts to improve practices to further engage students during this time.

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – no report
- Agriscience – no report
- CABE – no report

Future Business

None

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Board member Finnigan said she met with Officer Barrett of the Hartford Police Department who serves the homeless population by providing personal items through fundraising efforts. If anyone is interested in getting involved, contact her for details.

Board member Fry thanked all those involved in developing the budget proposal.

Adjournment

Dudack moved, Sattan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:10 p.m.

*Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of January 4, 2021.*

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan  
Secretary