

Board of Education Special Meeting  
Held Remotely via Zoom  
January 11, 2021

Call to Order

Board Chair Davis called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

Discussion/Action Items

- COVID-19 Update

- 1) Discussion of District Operational Status

Board Chair Mercik Davis thanked the Suffield community for their support and understanding relative to the decisions being made by the Board of Education and the Superintendent during the pandemic. This will continue to be a fluid situation possibly necessitating additional changes.

Dr. Van Tassel is proposing to change the operational status from the 3/2 hybrid with an option for full distance learning to a full in-person five days a week, keeping the option for full distance learning. This schedule will be phased in as follows: elementary students begin on January 25, middle school students begin on February 1, and high school students begin on February 17. There will be no change in instruction for full remote students. The rationale for this change is due to guidance from state health officials, consideration of the academic, social and emotional well-being of students, being at the mid-point of the school year, ongoing success of area districts who are operating in full in-person learning, and the rollout of the vaccination for staff.

Ms. Zawawi reviewed the attendance protocols, which will require a student's school model choice to stay consistent for 30 days for the elementary schools or for the marking quarter at the secondary level. If students who choose to attend in-person learning do not come to school, they will be marked absent unless it is related to COVID-19. Instruction for in-person learning will not change; livestreaming, classroom teachers and classroom assignments will remain the same. Dr. Van Tassel added that parents will be receiving a survey to choose which school model status their child(ren) will be attending. He also shared the enrollment numbers currently for full remote learners and said that even though there will be more students in classrooms, classrooms will not be full due to many families still opting for full distance learning.

Building principals reviewed the cafeteria seating arrangements and safety protocols, hallway transition procedures, and recess safety protocols at the elementary level. Ms. Kelly gave an update on the health and safety protocols, citing a change in the quarantine period from 14 days to 10 days. Mr. Hoff said all school meals will continue to be free of charge for all children 18 years of old and younger. Mr. Plano noted that cleaning procedures will

remain the same. Ms. Osleger said the technology department is prepared for the shift to full in-person learning. Remote students will still have access to the technology help line and onsite support systems will be in place as well.

Dr. Van Tassel shared other districts' operating models. The majority of the 11 districts polled, have at least elementary students attending full in-person learning. The Superintendent reviewed the primary and secondary considerations for continuity of full in-person learning including health official guidance, staffing levels, COVID-19 case trends in the schools, the district, the town and the county. Superintendent Van Tassel explained his recommendation for a change in the school calendar to include Wellness Wednesdays where schools will release in-person students early. The purpose of these days is for student wellness activities, remote student support and intervention, and teacher preparation time.

Board Chair Davis said although public comment is not typically accepted during Special Meetings, it would be allowed tonight. Questions will not be taken and should be held for the conference call with Superintendent Van Tassel later this week.

Jen Bombard, 6 Whitfield Way, thanked the staff and Board of Education for their effort and time. She fully supports students being in school in-person, and she thanked Dr. Van Tassel for recognizing the need for teachers to have extra planning time for remote teaching.

Tracy Hespelt, 875 Copper Hill Road, thanked everyone for their work and supported full in-person learning; however, she is concerned for the increased risk of teacher exposures resulting in higher quarantines, which will lead to an increased use of substitutes.

Kim Radziewicz, 14 Dara Lane, was surprised that the Board and Superintendent are considering returning to full in-person learning with the uptick in cases. Her greatest concern is the new variant of the virus. She read comments from Governor Lamont regarding the variant of the virus where he noted the importance of social distancing and wearing masks. She said that will not happen when students are eating lunch.

Sandy Bascove, 63 Redstone, asked if students will have partitions around their desks.

## 2) Discussion and Possible Action on the 2020-2021 School Calendar

Board members had questions relative to the timeframe of Wellness Wednesdays, the percentage of staff that signed up for the vaccine, distancing of students during lunch, and expectations of teachers working with remote students. Dr. Van Tassel said Wellness Wednesdays are currently being proposed for this school year only and about 90% of staff have registered for the vaccine. He said teachers will continue to work with remote learners as they have been doing all year. Both Ms. Olearczyk and Ms. Pryce said the cafeterias offer more space than students eating in their classrooms. SEA President, Mark Janick said teachers are concerned with students coming back in full and the hybrid model is working well. He agreed the Wellness Wednesdays will be helpful for teachers to support remote learners. In response to a Board member asking for Dr. Segool's viewpoint on students returning to full in-person learning, Dr. Segool said while there is no ideal time, he believed the district's approach to starting out conservatively to monitor the situation was prudent. There is no evidence of in-school transmission of COVID-19, which is very encouraging and it is wise to move forward at this point. Board members thanked the teachers and administration for their hard work during this challenging time and acknowledged the anxiety that may be experienced with the change, but believed it is in the best interest of

students. While there is no perfect solution, giving parents a choice is a great option to begin bringing students back full time. Board members unanimously supported the change in operational status of offering full in-person learning five days a week and the full remote learning five days a week; however, Board member Gazdik would prefer the change in operational status occur after staff receive the vaccine.

**MOTION #21-30:** Drzyzga moved to modify the 2020-2021 school calendar to reflect an early release schedule on Wednesdays (Wellness Wednesdays) once each school moves to full in-person learning five days a week. Fry seconded the motion. In response to a question of if the district reverts back to a hybrid or full remote option will Wellness Wednesdays be removed, Dr. Van Tassel answered in the affirmative. All members voted in favor and the motion carried **9-0-0**.

### Board of Education Budget Workshop #2

- A. Ward Spaulding Elementary School, McAlister Intermediate School, Suffield Middle School, Suffield High School and Curriculum and Instruction Proposed 2021-2022 Budget Presentations

Principal Olearczyk said the overall Spaulding School budget increase is 11.2%; however, 9.6% of that increase is due to moving expenses from grants and after-school funds to the BOE budget. Those expenses include teacher and academic support salaries, library books, and ELA and math supplies. While there are no new initiatives at Spaulding, the focus is to continue to develop student and professional development programs.

Principal Pryce reviewed McAlister's notable budget changes, the most notable of which is also due to moving expenses out of grants and after-school funds to the BOE budget. Those expenses include teacher and academic support salaries, library books and band instructional supplies. McAlister will continue to develop student programs and implement the best practices in Reading and Writer's Workshop. McAlister is also focused on examining supply needs in all content areas. The overall percentage increase is 7.4%; however, 6.3% is a result of moving expenses from grants and after-school funds to the BOE budget.

Principal Smith reviewed the notable changes to his budget which include instructional supplies for math instructional materials and to continue to develop the Reading and Writer's Workshop and acquiring the materials needed to enhance the program and to diversify the offerings. He noted a reduction in student program expenses due to identified efficiencies. The overall percentage increase is 1.4%, of which 0.07% is due to moving expenses from the after-school funds to the BOE budget.

Principal Blain stated that the high school is requesting a 1% increase, of which 0.34% is due to moving expenses from grants and after-school funds to the BOE budget. He highlighted the notable changes in the proposed high school budget, which include a reduction of a 1.0 FTE secretary, a decrease in instructional supplies, an increase in library books and stage productions due to moving these items from grants and after-school funds, and increases in Agriscience department including increased hours of the STEM Extension Supervisor, supplies due to enrollment, and for equipment maintenance.

Dr. Van Tassel said the school budgets reflect maintaining and improving the programs and initiatives already in place. In response to a question on the total impact of moving expenses from the Choice fund to the operating budget, Mr. Hoff said it was approximately \$640,000.

Assistant Superintendent Zawawi said the most significant changes to the Curriculum and Instruction budget are increases in instructional coaches' salaries due to these being moved from grants to BOE budget and step and degree changes, increase in curriculum resources for

Responsive Classroom and STEM materials, increase in curriculum consultants for Teachers College, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training, and administrator evaluation training, and an increase in professional development due to moving these expenses from grants to the BOE budget. The overall increase is 24.4%, of which 17.2% is a result of moving expenses from grant funds to the BOE budget.

Adjournment

Lingenfelter moved, Sattan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:02 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