

Board of Education Regular Meeting  
Suffield High School Media Center  
and Remotely via Zoom  
June 21, 2021

Call to Order

Board Chair Davis called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik (arrived 6:55 p.m.), Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, Director of Special Services Diana Kelley, and Business Manager Bill Hoff; and SHS Student Representative Connor Shaw

Absent: Board members Jamie Drzyzga, Scott Lingenfelter and Michael Sepko

SHS Student Representative

SHS Student Representative Connor Shaw updated the Board on happenings at Spaulding and McAlister Schools including their field day, a second-to-third grade transition virtual meeting, a virtual meeting for parents of incoming Kindergarten students, family connections and social-emotional learning parent nights, Spirit week, the Bike/Walk to School day, year-end assessments, a Unified Sports celebration, a MIS band performance, and a MIS Student Council cereal box collection for Suffield Community Aid.

Public Comment

Kelli Young, 285 North Stone Street, said she was disappointed that the district would let the high school principal go. She said he breathed life in the high school and that during a time of social-emotional difficulties, it is hard to see him go. Board Chair Davis said Mr. Blain took an outside position, it was his choice to leave the district and we wish him well.

Gary Cronin, 32 Magnolia Drive, said he was disappointed that Mr. Blain is leaving. He would prefer a discussion over speaking without Board response. He has witnessed Mr. Blain as an excellent leader and believes Suffield is missing stability. He believes Mr. Blain did not leave on his own accord and questions how parents can have faith that the district will not lose additional talent. Board Chair Davis said it is a personnel issue and, as such, the Board cannot discuss it in public. Further comment may be directed to Superintendent Van Tassel.

Kristen Conway, 449 Mapleton Avenue, feels the same way about Mr. Blain. She is concerned whether someone with his characteristics would be willing to come to Suffield. She is worried about the district turnover. Board Chair Davis said the district will undertake a rigorous hiring process to find the highest quality administrator available.

Board Member Comment

Board member Fry commented in support of PRIDE month. He values all as members of the community. He said social/emotional supports must be prioritized above academic needs at this time to support these children and their families.

Board member Dudack thanked Superintendent Van Tasel and all the administrators for what they accomplished this year.

### Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
  - The Superintendent said Principal Blain will be leaving the district. Assistant Superintendent Zawawi will be serving in an interim capacity. The formal search for a replacement will begin next fall, there will be full stakeholder engagement. Mrs. Inero will be working at the high school while Mrs. Eichorn is on leave. Dr. Rose will be working as the interim PreK-12 Curriculum Coordinator during Mrs. Zawawi's interim assignment.
  - A tri-board meeting (Boards of Selectmen, Finance, Education) was held to begin discussion of the allocation of ESSER/American Rescue Plan (ARP) dollars for the town and district.
  - The Department of Public Health developed guidelines for mask-wearing. The current guidelines state that masks must be worn in school buildings. A change to this guidance has not yet been made, though it may be coming. No decision has been made yet as for the mask policy for next fall.
  - Today marks the end of the school year. Dr. Van Tasel expressed thanks to the BOE, faculty, staff, parents and students for supporting each other during this challenging school year. He hopes all will have a safe and relaxing summer and looks forward to the first day of school, which will be September 1, 2021.
  
- Board Chair's Report
  - Board Chair Mercik Davis is pleased to announce that the Board unanimously approved a 2.25% raise with a one-year contract extension for Superintendent Van Tasel. The Board is incredibly grateful for his work in the district. His open communication style and strength in leadership benefited the district greatly.
  - PRIDE month is here. The district will continue to focus on the needs of all students and staff to foster a climate of support for all. The district's DEI work will allow us to provide an inclusive and safe environment for years to come.
  - Congratulations to the graduating class of 2021. Special thanks go out to recent graduate Akshita Jindal as she moves on from her work as student representative to the BOE. Thanks also to Connor Shaw who will be continuing to work with the Board next year. Welcome to Sophia Mormino who will be beginning her term as the junior BOE student representative.
  - The Tri-board meeting was collaborative and constructive as the district and town work to decide how to best use the ESSER/ARP funds.
  - Thanks to the administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents as everyone navigated possibly the most difficult year in educational history. We wish all a restful, safe and happy summer vacation.
  
- Business Manager's Report
  - Mr. Hoff said the department will be sending out a transportation survey to help assess transportation needs for next year. A summer program for the distribution of free breakfast and lunch is underway. Sign up in advance for meals. A communication has gone out to the district, information is available on the district website and questions can be directed to Business Manager Bill Hoff.
  
- Board of Selectmen's Report
  - No report

- Board of Finance Liaison's Report
  - No report

### Approval of Minutes

**MOTION #21-61:** Fry moved to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of May 3, 2021, May 17, 2021, and June 1, 2021. Finnigan seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **6-0-0**.

### Consent Agenda

**MOTION #21-62:** Finnigan moved, Gazdik seconded to approve the following on the consent agenda:

- A. Revisions to Policy #5141.4 – Child Abuse, Neglect and Sexual Assault and #5144 – Student Discipline
- B. SHS Field Trip Request – National FFA Convention – Indianapolis, IN-Oct. 27-31, 2021

All members voted in favor. The motion carried **6-0-0**.

### Discussion/Action Items

- Capstone Presentation

SHS Assistant Principal Ashley Eichorn presented the SHS Capstone work to date. In this multi-year requirement, students are asked to demonstrate their ability to apply key knowledge and skills by planning, completing and presenting a culminating project linked to one or more areas of personal interest. Successful completion of a Capstone Project will earn the student one elective credit toward high school graduation. Mrs. Eichorn said the Wildcat advisory period is used one time per month to help students organize material, supplement their portfolio and create an annual reflection paper. The Capstone final presentations will take place in twelfth grade, with students presenting their portfolio and final project, and making personal reflections on their experience. Successes of the Capstone program development include the creation of a capstone handbook and an exemplar bank to serve as examples. The next steps in the execution of the program will include a Capstone orientation with incoming ninth graders, and further communications of expectations and progress monitoring for all other students. 76% of current students have stated an idea and are making progress on the journey. The Capstone exercise will connect to the Portrait of the Graduate work that the district is undertaking.

Board members asked about Capstone-related teacher professional development and the mentoring that is available to the teachers. Ms. Eichorn is the Capstone leader, and is looking at matching teachers with more experienced mentor teachers. Currently, the assignment to a Wildcat group is random, though this can become under consideration as the Capstone process continues to be implemented. Board members asked how the Capstone project process works from year-to-year. Mrs. Eichorn said Capstone structures are still evolving, but student exploration is encouraged, as long as all work is grounded in core values and twentieth century skills. Board members asked about how projects are chosen, monitored, and evaluated and how student diligence will be ensured. There are rubrics for every year, and students will be subjected to progress monitoring. It will not connect to honor roll, grade reporting, only senior year will be formally graded---this might evolve over time. Projects will have flexibility in choice, but rigor will be required.

BOE Student Representative Connor Shaw reiterated the importance of getting the rubric out early to help students and suggested that students with similar projects get grouped together for mentoring. Administration is open to structuring supports to help all students. Dr. Van Tassel said there is value and growth in struggling, and this will be honored on the Capstone journey. Board

members requested that students that are not entirely engaged be brought along to keep expectations high.

- **COVID-19 Update**

Superintendent Van Tassel said the district reopening plan is posted on the district website. It will be updated throughout the summer in preparation for the beginning of the school year. The district COVID numbers had continued to decrease drastically through the end of the school year. He is expecting the State Department of Education to give guidance on whether districts will be required to offer virtual learning. The district will be prepared for a wide variety of scenarios.

- **April Financial Report**

Business Manager Hoff presented the financial report. The current year-end surplus estimate is \$736,136, based on May's preliminary report. If all items requested are approved, the projected surplus would be reduced to \$570,808. Food service continues to show a surplus, and summer lunch availability will positively affect our bottom line.

- **Approval of Preschool Tuition for the 2021-2022 School Year**

The current half-day preschool tuition of \$1400 has been in place for five years. Administration is recommending an increase to \$1600. The full day program tuition recommendation moves from \$2800 to \$3200. Mr. Hoff said the preschool is still affordably priced and the Finance Subcommittee reviewed and supports the recommendation.

**MOTION #21-63:** Dudack moved to accept the recommended increase. Gazdik seconded the motion. Business Manager Hoff clarified that the tuition goes to the town and applies to the peer model students that are paying tuition. Dr. Diana Kelley said that the program shoots for a 50/50 split between early intervention students and peer models. Board members discussed moving the preschool program toward accreditation and free preschool. Dr. Van Tassel said there is not free, universal preschool at this time. The tuition has not been increased in some time, and there are community preschools that would be affected if tuition is kept artificially low. Board Chair Mercik Davis called for a vote. Dudack, Finnigan, Gazdik, Mercik Davis, and Sattan voted in favor of the motion. Fry voted against. The motion passed **5-1**.

- **Approval of School Lunch Prices for the 2021-2022 School Year**

Mr. Hoff presented the recommendation to increase school breakfast price by \$0.10 and lunch by \$0.25. These increases will keep the district aligned with the State's expectations.

**MOTION #21-64:** Dudack motioned to approve the school lunch prices as presented. Finnigan seconded the motion. Mr. Hoff confirmed that during the 2021-2022 school year, grants will continue to pay for free breakfast and lunch. Board Chair Mercik Davis called for a vote. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **6-0**.

- **Review and Approval of Utilization of COVID-19 Relief Funds**

District discussions have centered on which programs and services the district will consider for the ESSER 2 and American Rescue Plan (ARP). Superintendent Van Tassel outlined use of the ESSER II funding and recommended grant funding for a family-school liaison and a new school psychologist to cover additional testing and supports. Kindergarten enrollment is higher than expected, and Superintendent Van Tassel recommends using ESSER II funds to fund an additional Kindergarten class teacher to allow for small class sizes. There is also an option to shift a headcount from the fourth grade at the intermediate school. Other significant ARP ESSER funds are earmarked for AWS asbestos floors and SHS science and math interactive technology, replacing the current Smartboards. Other expenses being recommended by Administration include the SMS

tech woodshop, floor scrubbers, a SHS auditorium projector and a SHS courtyard renovation. Board Chair Davis confirmed that the Board can approve all or eliminate some line items in the proposal.

**MOTION #21-65:** Board Chair Davis calls for a motion to approve the use of COVID funds and year end transfers. Dudack moved and Fry seconded the motion.

Board members expressed the need for small class sizes in Kindergarten, and support of the family-school liaison and psychologist. Board members were split about adding a headcount to fill the Kindergarten position versus covering the Kindergarten with an internal employee. Some Board members expressed a reluctance to move a fourth-grade teacher while dealing with the ramifications of COVID. Some Board members believed that class sizes will remain reasonable even after an internal move and the grant money is better spent elsewhere. In response to a Board member's concern over the one-year limited term of the position, Dr. Van Tassel said he does not know if they will be needed year-over-year.

For clarity, Dr. Van Tassel asked to separate Board member Dudack's motion into two motions, one regarding the application of the grant funds apart and one covering budget transfers. Board member Dudack withdrew the previous motion.

**MOTION #21-66:** Board member Dudack motioned to approve the COVID funds as presented in Dr. Van Tassel's recommendation. Fry seconded the motion. Board Chair Mercik Davis called for a vote. Dudack, Finnigan and Fry voted in favor of the motion. Gazdik, Mercik Davis and Sattan voted against. The motion failed **3-3**.

**MOTION #21-67:** Board Chair Mercik Davis motioned to approve the grant funding as presented, with the exception of the addition of a headcount for a Kindergarten teacher. Sattan seconded the motion. Board member discussion consisted of calls for reconsideration. Board Chair Mercik Davis called for a vote. Mercik Davis and Sattan voted in favor of the motion. Dudack, Finnigan, Fry and Gazdik voted against. The motion failed **2-4**.

**MOTION #21-68:** Board member Dudack motioned to approve the addition of a Kindergarten teacher for next year using the ESSER funds as presented. Fry seconded the motion. Board Chair Mercik Davis called for a vote. Dudack, Finnigan, Fry and Gazdik voted in favor of the motion. Mercik Davis and Sattan voted against. The motion passed **4-2**.

**MOTION #21-69:** Board member Dudack motioned to approve the remaining uses of the grant funds as recommended by Dr. Van Tassel. Fry seconded the motion. Board Chair Mercik Davis called for a vote. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **6-0**.

- Approval of FY21 Budget Transfers and Purchases

**MOTION #21-70:** Board member Finnigan motioned to approve the transfers and purchases as presented. Dudack seconded the motion. Board Chair Mercik Davis called for a vote. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **6-0**.

- Discussion Concerning In-person Board Meetings with a Hybrid Option per the First Selectwoman's Request

Board Chair Davis reviewed the guidance recently received from First Selectwoman. Fully remote meetings are acceptable, hybrid meetings are requested to have in person attendance sufficient for a quorum. The town's preference is to offer hybrid meetings where community members can

participate via Zoom. Board members participating remotely will still be allowed to vote. Location of meetings is open for change to improve technology and meeting access.

#### Subcommittee Reports

- May 14 & 28, 2021 Community Engagement & PR Subcommittee meeting – Board member Fry thanked the subcommittee and newsletter contributors in the creation of the recent communication.
- June 3, 2021 Finance & Facilities Subcommittee meeting – Board Chair Davis reported that the subcommittee discussed the financial information that was presented earlier in the meeting.
- June 21, 2020 Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee meeting – Board Chair Davis reported that student achievement data was presented. There is room for recovery, and the administrators are formulating a plan for further improvement.

#### Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – Board member Sattan reported that the State budget has passed and CREC discussed the budget implementer and its impacts on public education. Many budget details are included in the implementer, and summaries will be forthcoming to help districts in understanding its contents.
- Agriscience – Nothing to report.
- CABE – Nothing to report.

#### Future Business

- None

#### Public Comment

- None

#### Board Member Comment

Board member Gazdik thanked the teacher and administrators for their work this year.

Board member Dudack was impressed with the Capstone project presentation and thanked Superintendent Van Tasel and Business Manager Bill Hoff for the plan to use the grant funding.

#### Adjournment

Fry moved, Finnigan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:03 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1F2gH6NwwPiek5EcHvLSJ7A7WEnkOxnh4/view?usp=sharing>

*Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of July 19, 2021.*

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan  
Secretary