

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Held Remotely via Zoom
January 4, 2021

Call to Order

Board Chair Davis called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Jamie Drzyzga, Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik (joined at 6:32pm), Scott Lingenfelter, Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, Michael Sepko (joined at 6:32pm); and Superintendent Timothy Van Tasel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Bill Hoff; and SHS Student Representatives Akshita Jindal and Connor Shaw

Recognition

None

SHS Student Representative

Ms. Jindal said the middle school held a pajama day fundraiser to support CCMC cancer patients. Middle school parents and students can find information on clubs and activities beginning this month on the school's website and in the school's newsletters. The National Honor Society held a very successful toy drive to benefit CCMC cancer patients. Over \$4,500 and 400 toys were donated. The high school will not be holding mid-term exams this year; however, half year courses will have a final exam. Mr. Shaw said the hybrid schedule has not deterred teachers or students from holding special events such as spirit days. Both schools held a toy drive to benefit CCMC cancer patients, with both schools raising almost \$1,000 each school plus toy donations. Students at McAlister received new Chromebooks which has improved technology performance. Students at both schools have been working hard in STEM classes such as environmental projects and coding. During the month of December, McAlister students learned about diverse cultures and holidays. In January, Spaulding students will be taking benchmark testing and third graders will be taking their first round of SBAC assessments.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Board member Lingenfelter said he was disappointed that high school mid-term exams would not be administered this year.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
 - Dr. Van Tasel said the hybrid school calendar for January was revised to balance the in-person learning days for both cohorts. He noted January 15th is an early release day for students.
 - Superintendent Van Tasel congratulated Abby Halasi-Kun for being accepted into the Air Force Academy.

- Dr. Van Tassel said the Joint Facilities Study Committee interviewed several architecture firms and awarded the contract to Tecton Architects. Board member Sepko represents the Board of Education on the committee.
- Board Chair's Report
 - Board Chair Mercik Davis said Dr. Isobel Stevenson, consultant with Connecticut Center for School Change, will be facilitating two parent focus groups this month to get stakeholder feedback for developing the district's Portrait of a Graduate/ Strategic Plan.
 - Board Chair Mercik Davis congratulated Superintendent Van Tassel for defending his dissertation last month and earning his Doctorate of Education degree.
- Business Manager's Report
 - Mr. Hoff said many families are participating in the free meals program and pick-up days are on Tuesdays and Fridays.
- Board of Selectmen's Report
 - First Selectwoman Mack said the Board of Selectmen (BOS) has convened the Charter Revision Commission, which is required every five years, and charged them to perform a complete review of the town's governance structure. They will be seeking input from department heads, town-wide commission members and the public. One public hearing has been held and additional public hearings will be scheduled. The Commission will then make recommendations to the BOS and questions will appear on the ballot in 2021.
 - She said the BOS formed a pedestrian and traffic safety committee to evaluate and make recommendations to the BOS addressing pedestrian and traffic safety and infrastructure needs to allow the town to plan for expenditures in infrastructure improvements.
 - First Selectwoman Mack said the Town Hall renovations are going well and is being renovated as new.
 - She noted the great collaboration between the school and town relative to the Long-range Facilities Study. The next step is for Tecton to review our current buildings' plans to guide future planning.
- Board of Finance Liaison's Report
 - No report

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #21-27: Drzyzga moved to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of December 7, 2020, December 10, 2020, December 16, 2020 and December 23, 2020. Sattan seconded the motion. Board member Lingenfelter said he would like the December 16 minutes amended to reflect that he opposed changes to the school calendar and that the Board did not vote on that decision. Board member Drzyzga withdrew the initial motion.

Finnigan moved to approve the minutes of December 7, 2020, December 10, 2020, December 16, 2020 and December 23, 2020 with an amendment to the December 16, 2020 minutes to reflect that Board member Lingenfelter opposed the calendar change and no Board vote was taken. Sepko seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously **9-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

None

Discussion/Action Items

- Acceptance of SHS Booster Club Donation of Pixellot Cameras
Mr. Bosworth, Mr. Blain and Mr. Tim Lewis, SHS Booster Club Chair, were in attendance to present information on the donation. The Suffield High School Booster Club would like to donate two Pixellot cameras along with the required technology to provide livestreaming of sporting and other school events. Mr. Bosworth acknowledged Mr. Lewis' support and

fundraising efforts. There is a subscription fee of \$10.99 a month per device, which includes access to viewing games in other towns with the same system. The cameras should be completed by the spring sports season. Board members asked questions relative to the cameras' capability to record, and options to provide the service to families who may not be able to afford the monthly subscription. The cameras will record the events and there are mechanisms in place to work with families who may have financial hardships. Board members thanked Mr. Lewis and the SHS Booster Club.

MOTION #21-28: Sattan moved to accept the donation by the SHS Booster Club of two Pixellot cameras. Dudack seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried **9-0-0**.

- Budget Workshop #1: Technology, Transportation and Facilities Proposed 2021-2022 Budget Presentations

Ms. Osleger, Director of Technology, reviewed the notable proposed technology budget changes including a reduction in digital memberships and student applications, reductions in supplies and outside technology support services due to hardware upgrades implemented with financial support from the town, the addition of one additional staff member, and the additional expense of Chromebook enterprise licensing. She reviewed the major budget line items which proposes an overall reduction of \$7,390 over this year's budget, or a 1.0% decrease. Board members had questions relative to video conferencing capability on Chromebooks and questions relative to the district's cybersecurity. New Chromebooks were just received and were given to second through fourth graders who had older devices. Board of Finance member and liaison to the Board, Brian Kost, asked what has been learned during the pandemic in regards to providing education for a lower cost through the use of technology. Board Chair Mercik Davis said in-person learning is not only important academically for students but also for their social and emotional well-being. Assistant Superintendent said there is no substitute for in-person learning but because of the pandemic we have been more efficient and purposeful as it relates to technology. Regarding security concerns, Ms. Osleger said the district completed major infrastructure updates in the spring and also utilizes an application that detects potential threats. In addition, the State and National Guard conducted a full security audit in preparation for Election Day and reported that Suffield had the best technology infrastructure in the state. Ms. Mack added that Ms. Osleger and her team have done an incredible job and currently they are working on the technology needs in the Town Hall renovation. Ms. Mack said without the shared technology services structure that is in place, the municipal government would not be operating during the pandemic to the extent it is now.

Mr. Plano, Director of Facilities, reviewed the notable changes in the proposed maintenance budget. A sizable increase in the budget is due to moving funds from the Open Choice Grant fund to the operating budget due to a reduction in available funds in that grant. In addition, a part-time cleaner is proposed in next year's budget to maintain the required level of cleaning. There are also increased expenses for upgrades to HVAC filters and a more frequent replacement schedule as a result of COVID-19. Mr. Plano reviewed the maintenance budget requests broken out by school with a total increase of \$152,465 over this year's budget, or a 13.5% increase. Mr. Plano noted the support of the town in funding many expenses through the ACCE budget. Mr. Plano said the proposed increase excluding the impact of the grant fund shift is \$25,991. Board member Sattan suggested breaking out these numbers so Board members have a better understanding of the actual budget increases without the impact of moving funds from the Open Choice grant to the operating budget.

Mr. Hoff said there are little changes to the proposed utilities budget over this year's budget. Electricity and natural gas are budgeted the same as this year, and water is budgeted at the

current year plus 2%. In response to a Board member's question relative to exploring solar energy benefits, Mr. Hoff said the district, along with town, is involved in a solar project, specifically solar fields. The long-range facilities plan study will also look at solar projects. Mr. Hoff said the contract with M&J Transportation expires at the end of this fiscal year and preliminary discussions are underway to extend the contract.

- Discussion and Possible Action on the Capital Improvement Plan

Mr. Hoff reviewed the 2021-2022 capital budget requested items. These include: air conditioning units at SMS, replacing asbestos classroom tiles at Spaulding, district technology projects, SHS and McAlister stair tread replacements, replacement of high school bathroom partitions, a new camera server, McAlister auditorium renovations, Spaulding gym and auditorium renovations, furniture replacement at SHS, Spaulding energy management system replacement, and an open bay storage building. Board members asked for clarification or more information on these items to understand the rationale and specific projects.

MOTION #21-29: Sepko moved to approve the Capital Improvement Plan as presented.

Drzyzga seconded the motion and all members voted in favor except Fry, who abstained. The motion carried **8-0-1**.

- Discussion Regarding Long-range Facilities Study and Possibility of a Demographic Study of Suffield Public Schools

Dr. Van Tassel said the district will draft a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a district demographic study. The last demographic study was conducted about five years ago. The results of the study will be reviewed by the Finance and Facilities subcommittee and ultimately brought to the full Board to inform future district planning.

- November Financial Report

Mr. Hoff said the projected year-end net surplus is \$86,911, which is a slight decrease over last month. Increased expenses are a result of increases in salaries due to hiring an interim special education supervisor, purchasing of classroom libraries, and equipment repair expenses. The food service loss year-to-date is approximately \$99,000. Sales remain significantly lower than usual due to the hybrid model and distance learners. The district continues to promote the free breakfast and lunch program available to all children 18 and younger.

- COVID-19 Update

Superintendent Van Tassel said several positive cases were reported in the district today.

Dr. Van Tassel noted that some families have expressed concern over the removal of the health metrics on the website. While it has been removed, the district is still compiling and monitoring the data. Since the health metrics is only one data point used in making decisions on the school operating status, Superintendent Van Tassel thought it best to remove this information; however, he can revisit this decision. Superintendent Van Tassel informed the Board that the district is changing the quarantine period from 14 days to 10 days as recommended by the CDC and DPH. He stated the Connecticut travel advisory is established by order of the Governor, and is not in his purview to amend. Dr. Van Tassel said the districts' school nurses will be receiving the COVID-19 vaccination this week. The rollout for the rest of staff should occur in the next six weeks. We do not know if vaccinated individuals are still carriers of the virus, therefore, it is unlikely any changes will be made to our quarantine protocols. The Superintendent has scheduled a voluntary district-wide staff meeting for this Wednesday to provide information regarding the vaccine. Medical health experts will be in attendance to answer questions. He said the district is doing all it can to support our faculty and staff, and he is appreciative of the community and the Board for their partnership. Dr. Van Tassel said the vaccine administration to staff could potentially change the operational status of the district to a full in-person model.

Board members Mercik Davis and Sattan expressed concerns with waiting until vaccinations were available to staff before consideration of returning to a full in-person model. Board members discussed balancing in person days between Cohort A and Cohort B and Dr. Van Tassel confirmation that the hybrid model will be in place for next week.

Subcommittee Reports

- December 10, 2020 Policy Subcommittee meeting – Board Member Dudack said the committee discussed the policies being placed on a 30 day read: #6151 – Class Size, #6177 – Use of Commercially Produced Video Recordings, and #5125 – Student Records-Confidentiality. She welcomed Board members’ feedback before these policies are placed on an upcoming agenda for approval.

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – no report
- Agriscience – no report
- CABA – no report

Future Business

None

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Board member Sepko thanked Dr. Van Tassel and the members of the Finance subcommittee for their work on the budget.

Board member Sattan asked about the hiring process for a new Connecticut State Department of Education Commissioner that will be vacated by Dr. Miguel Cardona. Superintendent Van Tassel said an Interim Commissioner will be appointed while a search for a permanent replacement is conducted.

Board member Lingenfelter said he desires children to return to full in-person learning as soon as possible. He would also like to discuss mid-term exams at the high school. Board Chair Davis confirmed that will be readdressed, likely starting in the curriculum and instruction subcommittee.

Board Chair Mercik Davis reminded Board members to send their budget questions to Board member Sepko.

Adjournment

Dudack moved, Sattan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:26 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of February 1, 2021.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan
Secretary