

Board of Education Regular Meeting  
Suffield Middle School Auditorium  
and via Zoom  
November 1, 2021

Call to Order

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

Present: Board members Debra Dudack, Jamie Drzyzga, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik, Scott Lingenfelter, Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, and Michael Sepko (arrived 6:34pm); and Superintendent Timothy Van Tasel; Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Bill Hoff; and SHS Student Representatives Sophia Mormino (arrived 6:34pm) and Connor Shaw

Absent: None

The Board held a moment of silence in memory of former student Meghan Voisine who passed away last week.

Recognition

The Board recognized McAlister's fifth grade students who were nominated for this year's Kid Governor: Teagan Arnold, Nathan Deenihan, McKayla Dow, Elle Harrison, John Morissette, Jacob Vincent and Caleb Warren. Nathan Deenihan was chosen by his fifth grade peers to represent McAlister at the state competition. Nathan's platform was on student mental health. The Board congratulated all the students on a job well done.

SHS Student Representatives

Connor Shaw reported the Suffield High School senior class held a badminton tournament to raise money for their class, the sophomore class will be holding flag football game to raise money for their class; students and staff dressed up for Halloween, a college admissions night was held, senior planning is occurring this week for students to receive assistance with post-secondary planning, the fall sports teams have had a great season, the courtyard project is going out to bid next week, and parent conferences for both middle and high school are occurring next week. At Suffield Middle School, there is a meeting on November 8<sup>th</sup> for all students interested in participating in the drama production, the writing club, diversity club and many other clubs are underway. Sophia Mormino reported that both Spaulding and McAlister staff and student wore pink for breast cancer awareness month last week and raised over \$500 and \$340, respectively. Spaulding students learned about fire safety during fire safety month and at McAlister students ran the final mile and will be holding the Walk-to-School event on November 11 where they will also honor Veterans during the event.

Public Comment

None

### Board Member Comment

- Board member Sepko said the Kid Governor presentation was great.
- Board member Finnigan extend gratitude to the faculty and staff last week in supporting students after the tragic loss of a former student. She also encouraged the staff to check in on one another and offered the Board's support.
- Board member Dudack congratulated all the Kid Governor nominees and said it is great to hear about student achievements and accomplishments.
- Board member Gazdik echoed the previous Board members' comments.
- Board member Fry encouraged all to vote tomorrow and he encouraged all to get vaccinated. He noted that approval for vaccinating children is coming soon and he hoped children will get vaccinated.
- Board member Lingenfelter said he hoped that vaccinations for children will not be forced upon them and that parents will have the option to make that choice for their children.
- Board member Drzyzga congratulated the Kid Governor nominees and said they are incredible students.
- Board Chair Mercik Davis said the Kid Governor recognition brings a lot of light to the district and she echoed Board member Finnigan's statement that staff should take care of one another and the Board is here to support them.

### Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
  - The Superintendent thanked the community for coming together over the loss of one of our former students.
  - He congratulated the Kid Governor nominees.
  - The Superintendent said the budget presentation will be presented to the Board at the first December meeting. He and Board Chair Davis met with Board of Finance Chair, Ryan Anderson and First Selectman, Melissa Mack to discuss this year's budget process. These meetings are productive and provide transparency, which has been a goal of the district.
  - He thanked Technology Director, Rebecca Osleger for securing a grant for over \$6,000 which was used to purchase 24 new Chromebooks for the district.
  - On behalf of Suffield Public Schools, the Superintendent thanked People's Bank for their \$10,000 donation for the high school courtyard project.
  - He congratulated SHS student Griffin Mandirola who won the cross country Class M State Championship. The boys team came in fourth place in the Class M State Championship and the girls team came in eighth place in the Class MM State Championship. He added the entire fall sports season has been fantastic and there has been great community attendance and support at many of the games.
- Board Chair's Report
  - Board Chair Davis said she and the Superintendent met with Melissa Mack and Ryan Anderson in preparation for the budget process and she also attended the Board of Finance meeting to discuss the COVID-19 relief funds the district has received. They also discussed the non-lapsing account and the Board of Finance approved \$47,079 into that account.
  - She attended the Agriscience consulting committee meeting on October 21.
  - She said the comradery and fan base at high school sporting events has been outstanding and the snack shack is being run by special needs students to build life skills.
  - Board Chair Mercik Davis said the 350<sup>th</sup> parade was a wonderful event for our town and the school was well represented. She thanked Board member Finnigan for her coordination of the event as the event's co-chair, and Board member Fry for coordinating the Board's involvement in the parade.

- Business Manager's Report
  - Mr. Hoff said the district is still struggling with bus transportation but does anticipate the driver shortage to get better. However, bus driver shortages will be an issue for the remainder of the school year. He thanked everyone for their patience.
  - He said bids were issued today for the Suffield High School outdoor columns, the Family Consumer Science renovations, and the Agriscience Food Science lab. Walk-throughs will be conducted next week with submissions due by December 8.
- Board of Selectmen's Report
  - No report
- Board of Finance Liaison's Report
  - No report

*Finnigan left at 7:02pm, returned 7:03pm*

Approval of Minutes

**MOTION #22-18:** Dudack moved, Gazdik seconded to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of October 4, 2021 and October 18, 2021. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

None

Discussion/Action Items

- SHS Summative Assessment Presentation

Dr. Jeanine Rose presented the high school Advanced Placement (AP) Assessment results for the Class of 2021 with data from their tenth grade year to determine whether students are performing where they should on these summative assessments. She gave an overview of AP in Suffield, which outlines student eligibility, criteria for teacher recommendation and scoring. She discussed the impacts of COVID-19 on the Class of 2021 as exam requirements, content and administration of the tests were all altered during the pandemic which negatively impacted students. She explained the AP Potential tool which helps schools identify AP students and supports students in choosing AP courses that interest them. The AP Potential tool provides a list of students likely (60%) to score a three or higher based upon their PSAT and SAT scores; however, she noted this is only one criterion used to recommend a student for an AP course. Other factors include student motivation and preparation, parental support and teacher efficacy. Dr. Rose shared and summarized the findings of the Class of 2021 Math and English grades for 10<sup>th</sup> grade broken out by subgroups: socio-economic status, special education, and high needs. 105 students in the Class of 2021 received Rigorous Coursework Letters, totaling 787 AP course recommendations. Dr. Rose shared the number and percentage of readiness letters by course and the readiness percentage results for Humanities and STEM AP courses. The results indicate that if a Suffield student receives a Rigorous Coursework Letter, they have a greater than 60% chance of passing the AP exam with a three or higher. Dr. Rose discussed the implications for practice of offering Rigorous Coursework Letters to students who may not see themselves as AP students and to increase equity of access for all students. She provided action steps that the district will use to increase AP participation for all students. She concluded by stating that Suffield students are performing where they should be in these summative assessments. The Board and many teachers, who were present, discussed best practice for guiding students when deciding on which AP courses to take. In response to a Board member's question on how to advise students who may be on the cusp of qualifying, teachers stated that they balance encouraging students to challenge themselves and not putting too much pressure on themselves. In response to a Board member's question relative to what further supports may be

needed, it was stated that there needs to be a continuation of solid vertical curriculum development across the district, professional development offerings, and Professional Learning Committees to ensure students are as prepared as possible. The Board and teachers also discussed the value of students taking AP courses regardless of the outcomes on the exams. The experience of taking the test can also be valuable in and of itself. SHS student representatives Connor and Sophia said providing an AP student mentor to new AP students would be beneficial.

*Dudack left at 7:28pm, returned 7:30pm*

*Lingenfelter left the meeting at 7:52pm*

- COVID-19 Update

The Superintendent said the CIAC has removed the mask requirement for vaccinated student athletes while competing in sports. He anticipates more information to come from the Governor and State Department of Education. The Superintendent said McAlister School experienced its first COVID-19 cluster outbreak in October and he thanked the families of the affected students and the McAlister administration for their proactive response to the situation. He noted the case rates in the district are low and have remained that way. He added that it is expected the CDC will authorize COVID-19 vaccines for children 5-11; however, he has no information as to whether vaccines for children will be a requirement. He encouraged families to research it and speak with their children's doctors.

- September Financial Report

Mr. Hoff said the net surplus is just over \$1,000,000 and mostly due to savings in salaries and benefits. Over \$250,000 of this savings is due to not filling two positions this year. He noted there is a large projected end of year surplus in both the ESSER and Open Choice grant funds. Food Service had a surplus of almost \$30,000 for July, August and September. He thanked the food service employees as their workload has more than doubled because they are making more than twice the normal amount of lunches alone. In response to a Board member's question relative to reporting salary savings each month, Mr. Hoff said he uses his judgement in budgeting salary savings based on the likelihood of filling the vacancies. In response to a Board member's question relative to community response from the district's recruiting efforts, Mr. Hoff said Kathy Carney has on-boarded a number of new substitutes and food service workers.

- Acceptance of Donation from People's Bank for the Suffield High School Courtyard Project

Assistant Superintendent Zawawi said People's Bank representatives met with her, the Superintendent and Mr. Hoff to hear their proposal for the courtyard space. She submitted a formal proposal to People's Bank and they granted \$10,000 for the courtyard project. Ms. Zawawi said she was grateful for their support and the money will be used for outdoor furniture in the space.

**MOTION #22-19:** Sepko moved, Sattan seconded to accept the donation from People's Bank for the Suffield High School courtyard project. Mercik Davis said she hopes the district will provide furniture that offers flexible seating for those with disabilities. Ms. Zawawi assured her that will be the case. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

### Subcommittee Reports

A. October 18, 2021 – Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee Meeting – Board member Drzyzga said the committee delved deeper into the assessment data that was presented this evening. The committee will continue to review data throughout the year.

### Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – Board member Sattan said at CREC’s last meeting they discussed magnet school participation. There are 16 CREC magnet schools with 8,800 students representing 80 towns; 800 certified staff; 45% of the students are Hartford residents, 7% are multilingual, and 16% are special needs.
- Agriscience – Board member Fry said the Agriscience consulting committee met on October 21. The Superintendent attended and shared initiatives around transportation, and said State Representative Tami Zawistowski has offered her help with the transportation challenges. The priorities of the Agriscience program are to hire an additional teacher, develop an outdoor arena, remodel the biology room, update equipment and offer advanced classes, and expand communication efforts with sending towns. The Agriscience open house for incoming 8<sup>th</sup> graders is on November 4.
- CABA – no report

### Future Business

- Board member Sepko said addiction to video gaming and social media is a real issue for students and he would like the district to partner with parents to teach children of the potential for addiction to gaming and social media.
- Board member Sepko would like the district to partner with parents in creating a roadmap with guidance counselors for students who are not college-bound. This initiative should occur before the last few years of high school.
- Board member Gazdik would like a follow-up on tonight’s conversation relative to AP at the end of the school year, specifically where the district is relative to the next steps presented this evening.

### Public Comment

Suzanne Richardson-White, 824 Newgate Road, said she hopes that in researching student assessment results and student readiness for AP courses, that the district will look at reinstating honors classes at the middle school. She added relative to the conversation this evening about how to encourage and support students on the cusp of qualifying for advanced courses, she believes the district may be missing the opportunity to place students in honors classes who are ready for them.

### Board Member Comment

Board member Sattan thanked Dr. Rose for the presentation tonight and it was evident Dr. Rose knew the underlying data. She would also like an end of year update.

Board member Sepko thanked Dr. Rose for her presentation and said it is helpful to receive this information and teachers’ perspectives.

Dudack thanked Dr. Rose for the presentation and it was great to learn more of students’ accomplishments. She thanked People’s Bank for their donation and Ms. Zawawi for her work in securing the donation and on the courtyard project.

Board member Gazdik also thanked Ms. Zawawi.

Board member Drzyzga echoed all the other Board members’ comments.

Board Chair Mercik Davis welcomed Mr. Dobi into his new position as Suffield High School Interim Assistant Principal.

Adjournment

Gazdik moved, Fry seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:38 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/171xQYrFeXuNdE\\_QfPGbdAlkAxQWDeVIm/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/171xQYrFeXuNdE_QfPGbdAlkAxQWDeVIm/view?usp=sharing)

*Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of December 2, 2021.*

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan  
Secretary