

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Suffield Middle School Auditorium
and via Zoom
December 6, 2021

Call to Order

Superintendent Van Tasel called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance followed by a moment of silence in observance of National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, which is December 7.

Present: Board members Terry Antrum, Tracy Cloyd, Jamie Drzyzga, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik, Scott Lingenfelter, and Maureen Sattan; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tasel; Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Bill Hoff; and SHS Student Representatives Sophia Mormino (arr. 6:32pm) and Connor Shaw

Also in attendance: First Selectman Colin Moll

Absent: None

MOTION #22-20: Sattan moved to add two items to the agenda under XI. Discussion/Action Item #E – Board of Education Member Resignation and Timeline and F. – Discussion of Board of Education Meeting Location. Drzyzga seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Election of Officers

Superintendent Van Tasel explained the process as outlined in Board Bylaw #9120.

- **Board of Education Chair** – Lingenfelter nominated Sattan for Chair. Sattan accepted the nomination. Fry nominated Gazdik for Chair. Gazdik declined the nomination.
MOTION #22-21: Fry moved to close nominations for Chair, Antrum seconded the motion. A roll call was conducted and votes tallied.
MOTION #22-22: All members voted in favor of electing Maureen Sattan as Board of Education Chair except for Fry, who abstained. The motion carried **7-0-1**.
- **Board of Education Vice Chair** – Lingenfelter nominated Gazdik for Vice Chair. Gazdik accepted the nomination. Drzyzga nominated Fry. Fry accepted the nomination.
MOTION #22-23: Drzyzga moved to close nominations for Vice Chair, Antrum seconded the motion. A roll call was conducted and votes tallied.
MOTION #22-24: Antrum, Cloyd, Finnigan, Gazdik, Lingenfelter and Sattan voted for Gazdik. Drzyzga and Fry voted for Fry. Glenn Gazdik was elected as Board of Education Vice Chair in a **6-2-0** vote.
- **Board of Education Secretary** – Sattan nominated Drzyzga for Secretary. Drzyzga accepted the nomination.
MOTION #22-25: Sattan moved to close nominations for Secretary, Gazdik seconded the motion. A roll call was conducted and votes tallied.
MOTION #22-26: All members voted in favor of electing Drzyzga as Board of Education Secretary. The motion carried **8-0-0**.

At 6:41pm, Superintendent asked for the Board to stand at ease.

At 6:45pm, Superintendent Van Tassel turned the meeting over to Board Chair Sattan.

Recognition

None

SHS Student Representatives

Connor Shaw reported that Suffield High School held a fundraiser and they raised over \$2000 for Christmas gifts for children at the Burgdorf Clinic, super fan winners were announced last week, the drama club put on *Clue* this past weekend and was well attended, the FFA held its winter sale last week, ski club sign ups were held recently and the first phase of the courtyard renovation is complete. At Suffield Middle School many clubs are being held and meeting consistently, ski club sign ups have been posted, basketball tryouts will be held December 8-10, PJ day is coming up to benefit Connecticut Children's Medical Center, the November food drive resulted in over 300 food items being donated to Suffield Community Aid, and the middle school winter concert is next week. Sophia Mormino reported that at Spaulding they are holding spirit days each Friday, the first Spaulding Stars assembly is being held virtually this week, and at both Spaulding and McAlister, the schools held assemblies on Veteran's Day to honor veterans and McAlister also participated in a walk to school event on Veteran's Day. On October 16, State Representative Tami Zawistowski visited McAlister in conjunction with the Kid Governor program. She explained her role in the legislature and how a bill becomes a law.

Public Comment

Courtney Vincent, 1576 North Stone Street, expressed her concern over paperwork that is circulating in the Suffield Public Schools entitled, "Ten Things Every White Teacher Should Know When Talking About Race". She would like to understand how this is happening when the Board last summer voted against teaching Critical Race Theory. She also raised concerns over inappropriate and pornographic books in our school libraries, specifically citing the book *Lawn Boy*.

Dave Shute, 1165 Halladay Avenue West, stated that he supports the new members of the Board and recognizes they have a difficult job and tough decisions to make. There needs to be a course correction in our schools and while his children are out of school, he is concerned for his grandchild. It's not only a matter of liberalism but a slippery slope into socialism and communism. He has faith that this Board is here to make the needed course correction. He believes the majority of teachers want to teach academics and not be social justice warriors. He would like to see children being taught Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision – where we are judged on content of character not the color of our skin. He said Critical Race Theory is causing division not unity and it's not what we should be teaching our children.

Sophia Mormino left at 6:53pm

Julia Hart, 975 North Grand Street, reiterated the previous public comments. She believes the district is going down the wrong path.

Janet Davis, 8 Wisteria Lane, also echoed the other public comments this evening. She would like the mask requirement to be removed and stated there are studies to prove that masks are not effective. She asked that teachers be allowed to do their jobs and bring academics back to the classroom; not virtual learning.

Board Member Comment

- Board member Fry congratulated Board Chair Sattan and welcomed new Board members Antrum and Cloyd and thanked them for their willingness to serve.
- Board member Antrum said one of the reasons he volunteered for this position was to bring common sense to Board decisions and we can do better.
- Board member Lingenfelter thanked those who spoke tonight at public comment and brought these matters to the Board. He also noted the book, *Ghost Boys*, which has been banned in other school districts because of its anti-police stance is available to students at McAlister. He said it is important the Board looks into the curriculum being taught to our students.
- Board member Cloyd acknowledged those that spoke during public comment, that she heard their concerns and she is ready to get to work.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
 - The Superintendent congratulated the 32 students inducted into the National Honor Society this year; 14 seniors and 19 juniors.
 - He said the SHS drama, *Clue*, was well done by very talented students.
 - The months of December and January are performance season and he encouraged all to come out and enjoy the student performances.
 - Fall sports are completed and he congratulated all the athletes.
 - He thanked the PTA, PTAC, and SFES for the funding these organizations provide to our schools to augment the BOE budget.
 - He thanked Northern Nurseries for its donation of a \$1000 gift certification for the SHS courtyard project.
 - In recognition of National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, he expressed sincere gratitude to those who served in World War II and those who are currently serving.
 - The Superintendent welcomed and congratulated the new Board of Education members.
- Board Chair's Report
 - Board Chair Sattan asked Board members to consider which subcommittees they would like to serve on as well as consideration of chairing these subcommittees. In addition, liaisons for CREC, CABE and Agriscience need to be filled.
- Business Manager's Report
 - Mr. Hoff said one bus has been added back into our routes and the district is hopeful we will have two more buses in the next few weeks.
- Board of Selectmen's Report
 - Mr. Moll congratulated the Board members who were newly elected and those who were reelected.
 - He said the Suffield tree lighting event occurred this past weekend and there was a great turnout. He is looking for more community involvement next year and he thanked those who helped and those who came out to support the event.
 - He is looking forward to collaborating with the Town Boards on the budget process.
 - The transition has been very good and there are many great people in this town and he expressed his appreciation for the public's support.
 - Mr. Moll and Town Planner, Bill Hawkins met with Tecton representatives regarding the master plan. He requested Tecton to put figures on all proposals and he is hopeful to have that information by January.
 - He acknowledged the public comment tonight and understands their concerns. He has faith the Board of Education will do the right thing for our children and community and will

support the Board's decisions. He also extended an invitation to anyone to reach out to him with any concerns.

- Board of Finance Liaison's Report
 - No report

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #22-27: Lingenfelter moved, Finnigan seconded to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of November 1, 2021 and November 15, 2021. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #22-28: Drzyzga moved to approve the following on the consent agenda: Revisions to Policy #0200 – Goals and Objectives and Policy #5141.3 – Health Assessment and Immunizations. Fry seconded the motion. At the request of a Board member, the Superintendent explained the purpose of the consent agenda for the new Board members and stated the consent agenda is used to expedite meetings to approve many items at once that do not need to be discussed. Board members can move to remove items before voting. In response to a Board member's question regarding the proposed removal of language in the health assessment policy (#5141.3), the Superintendent said these are recommendations from the Board's legal counsel due to legislative changes. It was requested Policy #5141.3 be removed from the consent agenda. Board Chair Sattan called for a vote. Fry and Drzyzga voted to approve the consent agenda. Sattan, Antrum, Cloyd, Lingenfelter, Gazdik and Finnigan voted against. The motion failed **2-6-0**.

MOTION #22-29: Lingenfelter moved to approve Policy #0200 and remove Policy #5141.3 and refer that policy back to the Policy subcommittee. Sattan seconded the motion. All members voted in favor, except Drzyzga who voted against. The motion carried **7-1-0**.

Discussion/Action Items

- Superintendent's 2022-2023 Proposed Budget Presentation

Dr. Van Tassel read his formal transmittal of the 2022-2023 proposed budget of \$36, 808,545, which is a net increase of \$907,523 over this year's budget, or a 2.53% budget increase. Over the next few months, the Board will be presented with school and department budgets which will provide more details to the overall budget request. The Superintendent thanked the administrative and central office team for their work in the budget process. He highlighted the key takeaways of the budget request which included proposed personnel increases (a 0.5 music teacher at McAlister, a 0.5 custodian at SHS and a 0.5 financial assistant in Central Office) and proposed budget neutral changes (reducing a PE teacher at McAlister and adding an elementary teacher at Spaulding due to rising enrollment and reducing a Special Education teacher at SMS due to reduced caseload and adding a Career and Technical Education teacher at SHS). Dr. Van Tassel noted that 84% of the operating budget is due to personnel costs. He also pointed out that there has only been a 22 student decrease in enrollment from last year to this year. Key programs and services that impact the budget request are district-wide STEM and Career and Technical Education programming, high school mathematics texts, K-12 EASTCONN Psychological and Behavioral Support Services, and K-8 Teachers College Readers and Writers Project Professional Development. The Superintendent gave an overview of grant budget allocations. He also reviewed potential additional savings and/or liabilities which include COVID-19 relief funding, faculty and staff turnover, health insurance premium costs and enrollment changes, special education outplacements, magnet school tuition, shared services with the Town of Suffield and neighboring school districts, and state mandates. Board Chair Sattan thanked the Superintendent and the administrative team.

- COVID-19 Update

The Superintendent said cases and quarantines in the district have increased significantly over the last few weeks which was anticipated with the colder weather and the Thanksgiving holiday. We have had 79 positive cases this year with 20 positive cases occurring in the last two weeks. We have reached the highest quarantine rate today of 58 individuals. The Department of Public Health has indicated that they do not want anyone overreacting to the Omicron variant. It is being monitored but is too early to warrant making any changes in our safety protocols. The Superintendent noted that the district is only providing virtual learning to students who are on a school-based quarantine. The Superintendent concluded by saying the district is in a good place and he is looking forward to things continuing in a positive direction.

- October Financial Report

Mr. Hoff said the monthly financial report includes the general budget, state and federal grants and the food service report. However, the October food service report was not yet available. The projected year end surplus is \$560,731 less than last month primarily due to a lower salary surplus, reduced benefits surplus and increased electricity expenses. Mr. Hoff noted the ASTE grant has increased by \$218,529 due to an increase in state payments. In response to a Board members question relative to Open Choice participation next year, Mr. Hoff said the district expects about \$130,000 in Open Choice funding next year. We are currently below the 2% threshold and we are projecting 39 students to enroll in Suffield next year. The Board discussed looking at recruiting efforts to attract more Open Choice students to Suffield. Mr. Hoff noted that Suffield's distant location to Hartford is an impediment to attracting students and decreasing Open Choice enrollment is a state-wide issue.

- Discussion Regarding BOE Committees

Board Chair Sattan said the subcommittees of the Board need to be populated. She asked Board members to consider which subcommittees they would like to serve on and think about the current subcommittee structure. In response to a Board member's question relative to the maximum number of members on a subcommittee, the Superintendent said you cannot have a quorum of the Board, so no more than four plus the Board Chair who serves as ex-officio on all subcommittees. Dr. Van Tassel also noted that changes to the subcommittee structure would need to be reviewed by the Policy subcommittee. Board Chair Sattan will reach out to members to obtain their preferences.

- BOE Member Resignation and Timeline

Board Chair Sattan said she received a copy of a resignation letter from Board member Mercik Davis. Board Chair Sattan read Ms. Mercik Davis' resignation letter. The Superintendent explained the process of filling the vacancy.

Board member Gazdik left meeting at 8:07pm, returned 8:09pm

- Discussion of Meeting Location of the Board of Education

Board member Cloyd said she looked into moving Board meetings to the new Town Hall meeting room which is more conducive for holding meetings as it has the required technology and space for the public to attend. The second and fourth Thursdays of the month at 6:30pm are available. Board Chair Sattan will reach out to Board members for their availability.

Subcommittee Reports

- A. December 6, 2021 – Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee Meeting – Board member Drzyzga said the committee met with four high school teachers and administrators who gave an overview of five new proposed courses, three of which are in the math department and two in

the art department: Algebraic and Geometric Connections, Mathematics for Machine Technology, Financial Literacy and Analysis, Comics and Illustration and Introduction to Animation. The math courses are yearlong courses and the art courses could be taken one semester at a time. These courses will move to the full Board for approval.

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – Board member Sattan attended the November 12 meeting and the main topic was the potential of increases in CREC tuition to sending districts if there is not an increase in state funding to CREC. CREC needs a Suffield representative to serve on its council. She also shared that CABA is holding a new Board member workshop on December 8.
- Agriscience – Board member Fry said on December 21. six Suffield Regional Agriscience program graduates will be celebrated for receiving their American FFA Degree. This is the highest degree a member can earn and requires 50 hours of community service as well as over 2,500 hours of out of school agricultural projects. Only 1% of the FFA membership earn this degree. The Agriscience holiday sale was a big success and well attended and students are involved in every aspect of the event. Agriscience also hosted a Make and Take event where families attended a holiday decorations workshop and were able to take home their projects. Over 80 families participated. The winter farmers market took place this past weekend in the large animal facility which was organized by the students.
- CABA – no report

Future Business

- Board member Lingenfelter requested there be a follow up on the concerns raised by the public tonight about controversial books and curriculum that are in the schools and the educational value of these items.
- Board member Finnigan would like to look out how to utilize the instructional technology purchased during the pandemic that is not currently being used. She was not sure what venue the review would need to take place, perhaps policy, but would like to discuss how that technology could be used in the future, possibly for alternative education.
- Board member Fry requested that items that are currently on future business be scheduled at upcoming meetings.

Public Comment

Carl Christian, 450 North Grand Street, would like to know how the \$1.38 million the district received in COVID-19 relief funds was used and what path did it make our school take by accepting the money.

Janet Davis, 8 Wisteria Lane, spoke about an inappropriate book her daughter was recommended by her teacher to read last year where the main character describes how to commit suicide. The response she received from the administration and teacher when she brought it to their attention was unacceptable and a book like that should not be in our schools' libraries. That book should be reconsidered as well as the other books mentioned tonight and she would like a response to the results of the administration's review of these books.

Board Member Comment

Board member Fry thanked Sue Mercik Davis for her service to the district and this Board. She made it a true passion and full time effort of her work. She put in a tremendous amount of time on the Board and dedicated herself to the district. He wished her and her family all the best and

respects her decision. The Town of Suffield is better for her time on the Board. Board member Fry also welcomed the new Board members and congratulated the new executive Board members. He encouraged families to reach out to their medical providers to inquire about the COVID-19 vaccine and, if eligible, to get the vaccine.

Board member Drzyzga echoed Board member Fry's comments relative to Sue Mercik Davis. Ms. Mercik Davis gave a great deal of time to the Board and Board member Drzyzga wished her well.

Board member Gazdik thanked Sue Mercik Davis for her time and effort she put into the Board and that amount of time did not go unnoticed, and he wished her the best.

Board member Lingenfelter said Mel Chafetz, former principal and interim superintendent of Suffield Public Schools, recently had a heart attack and underwent open heart surgery. Dr. Chafetz is now home and Board member Lingenfelter wished him a speedy recovery.

Board member Finnigan thanked Sue Mercik Davis for the countless hours she put into the Board and was sad to hear of her resignation. She wished Ms. Mercik Davis and her family the best.

Board Chair Sattan said the Board is worse off for Sue Mercik Davis not being on the Board. Board Chair Sattan said she will do her best serving as the Chair and asked for grace as she becomes familiar in the role.

Adjournment

Drzyzga moved, Antrum seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:33 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1PYn-ZaYawzF3RqSROLoZBLhV2SsmSiAG>

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of January 3, 2022.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Drzyzga
Secretary