

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Held Remotely via Zoom
February 1, 2021

Call to Order

Board Chair Davis called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Jamie Drzyzga, Debra Dudack (joined 6:35pm), 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

Absent: None

Recognition

None

MOTION #21-31: Mercik Davis moved to add an item to the agenda, X.A.1 to add a discussion on the use of remote learning days instead of snow days. Drzyzga seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried **9-0-0**.

MOTION #21-32: Finnigan moved to change the order of the agenda to move Discussion and Action Item X.A., Review and Possible Approval of the 2021-2022 School Calendar, to after Agenda Item III. Gazdik seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried **9-0-0**.

Discussion/Action Item

• Review and Possible Approval of the 2021-2022 School Calendar

The calendar committee, made up of administrators, teachers, parents and a BOE member, met several times to develop next year's school calendar. Mrs. Pryce explained the rationale for selecting September 1 as the first day of school. Mr. Casinghino said the committee selected three full day professional development days and one half day on the school calendar instead of several half days throughout the school year as has been done in years' past. Mrs. Wosko discussed the rationale for the parent/teacher conference schedules. Conferences are proposed to occur within one week for all schools instead of over two weeks. Tuesday and Wednesday will be afternoon/evening conferences, and students will attend school all day. Thursday and Friday will be early dismissal for students. Mr. Janick noted that parent representation on the committee was very valuable. Mrs. Olearczyk explained the rationale for selecting the week of April 11-15 for spring vacation. Mrs. Eichorn explained the dates selected for high school mid-terms and finals which align with the end of the second and fourth quarters; both over a four-day period. The Board discussed the use of a three-hour delay option for inclement weather and whether to set the 2022 graduation date at this time. Dr. Van Tassel recommended adding three-hour delays to the calendar and noted that, as of now, the state is permitting snow days to be re-designated as remote learning days for this year only. Board member Finnigan noted a three-hour delay results in very short class times, especially at the high school level. Board Chair Mercik Davis and Board member Lingenfelter agreed. Board members Sepko, Gazdik, Fry and Dudack supported the three-hour

delay to be used only in rare circumstances. Board member Dudack added the decision is operational and should be at the Superintendent's discretion. Board members Sattan, Sepko and Lingenfelter were opposed to setting the 2022 graduation at this point. Board members Dudack, Finnigan, Gazdik, Fry, Mercik Davis and Drzyzga were in support of establishing the 2022 graduation date now.

MOTION #21-33: Mercik Davis moved to approved the 2021-2022 school calendar as presented with the addition of a three-hour delay option only to be used in extreme circumstances. Fry seconded the motion and Sepko, Finnigan, Gazdik, Fry, Drzyzga, Mercik Davis and Dudack voted in favor. Sattan and Lingenfelter voted against. The motion carried **7-2-0**. Board member Sattan said she voted against the motion because she was not in favor of the three-hour delay option; however, she was in support of the school calendar as presented.

MOTION #21-34: Finnigan moved to establish the 2022 high school graduation date as June 11, 2022. Dudack seconded the motion. Finnigan, Gazdik, Drzyzga, Dudack and Mercik Davis voted in favor. Sepko, Lingenfelter, Fry and Sattan voted against. The motion carried **5-4-0**.

SHS Student Representative

Ms. Jindal said the high school is currently holding senior class council meetings weekly and seniors are receiving college acceptance letters. Work on the spring musical is underway and students are working in small groups in the auditorium. At the middle school, the boys' and girls' basketball teams are holding tryouts and practices begin this week. Many SMS clubs are very active, such as the drama club and student council. Students in grades 6 and 8 will have an opportunity this week to participate in the Scholastic Challenge. Mr. Shaw said elementary schools started the full in-person/full remote learning model last week and held spirit days each day. This Friday, students can wear their favorite sports team. At McAlister, the Social Emotional Learning committee has been holding virtual assemblies to welcome back students. At Spaulding, Suzi Kline, the author of the *Horrible Harry* series, will be visiting.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Board member Finnigan thanked Principal Pryce and the McAlister staff for the welcome back video sent to students.

Board member Fry would like to discuss replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous People's Day.

Board member Drzyzga thanked the McAlister staff and administration for their work in getting students back to full in-person learning.

Board member Dudack thanked Spaulding administrators and staff for welcoming back the students to full in-person learning.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
 - Dr. Van Tassel was pleased with the return to full in-person learning last week for the elementary schools and the middle school will begin this week.
 - He reminded everyone that the graduation date for this year has been set for June 12th.
 - Dr. Van Tassel, Mr. Hoff, Board Chair Mercik Davis and Board member Sepko will be presenting the district's Capital Improvement Plan to ACCE this Thursday.

- Superintendent Van Tasel thanked the elementary parents who attended the strategic planning focus group meeting. The secondary parents focus group meeting will be held on February 11th.
- Board Chair's Report
 - Board Chair Mercik Davis said the beginning work on the Portrait of the Graduate is going well.
 - She said the town ice skating rink is now open at McAlister School's basketball court.
 - She thanked the administration and staff for getting students back to full in-person learning.
- Business Manager's Report
 - Mr. Hoff said tomorrow is a meal distribution day, and once we know tomorrow's status we will communicate any change to families.
- Board of Selectmen's Report
 - No report
- Board of Finance Liaison's Report
 - No report

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #21-35: Finnigan moved to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of January 4, 2021, January 11, 2021, and January 19, 2021. Gazdik seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously **9-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

None

Discussion/Action Items

- Discussion and Possible Approval of Using Snow Days as Remote Learning Days for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year.
Board member Sepko said remote learning days instead of snow days may be difficult for planning for parents and could be setting a precedent. Board members discussed concerns with the quality of education on remote learning days. They also discussed establishing a limit for the number of snow days before moving to remote learning days. They discussed June 18th as the last day for snow days before moving to remote learning days for any snow days after that date.
MOTION #21-36: Finnigan moved to continue with regular snow days until those cancellations would extend the school year beyond June 18, 2021 at which time snow days would be covered by remote learning days. Drzyzga seconded the motion. Board members discussed concerns with students attending school late into June and the possibility of having to look at removing days from April vacation. Board Chair Mercik Davis called for a vote. Finnigan, Gazdik, Fry and Drzyzga voted in favor of the motion. Sepko, Sattan, Lingenfelter, Dudack and Mercik Davis voted against the motion. The motion failed **4-5-0**.
- December Financial Report
Mr. Hoff said the projected end of year surplus is \$57,064. There was an increase in salaries due the district hiring our own substitutes. He reported the net out-of-district tuition surplus is \$144,128 based on the December 1 state reporting. He said there was little change to grants this month, but the district is expected to receive a second round of ESSER grant funding from the state, which can be used through September 2023. The Food Service shows a loss of \$18,383 for December. Having students in school full time will help as well as continuing to provide meals for all students seven days a week.

Board member Sattan asked if the Board will be involved in how the ESSER funds are allocated. Mr. Hoff said the state will be setting grant priorities that are likely more flexible than the fall. and the information will be shared with the Board. He noted that sometimes the turnaround time for when an application is released and when it is to be submitted is a short timeframe, but even if that is the case, he believes the application can be changed once submitted.

- 2021-2022 Budget Discussion

Dr. Van Tassel said the discussion tonight will be focused revenues. Mr. Hoff explained the types of grants: entitlement grants (Title I, II, III, IV, IDEA, Perkins, CRF, and ESSER), and he explained the spending rules of these grants. Mr. Hoff said another revenue source is private donations such as memorial gifts, charitable estate contributions, and PTO/PTAC, SFES and booster club donations. Mr. Hoff reviewed the federal and state grants projected for next year, resulting in an end of year balance in 2021-22 of \$155,211. He noted the salaries that are paid for out of grant funds. Mr. Hoff highlighted the Open Choice grant expenditures in the 2020-2021 budget and the 2021-2022 proposed budget. Many expenditures have been moved out of the Choice grant into the BOE budget due to a smaller balance in the Open Choice grant fund. Board member Dudack asked what the district has projected for the number of Choice students next year. Mr. Hoff said no formal discussions have occurred at this point since the district has not received the seat declaration form from Open Choice, but we are budgeting to keep it the same; at a 2% reimbursement rate. Dr. Van Tassel noted it has been difficult to get accepted students to enroll in Suffield with more opportunities for school choice. Board members discussed increasing marketing efforts for the Choice program as well as the Agriscience program.

Board members reviewed the budget object codes, including 8000-Dues and Fees (2.03% decrease), 7000-Property and Equipment (133.92% increase), 6000-Supplies and Materials (4.42% decrease), 5000-Other Purchased Services (0.07% decrease), 4000-Purchased Property Services (7.13% increase), and 3000-Professional and Technical Services (2.05% increase). Mr. Hoff again noted that many of the budget increases are due to moving expenses from the Open Choice grant fund to the BOE budget. In response to a question regarding the replacement of floors in Spaulding classrooms a few classes at a time, Mr. Plano said we cannot repair too many at one time otherwise we would have to go out for abatement which is very costly. In response to a question as to why there is an increase in textbooks when we are a 1:1 district, Ms. Zawawi said the increase is due to the purchase of books to supplement classroom libraries to offer more diversity. She added a high school audit is currently underway to ensure teachers have access to high quality materials as it relates to diversity. Ms. Zawawi explained there are online textbooks subscriptions for all core classes, however, they were purchased relatively close to each other and will expire around the same time. A five year staggered plan is being created and will be reviewed by the Curriculum and Instruction subcommittee. Board member Finnigan suggested utilizing organizations like SFES to support this endeavor. Ms. Zawawi said the DEI council is currently looking at grant sources. In response to a Board member's question regarding transportation costs, Mr. Hoff said the costs do not include fuel, only the cost of the busses and the bus drivers. Mr. Kost asked if gas and diesel are budgeted for next year at an increase over this year because prices will increase. Mr. Hoff said they are budgeted the same as this year. Diesel prices are locked in through June of this year. Mr. Hoff added the district is currently in negotiations with M&J. Board members asked for the grants presentation and the budget object code document be sent to Board members. Board members also asked for each line item that have been impacted by the Open Choice grant be notated and shared with Board members.

- COVID-19 Update
Superintendent Van Tasel said cases in district dropped this past week and no new cases were reported. Town Emergency Management Director, John Spencer, has noticed a discrepancy in state reporting of Suffield cases and the cases of which he is aware. This may be due to cases in the prison being included in the Suffield numbers. Dr. Van Tasel said it is anticipated that educators will not be able to get vaccinated for four to six weeks. We are awaiting permission from the state to enter our faculty and staff into the VAMS system. Dr. Van Tasel is concerned with the variants to the COVID-19 virus, and health officials are saying there could be significant impact to school operations in the spring. If the district has to move back to full remote, having in person days at the end of the year could be of value.

Subcommittee Reports

- January 15 & 29, 2021 Community Engagement & Public Relations Subcommittee meeting – Board Member Fry said the committee reviewed the format and content for the newsletter at the first meeting. At the January 29 meeting, the committee finalized the newsletter content and layout. A courtesy copy will be sent to all Board members prior to it being sent to families this Friday.
- January 28, 2021 – Finance & Facilities Subcommittee meeting – Board member Sepko said the committee discussed the food nutrition waiver and the renovations to the Agriscience food service room and the Family and Consumer Science kitchen, costing \$13,800 and \$14,500 respectively. The committee also discussed the SMS music facility project and since the cost may be over the approved \$2,000,000, the administration will ask for an update from the architects to determine next steps.

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – Board member Sattan reported that CREC is ramping up efforts to influence the legislative agenda. CREC’s priority is to request increased state spending to support CREC programs, which may mitigate expenses at the district level.
- Agriscience – Board member Fry said 40 students have been accepted into the program next year. The department is looking to increase recruiting efforts as there are still 10 slots available for next year. SAE and FFA students will be presenting their capstone projects in the upcoming weeks. The department is looking forward to filling the Agriscience extension supervisor position for extending supervisory support to students outside of the school day.
- CABE – Board member Drzyzga said CABE sent an invitation for its annual equity symposium on February 10, which will be virtual. She will forward the information to Board members.

Future Business

- Discussion of Columbus Day versus Indigenous People’s Day
- Update on DEI progress in the district

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Board member Sepko thanked teachers and staff for getting students back to full in-person learning.

Adjournment

Sepko moved, Finnigan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:18 p.m. All members voted in favor.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan
Secretary