

Board of Education Special Meeting  
Held Remotely via Zoom  
December 16, 2020

Call to Order

Board Chair Davis called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Present: Board members Jamie Drzyzga, Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik (arrived 6:41pm), Scott Lingenfelter, Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, Michael Sepko; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Bill Hoff

Absent: None

Discussion/Action Items

- Discussion of School Model Status and Schedule

Superintendent Van Tassel shared data on health metrics, personnel absences and student attendance. He highlighted the current Hartford and Suffield community cases, confirmed Suffield district cases, the number of students and staff currently quarantined, and a snapshot of student attendance by school and by cohort. He stated that the thinking has changed from using COVID-19 case levels as the sole determinant of the mode of instruction; it is not being disregarded, just allowing it to be used in wider context. He stated that the district has become more judicious in the numbers of people quarantined. He noted the biggest challenge right now is staff coverage for a significant number of staff absences. Superintendent Van Tassel said a survey was sent to teachers relative to their travel plans over the holiday break. To date, over 20 staff members have indicated they will be traveling to a high-risk state, which may impact their ability to return to work on January 4<sup>th</sup>. Superintendent Van Tassel recommended moving to a remote status model beginning Friday, December 18, 2020 through January 8, 2021, with a tentative return to a hybrid model on Monday, January 11. Dr. Segool, Suffield's School Medical Advisor, was in attendance to answer Board members' questions.

***Finnigan left the meeting at 7:00 p.m.***

***Sepko left the meeting at 7:16 p.m.***

Board members asked questions of Dr. Segool regarding the root cause of Suffield's relatively higher COVID-19 incidence numbers, his thoughts on the ability to return on January 11, and what pediatricians think the best instruction model for students at this time. Dr. Segool said that there were very few secondary cases of COVID-19 spread in the schools that were able to be identified.

Board members asked about the CDC shortening recommended quarantine times, and Superintendent said that the district policy will change with the relevant addendum from the State Department of Education. The Superintendent discussed ways to keep schools open when staff absences are high, such as combining classes and the utilization of substitutes, specifically college students. Board members discussed cancelling school on Monday, December 21 and Tuesday, December 22, and moving those days to the end of the school year, citing current challenges for working parents, struggles for distance learners, higher possibilities for in-person

instruction later in the year, and the lack of evidence of in-school spread. Principals shared anecdotal feedback from teachers that they prefer having Monday and Tuesday as remote learning over moving them to the end of the school year. Board members also acknowledged the challenges that a calendar change may bring to teachers, and thanked Superintendent Van Tassel for his leadership. A Board member asked for creativity in giving students an option to return five days. Superintendent Van Tassel confirmed the calendar change is executable. The Board did not officially vote on the change to the calendar; however, the majority of the Board supported moving to full remote status from December 18, 2020 through January 8, 2021, and canceling school on December 21 and December 22 and adding those days to the end of the school year, resulting in a tentative last day of school as Monday, June 14, 2021. Board member Lingenfelter opposed the changes to the calendar.

Adjournment

Fry moved, Sattan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:55 p.m. The motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan  
Secretary