

Suffield, Connecticut

Approved by Bd. of Ed.

Board of Education Regular Meeting  
Suffield Middle School Auditorium  
and via Zoom  
October 4, 2021

Call to Order

Board Chair Mercik Davis called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

Present: Board members Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik, Scott Lingenfelter, Susan Mercik Davis, and Maureen Sattan (via phone); and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel and Business Manager Bill Hoff

Absent: Jamie Drzyzga and Michael Sepko

Executive Session

Fry moved, Finnigan seconded to go into executive session for the purpose of discussion and review of the Tentative Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the Teamsters Union, inviting in Superintendent Van Tassel and Business Manager Bill Hoff.

The executive session ended at 6:14 p.m.

Regular Session (6:35pm)

Present: In addition to the individuals noted above, Board member Jamie Drzyzga, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi and Suffield High School Student Representative Connor Shaw joined the regular session, and Board member Sattan joined via Zoom.

Absent: Michael Sepko and SHS Student Representative Sophia Mormino

The regular session began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

**MOTION 22-13:** Finnigan moved, Lingenfelter seconded to add a Discussion/Action Item to the agenda – Action Item XI. F. - Approval of the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the Teamsters Union. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Recognition

The Board held recognitions for:

1. Sarah Whitehouse who has been named the National Merit Scholarship Semifinalist presented by Assistant Superintendent Zawawi.
2. TEAM Graduates and their mentors, respectively, presented by Spaulding Assistant Principal and TEAM Coordinator Jack Ferraro: Brooke Schomburg and Shannon Insero; Abby Harrington and Brittany Popeleski; Nicole Olearnick and Shannon Picard; Olivia Raum and Michael Alexopoulos; Rebecca Ferguson and Laura LaFlamme; and Greg Smedberg and Kelly Blais.
3. Suffield Teacher of the Year, Kate Sweeney and Paraeducator of the Year, Doreen Tapper; presented by Spaulding Principal Gina Olearczyk and Suffield Middle School Principal Ken Smith, respectively.

### SHS Student Representatives

Connor Shaw reported that Suffield Middle School's panoramic photo will be taken on October 12, SMS will be partnering with the North Central Connecticut Chamber of Commerce to celebrate students who are displaying acts of kindness, the PTAC will be hosting its annual Boo Bash for 6<sup>th</sup> graders, two 8<sup>th</sup> grade students represented the school and community at the Second International Virtual Youth Leadership for Peace event, and a new mental health awareness program, called Check-in was started. SMS and SHS held their open houses recently. At SHS, students have been picking one game a week to attend to show their support, and along with the special game day is a spirit day as well. Many SHS clubs are involved in the town's 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration parade and a group of SHS students got together to thank bus drivers at McAlister last week, which was featured on Channel 3 news. The courtyard planning is underway and a student survey was sent, which was taken by about 170 students, asking for students' opinions on what they would like to see in the space. At Spaulding, preschoolers are learning about the five senses, second graders are working on writing personal narratives, a virtual school-wide assembly was held last week revamping their Spaulding Stars program, the Superintendent's Listen and Learn event is on October 9, and picture day on October 18. At McAlister, parent volunteers are welcome to help out in the media center and 5<sup>th</sup> graders are enjoying their weekly lessons with Mrs. Wilson. McAlister will once again be participating in One School, One Book and will be reading *Save Me a Seat*. Sarah Weeks, one of the authors of the book, will be visiting the students virtually on October 22. McAlister's picture day is October 18.

### Public Comment

None

### Board Member Comment

Board member Dudack was excited to attend several open houses and Listen and Learn events and she said it is nice to see families attending school events. She was also happy to hear about the high school courtyard.

Board member Fry said he hoped everyone who is eligible for the vaccine gets vaccinated. He said a recent CDC report states that keeping children masked is effective in reducing transmission of the virus. He wished all indigenous people a Happy Indigenous People's Day being celebrated next Monday, and he noted Hartford's City Council unanimously voted to recognize Indigenous People Day instead of Columbus Day.

### Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
  - The Superintendent congratulated Sarah Whitehouse, TEAM mentors and mentees, and the Teacher and Paraeducator of the Year.
  - He thanked Mr. Zenczak and Ms. Flagg for raising school spirit this year. Many people are attending various events to celebrate all that is going on in our schools and community. He thanked the Board for their commitment in this endeavor.
  - The Superintendent also thanked the Town for their support to help alleviate our bus driver shortage. They were extremely receptive and have had many town volunteers willing to help. He also thanked parents for their willingness to drive their students to athletic events in the absence of buses.
- Board Chair's Report
  - Board Chair Davis said she attended the CAFE webinar on Board Chair Leadership During Divisive Times. She said Suffield has not experienced as much difficulty as other districts

- and she attributed that to the district leadership and the patience and understanding of parents and community members.
- She is happy that Dr. Van Tassel is holding the Listen and Learn events and Coffee Hours for staff and families, and she reminded Board members they are welcome to attend.
  - Board Chair Mercik Davis said she is pleased about the community involvement with high school sports and Mr. Zenczak's leadership. It is building a great school spirit and community in a short period of time.
  - The town's 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary parade is taking place on October 9<sup>th</sup>. She asked Board members to indicate their attendance.
  - She thanked parents for their patience during the bussing shortage.
  - Business Manager's Report
    - Mr. Hoff thanked Jackie McDonough of M&J for her tireless work in handling the bussing shortage and planning relative to combining routes. He also thanked the parents for their patience.
    - He reminded the Board that all meals are free for students again this year, and each school has seen a significant increase in participation.
    - Weekly COVID-19 testing in each school will begin next week for any students and staff who would like to be tested. To date, about 65 families have signed up.
  - Board of Selectmen's Report
    - No report
  - Board of Finance Liaison's Report
    - No report

#### Approval of Minutes

**MOTION #22-14:** Finnigan moved, Lingenfelter seconded to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of September 7, 2021 and September 20, 2021. Board members discussed the scope and balance of the reported discussion relative to Motion #22-12 in the September 7 minutes. Board members Sattan, Finnigan, Lingenfelter and Mercik Davis voted in favor. Board members Dudack, Drzyzga, and Fry voted against. Board member Gazdik abstained. The motion passed **4-3-1**.

#### Consent Agenda

None

#### Discussion/Action Items

- School Advancement Plans & Portrait of a Graduate/Strategic Plan Presentation  
Dr. Jeanine Rose reviewed the five-year strategic plan, which is aligned to the district and school advancement plans and Board of Education goals. She highlighted the improvements in structures and programming and shared the district's vision, mission and theory of action. Dr. Rose shared current academic performance targets for SBAC and SATs for both general education students and students with high needs. The five-year target goals were developed based on our District Reference Group (DRG). She noted these goals are challenging but attainable. In order to improve academic performance of all students, the district will focus on initiatives such as specific instructional practices in literacy and math, implementation of curriculum and assessments, coaching to provide instructional feedback, professional development for teachers, student assessment and data team meetings.

***Lingenfelter left the meeting at 7:34 p.m.***

Dr. Rose reviewed the STEM improvement goals and how these goals will be achieved. Improving social emotional learning will be done through increasing DESSA screening participation and reducing chronic absenteeism among special populations. Dr. Rose shared specific district initiatives to improve social emotional learning.

The administrative team reviewed the District Priorities and School Advancement Plans for the 2021-2022 school year. Each principal shared specifically how the Board's Goals 1-4 of continuing community engagement and communication, continuing to drive student achievement and outcomes by using meaningful data to track student success and instructional practices, continuing to design and implement an integrated plan for professional learning, and continuing to revise curriculum and programming with an emphasis on alignment and fidelity of implementation, were aligned to each school's Advancement Plan with identified goals and indicators of success. The Superintendent reviewed Goal 5 which addresses the development of the five-year strategic plan. This work is being done in partnership with the Center for School Change. A presentation will be made to the Board in early 2022 with their recommendations and this will lead to incorporating the Portrait of the Graduate with multi-year Board of Education Goals and Strategic Plan. Ms. Zawawi reviewed Goal 6 which revolves around diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and reviewed the identified goals and indicators of success in the school advancement plans. In response to a Board member's question relative to the Capstone, Ms. Inero explained the purpose of the project, which will span all four years for every student and measure their growth in identified skills and attributes; the platform students will use to upload their artifacts; and the role of the advisors. In response to a Board member's question relative to regularly monitoring the progress of the School Advancement Plans, the Superintendent said a mid-year summit is held with professional staff to dialog on the progress of their goals. The district has incorporated mechanisms to address matters as they occur. At each school department-based teams are meeting weekly to address needs and concerns. In addition, student achievement meetings, vertical team meetings and district level team meetings are occurring regularly. In response to a Board member's question inquiring if the indicators of success have subsections, the Superintendent answered in the affirmative. Multiple Board members thanked the administration for tonight's multi-year Strategic Plan and Advancement Plan and expressed their approval and support.

- COVID-19 Update

The Superintendent said the Governor's executive orders relative to COVID-19 have been extended through February. The district continues to deal with a major labor shortage but has received a favorable response from local residents to apply for vacancies. He will continue to update the Board on these issues.

- Discussion and Possible Action on Indemnity Waiver for Sports and Other Student Activities

Dr. Van Tassel said due to the transportation shortage, the district sought legal counsel's advice about an indemnity waiver for students or families to transport themselves or students to school functions. Legal counsel cautions that even with indemnity waivers, there is still may be a degree of liability for school districts. The Superintendent said because of state of crisis we are in relative to transportation, the district did have legal counsel provide an indemnity waiver that is also being used by other districts. These waivers will be used on a case-by-case basis. The district will use its discretion to use the waivers but would like to get the Board's approval. The Superintendent recommends using them for the length of time they are needed.

**MOTION #22-15:** Drzyzga moved, Fry seconded to approve an indemnity waiver for sports and other student activities. In response to a Board member's questions as to an alternative approach, the Superintendent stated they are working diligently to hire bus drivers, as well as getting town

employees with CDLs the appropriate certifications to drive students. We are also moving games to later in the evening to utilize bus availability. In response to a Board member's questions as to the risk of using the waivers, the Superintendent said it has to do with the safety element of self-transport or parent transport. Board Chair Mercik Davis called for a vote. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

- August Financial Report

Mr. Hoff said the end of year surplus is projected at \$1,085,042 with a salary surplus of \$355,932, much of which is due to savings in the high school principal salary. Health insurance is preliminary and likely to change once revenue and enrollments are finalized. He noted the district received \$25,671 less in Title I funds than projected. There is a significant surplus but this is a very preliminary report. We will have a better projection for salaries, health insurance and special education tuition in the September financial report.

- Adoption of Proposed 2022 Board of Education Meeting Dates

**MOTION #22-16:** Gazdik moved, Dudack seconded to adopt the 2022 Board of Education meeting dates as presented. Board Chair Mercik Davis said Board member Lingenfelter asked why the meeting dates were being acted upon at this time since it is an election year and it may be better to act on this at the December meeting. Board Chair Mercik Davis noted that it was on this meeting's agenda simply because that is when it is done each year. Board Chair Davis stated that she agreed that the Board should consider moving voting on meeting dates until December. Board Chair Mercik Davis called for a vote. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

- Approval of the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the Teamsters Union

**MOTION 22-17:** Finnigan moved, Gazdik seconded to approve the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the Teamsters Union as presented by the Administration. All members voted in favor except for Drzyzga, who abstained. The motion passed **6-0-1**.

### Subcommittee Reports

- September 10 & October 1, 2021 – Community Engagement/PR Subcommittee Meetings – Board member Fry said the committee discussed the back to school flyer which will be sent to Board members tomorrow and families on Friday. The committee also discussed the Board's participation in the town's 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary parade on October 9. Board members will be grouped with Suffield Public Schools and should park at Ff Tyler Place by 8:45am.
- September 13, 2021 – Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee Meeting – Board member Drzyzga said the committee reviewed NGSS, AP and SBAC data and discussed the current and ongoing action steps to reach student achievement goals.
- September 20, 2021 – Policy Subcommittee Meeting – Board member Dudack said two policies are being placed on 30-day read: Policy #0200 – Goals and Objectives, and Policy #5141.3 – Health Assessment & Immunizations. There are also revisions to the Health Assessment and Immunizations regulation, but regulations are the purview of the administration to approve.
- September 30, 2021 – Finance & Facilities Subcommittee Meeting – Board Chair Davis said the committee discussed the bus driver shortage, the budget process for the upcoming year, and received an update on facilities projects.

### Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – Nothing to report.
- Agriscience – Board member Fry said the FFA hosted a welcome back picnic and it was well attended. The Agriscience department is holding an open house on November 4<sup>th</sup> from 6-8pm for prospective eighth graders.
- CABE – Board member Drzyzga reminded Board members the CABE/CAPSS convention is Friday, November 12<sup>th</sup>.

### Future Business

None

### Public Comment

None

### Board Member Comment

Board member Dudack expressed appreciation for the work done on the strategic plan.

Board member Drzyzga said the plan was impressive and it was nice to see the Board goals aligned to the plan and the schools working collaboratively.

Board members Gazdik and Mercik Davis echoed Board members Dudack's and Drzyzga's comments.

### Adjournment

Gazdik moved, Dudack seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:44 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EfxaSjPXyxxqVfAqJZAYQRxGkW9LXUB6/view?usp=sharing>

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

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan  
Secretary