

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Held Remotely via Zoom
April 6, 2021

Call to Order

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

Present: Board members Jamie Drzyzga, Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik, Scott Lingenfelter (arr. 7:45p.m.), Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, Michael Sepko; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Bill Hoff; and SHS Student Representative Akshita Jindal

Absent: SHS Student Representative Connor Shaw

MOTION #21-43: Mercik Davis moved to add Letter F to the Discussion/Action Items to discuss concerns related to Agriscience transportation. Gazdik seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Recognition

Mr. David Orie, SHS teacher, and Advanced Placement English Language and Composition students, Faith Neault, Ashley Greene and Sarah Whitehouse, attended the meeting to share their project-based learning presentations with the Board. Mr. Orie explained the project he assigned to his students which was to identify a problem in education during the pandemic, collect data and develop a solution.

SHS Student Representative

Ms. Jindal reported that the high school currently has 537 students, or 70% of population, attending in person, which is the highest number of students in the building this year. The spring musical, "Quarantunes" is recorded skits of students favorite shows and will be shown via Zoom on April 8th. The Senior prom is May 21 and the Junior prom is May 22. Spring testing is underway and includes the SAT school day for juniors, which occurred on March 24, with a make-up day on April 28. The Next Generation Science Standards exams for juniors will take place on May 21, and AP exams will take place in May. The SHS World Language Honors Society Induction Ceremony will take place on May 6, and report cards will be mailed on Friday. Board member Mercik Davis read Mr. Shaw's update as he was not in attendance. At McAlister, parents were given an opportunity to attend a social media parent event on April 29. After vacation, students will attend the Scott Driscoll assembly on April 20 and Arbor Day celebration on April 24, both will be held virtually. SBAC testing will occur in late April and early May. The Kid's Heart challenge at McAlister has already succeeded last year's goal and has exceeded \$7,000. The bike safety program will occur this spring for fourth and fifth grade students. Connection classes have also begun at McAlister. At Spaulding, this past Monday marked the next school model change and only about 40 students are attending remotely. Mrs. Potter's first grade class were successful in convincing Ms. Olearczyk and Mr. Ferraro to create soccer field on the playground. The final book of 2021 will be announced on Thursday with a mystery reader culminating in the end of the Tournament of Books to celebrate the month of reading in March. Students voted on their favorite read aloud book at both McAlister and Spaulding.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Board member Finnigan asked if there was any updated guidance from the Centers for Disease Control or the local health district in reducing the length and number of quarantines.

Board member Dudack thanked the district for hosting the social media safety event for parents.

Board member Fry thanked Mr. Orie for extending an invitation to Board members to his classroom last week to hear students' presentations. He requested the Zoom link to the high school musical be sent to Board members. He also would like to hear a report from the district's nursing department.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
 - Dr. Van Tassel congratulated paraprofessionals in recognition of Paraprofessional Week. He also noted, the process for selecting this year's Paraeducator of the Year is underway.
 - He thanked the Board for their attention to detail in preparing the 2021-2022 budget. A formal presentation was given to the Board of Finance last week. He noted the budget could be further reduced by using COVID-19 relief funds.
 - Superintendent Van Tassel said graduation is being planned for outside on Beneski Field with safety measures in place and in accordance with the Governor's guidelines. He added that he is hopeful that end of year events can be scheduled. However, depending on case rates and quarantines, these events or individual student attendance at these events may be impacted. The district is making efforts to support outdoor events at all grade levels.
 - Dr. Van Tassel said Phase I of the Strategic Planning/Portrait of a Graduate is almost complete. The last two focus groups, elementary and secondary faculty and staff, will be occurring in the coming weeks. Findings from all focus groups and next steps in the process will be shared with the Board at an upcoming Board meeting.
 - Superintendent Van Tassel said the Teamster's negotiations are underway and the objective is to reach a tentative agreement by the end of the fiscal year, which will then come to the Board for approval.
 - Dr. Van Tassel thanked Mr. David Corliss, a parent in district, who is connected to Pacific Life Foundation and helped Spaulding School apply for and receive a grant for \$1,000 to be used toward supplemental reading materials.
 - Dr. Van Tassel wished students, staff and families a wonderful vacation, and he thanked Debra Dudack, Girl Scout troop #10981, and all families who donated to providing gift baskets of Girl Scout cookies to all the schools and Central Office.
- Board Chair's Report
 - Board Chair Mercik Davis thanked Board members and administrators relative to all the work done on the budget.
 - She attended a meeting with State Representative Tami Zawistowski, Central Office administration and Agriscience Director Laura LaFlamme regarding seeking support for Agriscience programs at the state level, specifically transportation opportunities.
 - Board Chair Mercik Davis also attended a meeting with Melissa Mack and Ryan Anderson to discuss and plan for the Tri-board meeting. The meeting was scheduled for this week but is being postponed until the town and district receive guidance from the state on how the pandemic relief funds can be used.

- Business Manager's Report
 - Mr. Hoff said the Board of Finance will be meeting each week to review the budget and must vote on the overall budget by April 19. The Town meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 28.
- Board of Selectmen's Report
 - First Selectwoman Mack thanked the Board for their collaborative efforts on the budget.
 - She stated that Suffield has not been as financially impacted by the pandemic as other towns, which means the federal funds the town receives will give the town a great opportunity to make progress in investing in Suffield. She is looking forward to Tri-board meeting.
 - Ms. Mack said the multi-use trail project connecting the schools is going out to bid and the project should be completed by fall 2021.
 - She said the Town Hall renovation is complete and came in under budget. She is looking forwarding to welcoming the public back into the building.
 - Ms. Mack thanked Akshita Jindal and Melissa Finnigan who are the student and Board of Education representatives to promote involvement by students and school staff in the 350th town celebration parade this fall.
- Board of Finance Liaison's Report
 - No report

Board member Lingenfelter joined the meeting at 7:45pm

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #21-44: Gazdik moved to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of March 1, 2021 and March 15, 2021. Finnigan seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #21-45: Dudack moved to approve the following on the consent agenda: Revisions to Policy #0521 – Equal Opportunity Plan/Nondiscrimination; Policy #1212 – School Volunteers; Policy #1700 – Otherwise Lawful Possession of Firearms on School Property; Policy #4115.3 – Evaluation, Termination, and Non-Renewal of Athletic Coaches; Policy #4118.11/4218.11 – Nondiscrimination; Policy #4118.112/4218.112 – Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment; and Policy #5145.5 – Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment (Students). Fry seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

Discussion/Action Items

- COVID-19 Update

Superintendent Van Tassel gave an update on the school operational status. He shared the enrollment numbers as of April 1 and April 6. The number of in-person students has increased significantly in the last week. He also shared data on cases by school since the week of February 15, which is the week that all schools were back to full in-person learning. He noted that when there is a holiday or vacation, spikes in cases have occurred a week or two later. With the increase in cases in children and families traveling next week, now would not be a good time to reduce current quarantine guidelines. The next phase, possibly starting in early May, would be to reduce the quarantines from 10 to seven days with a negative test after five days. If that change proves successful, the next step could be to just quarantine the positive case and give families of exposed children the option of whether to quarantine their child or send them to school. Superintendent Van Tassel said he is going to send a communication to families in the next few days relative to traveling over April vacation, specifically that the travel advisory is no longer in effect per the Governor. Board members had questions around spikes in cases and

quarantines, the continuation of Wellness Wednesdays, and clarifying how absences will work for in-person students who travel over vacation and choose to stay home until getting a negative test. Superintendent Van Tassel said spikes in cases occurred a week or two after holiday breaks, Wellness Wednesdays will continue through the end of this school year, and in-person students who choose to stay home to self-quarantine after vacation will be marked absent.

- February Financial Report

Mr. Hoff said the projected end of year surplus is \$620,727; a slight decrease from last month's surplus of \$626,692. Electricity and heating is projected using actual expenditures from March through June in 2018-2019. There were no significant changes to grants. There was an almost \$9,600 surplus in food service in January. The district expects to at least break even for the remainder of the year. There continues to be a surplus and the district will continue to work with the Board and town to determine how best to manage the surplus.

- Discussion and Possible Approval of Bylaw #9326 - Minutes

Board Chair Mercik Davis said approval of policies are usually placed on the consent agenda after the 30 day read period; however, this bylaw was added to the discussion/action item portion of the agenda because concerns have been raised. Policy subcommittee Chair Dudack explained the rationale for the revisions to this bylaw. The subcommittee revisited this bylaw at the request of a board member and the concern of how minutes are recorded.

MOTION #21-46: Dudack moved to approve the revisions to Bylaw #9326 as proposed. Fry seconded the motion.

Policy Subcommittee members expressed support of the bylaw, saying the proposed revisions were made to provide a summary of meeting discussions, not verbatim minutes, in the most equitable way; it provides transparency; revisions were made using recommendations from CABA and that CABA suggests that transcribed minutes can make it difficult to get minutes approved; taping meetings provides the public the opportunity to hear the details of meetings; the bylaw eliminates inequity in some board member's comments; some Board members had attributed statements in the minutes more than others; the Board member comment section can provide for all members and recorded minutes and summary communications from Superintendent will provide transparency; and the Subcommittee members worked diligently to prepare the policy.

A Board member expressed a concern that if a meeting is not recording or the recording fails, then there will not be a complete transcript of the meeting available to the public. In response to a Board member's question as to if they can request their comment be added to the record during a discussion item, it was said that the intent would be to have the Board member state their comment during the Board member comment section of the meeting.

Points of dissent include structural problems with the agenda items in the policy only applying to a fraction of BOE meetings and the policy's assignment of the minutes-keeping to the recording secretary, as the recording secretary does not traditionally attend special meetings and some regular meetings; not all regular meetings are videotaped; Superintendent Van Tassel confirmed that meeting videos will not be available in perpetuity; other large Suffield Town Boards (BOF/BOS) attribute Board member statements and opinions to their elected members; the Superintendent, the Board Chair, the Board Secretary and sometimes the Recording Secretary see and can discuss the minutes as a check on accuracy and fairness before minutes are circulated as a draft; the transparency provided to the community is worth working through the details as a Board; assertions that offering the videotape gives transparency neglect the time-

consuming difficulty in accessing any particular part of the tape, even when it's available; there are times when Board member comments should be recorded and attributed at the time of a motion, dissent, question, or vote in the discussion/action items; and the new policy would cause long meetings to be even longer.

Board Chair Mercik Davis called for a vote. Board members Sepko, Fry, Drzyzga, Gazdik, Dudack and Mercik Davis voted in favor. Lingenfelter, Sattan and Finnigan voted against. The motion passed **6-3-0**.

- Discussion and Possible Approval of the 2021-2022 Healthy Foods Certification
Mr. Hoff said the state is now requiring two motions to accept the Healthy Foods Certification, so the Board needs to approve this year's and next year's programs.

MOTION #21-47: Finnigan moved, pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the Suffield Board of Education certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups. Sepko seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

MOTION #21-48: Gazdik moved that the Suffield Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food and beverage items are not sold from a vending machine or school store during the period of July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021. An "event" is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The "regular school day" is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. "Location" means where the event is being held. Dudack seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

MOTION #21-49: Dudack moved, pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the Suffield Board of Education certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups. Drzyzga seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

MOTION #21-50: Gazdik moved that the Suffield Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the

regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food and beverage items are not sold from a vending machine or school store during the period of July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022. An “event” is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The “regular school day” is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held. Finnigan seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

- **Non-Renewal of Staff in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes**
MOTION #21-51: Mercik Davis moved to approve the non-renewal of staff as presented in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes. Sattan seconded the motion. Dr. Van Tassel said according to Statutes, boards of education must take action each year on the non-renewal of teachers that have been in district over 40 days and affected teachers be notified by May 1. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.
- **Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Agriscience Transportation**
Superintendent Van Tassel said 17 East Windsor students are attending our Agriscience program. East Windsor had designated both Suffield and Rockville Agriscience programs, but recently made the shift back to just designating the Rockville Agriscience program. As Rockville is now East Windsor’s sole designation, the East Windsor Board of Education will not be providing transportation to East Windsor students attending the Suffield Agriscience program beginning next year. This issue was brought to the Finance subcommittee and we propose that we share the cost of transportation with East Windsor and Enfield. The Superintendent requested that the Board allow him to enter into agreement with East Windsor to share the cost of transportation for these students for the next three years, which will cost \$2 per student per day, sharing this cost with East Windsor.

MOTION 21-52: Gazdik moved to authorize the Superintendent to enter into an agreement with the East Windsor Board of Education relative to East Windsor Agriscience transportation. Sepko seconded the motion. Board member Sepko said the 17 students generate about \$11,000 in revenue and the cost of transportation will be about \$3,000, so transportation costs are nominal and we need to do as much as possible to support the Agriscience program. All members voted in favor. The motion carried **9-0-0**.

Subcommittee Reports

- March 15, 2021 Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee meeting – Board Member Drzyzga said the math coaches at all four schools presented their theory of action to improve math performance of students. They have created a plan and have a three-year goal to increase math scores in the district.
- April 1, 2021 – Finance & Facilities Subcommittee meeting – Board member Sepko said most topics discussed at the subcommittee meeting have been covered in this meeting with the exception of the music room. There was a discussion on how the music room project would converge with the long-term town facilities study that is being conducted. It was determined that the music room project will be put on hold pending the outcome of the long-term facilities study. Board Chair Mercik Davis and Board member Sepko will communicate with Melissa Mack and Board of Finance on this decision.

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – no report
- Agriscience – Board member Fry said the Agriscience consulting committee met last month. Faculty and students gave presentations detailing a wide-range of events happening. The Agriscience extension coordinator shared what students are doing after school including repairing of tractors and making maple syrup. Enrollment, recruitment and advertising were also discussed. He thanked Dr. Van Tassel for finding a solution to the East Windsor transportation issue.
- CABA – no report

Future Business

Overview of nursing department

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Board members Sepko and Gazdik thanked Ms. Guerrette for her work in supporting the Board of Education. Board member Sepko also stated that he respects all opinions shared this evening and believes the sharing of ideas and opinions is important and essential for the work of the Board.

Board member Sattan said she does not agree with the revisions to Bylaw # 9326 covering meeting minutes. Her concerns include the inaccuracy of the policy, stating it applies to all regular and special meetings but listing agenda items that only apply to a fraction of only the regular meetings; the policy's assignment of the minutes-keeping to the recording secretary, as the recording secretary does not traditionally even attend special meetings and some regular meetings; not all regular meetings are videotaped; Superintendent Van Tassel confirmed that meeting videos will not be available in perpetuity; other large Suffield Town Boards (BOF/BOS) attribute Board member statements and opinions to their elected members; the Superintendent, the Board Chair, the Board Secretary and sometimes the Recording Secretary see and can discuss the minutes as a check on accuracy and fairness before minutes are circulated as a draft; summarized minutes can be open to interpretation, but the transparency provided to the community is worth working through the details as a Board; assertions that offering the videotape gives transparency neglect the time-consuming difficulty in accessing any particular part of the tape, even when it's available; there are times when Board member comments should be recorded and attributed at the time of a motion, dissent, question, or vote in the discussion/action items.

Board member Finnigan reminded Board members to pick up their Board member appreciation gifts in Central Office.

Board member Dudack thanked Board members for the discussion and dialog tonight relative to the minutes and noted the bylaw provides an opportunity for all members to have their comments recorded. She is also open to review this bylaw in the future if needed.

Board member Lingenfelter said he agreed with Board member Sattan that the taking of minutes as approved tonight will be less transparent. This policy encourages Board members to speak before discussion items are held or repeat themselves a second time after the discussion item in the second board member comments. Board members' comments should be recorded during the time of the discussion. This will create ineffective, inefficient, and even longer meetings. Board member Lingenfelter also said he has heard from students that there is a gender-neutral bathroom being constructed at high school. He does not remember that proposal coming to the Board. He requested this proposal come to the Board for further discussion.

Adjournment

Gazdik moved, Drzyzga seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:49 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view meeting recording:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1T3FJxl2ew_sLY_3NJSs3EEGJXuCSCkhE/view?usp=sharing

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of May 3, 2021.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan
Secretary