

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Via Zoom
February 7, 2022

Call to Order

Board Chair Sattan called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Terry Antrum, Tracy Cloyd, Jamie Drzyzga, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik, Scott Lingenfelter, James Mol and Maureen Sattan; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel; Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Bill Hoff; and SHS Student Representatives Sophia Mormino and Connor Shaw

Absent: None

Recognition

The Board of Education postponed the *Schools in the Spotlight* presentation given by the Suffield High School Film & Video Class. The presentation will be showcased at the February 23rd Board of Education meeting.

Suffield High School Student Representatives

Connor Shaw reported that the Suffield Middle School band held their winter concert on January 27th. The SMS Fine Arts Department is celebrating news that seven students from SMS will be participating in the CMEA Northern Region Middle School Music Festival. SMS sports teams will finish the season strong. SMS guidance counselors are currently meeting with all eighth grade students to review high school course selections. SMS will hold the Scholastic Challenge February 14 and 15. SMS Drama Club will be performing High School Musical at the end of February. At Suffield High School, the yearbook is looking for pictures. SHS Earth and Outing Club is selling Valentine sweetheart pops for \$1. Students are welcome to join the Library Advisory Board, please check the website for details. SHS clubs continue to meet. SHS sports teams are having a successful season. Congratulations to Matt Sinofsky on being selected Rotary Student of the Month. SHS is offering new courses including advanced carpentry. SAT prep practice is being offered during Wildcat. Overall, both schools are very busy.

Sophia Mormino reported that the PTO provided first graders at A.Ward Spaulding School with a visit from local author Jamie Deenihan. The STEM program at AWS has students working with robots to gain basic knowledge of coding. Kindergarten benchmark assessments will begin in March. Third graders at McAlister Intermediate School will have a fitness night on March 3rd. MIS fifth grade table tennis tournament will be rescheduled sometime in April. Fifth grade student Kaitlyn Dudack has been selected for the Connecticut Elementary Honors Band and will perform at the Convention Center in March. The MIS Spring Concert will be held June 9th in the SMS Auditorium. AWS and MIS will celebrate the 100th Day of School on February 9th. Both schools will have Spirit Week and will hold a Super Bowl fundraiser to benefit community aid.

Public Comment

Amy Healy, 10 Academy Drive, said she believes in the freedom to read and that there is no place for book censorship in our schools and libraries. Board Chair Sattan cited the current Board policies that state the Board's commitment to intellectual freedom.

Annie Hornish, 584 Thrall Avenue, requested that the BOE issue a statement of support for the freedom to read in order to preempt any and all efforts to ban books.

Linda Cunningham, 789 Bridge Street, said the freedom to read allows students to think creatively and make educated choices when faced with complex decisions.

Tess McCool, 10 Sutula Road, spoke out for students' ability for the freedom to read. It is her hope that when the subcommittee reviews the library policies that it is meant to strengthen, and not to weaken, the procedures for challenging library books.

Kristin Hamilton, 40 Stratton Farms Road, said she was not in favor of removing books from our schools. She feels the policy is a sound one and she would be happy to serve on an ad hoc committee.

Ann Franczyk, 31 Greendale Drive, said times are changing, knowledge is expanding and as the mission of Suffield High School states, we exist to prepare our students for a rapidly changing world. Let us provide our students with the freedom to read what they choose to read.

Sandra Janik, 380 Prospect Street, said the books in question belong in our library and in our curriculum to follow the BOE mission statement and encourage thinking beyond their perspective.

Eric Harrington, 700 North Street, said he reviewed the SHS library selection on the website. He would like to see a more balanced library and suggested several titles that the school should purchase.

Ivan Grant, 14 Melrose Lane, said that his library was home when he was growing up. He is against the BOE reviewing books for the purpose of removal because access to those books is important.

Kerry White, 995 Newgate Road, suggested parents tell their own children what not to read rather than denying those books to others.

Suzanne Richardson-White, 824 Newgate Road, said she is strongly opposed to censoring books in our school libraries. There is no need to change current policy.

Board Member Comment

- Board members Gazdik and Drzyzga thanked all those who shared their perspectives.
- Board member Cloyd thanked everyone who participated and gave a voice on this issue.
- Board member Finnigan thanked all participants and was glad to hear all sides. She said the Board takes these matters seriously and even though there may not be a comment that does not mean the Board does not care or that something is not important.
- Board member Fry thanked all members of the public for attending and they have been heard.

- Board member Lingenfelter thanked all who participated and wanted everyone to know that there has been no talk about censoring or banning books but to look at the policy to address certain things and provide a truly diverse selection of books so that all viewpoints are heard. He said he hopes the BOE will address the mask mandate.
- Board member Mol echoed the appreciation of everyone's comments.
- Board member Sattan spoke in support of the policies and the procedures that accompany them as they stand for intellectual freedom. She is also supportive of the appeals process contained in the policy.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
 - The Superintendent thanked members of the town's Advisory Committee on Capital Expenditures (ACCE), the BOE, Larry Plano and Bill Hoff for the collaboration on the FY23 Capital Proposal.
 - He said the Advanced Audio and Video students from Mr. Casinghino's class will be attending the February 23rd BOE meeting.
 - The Superintendent apologized for the two recent school cancellations. He acknowledged and thanked the custodial team for their hard work.
 - He thanked everyone for working together during the month of January when we had a wave of positive cases.
 - The Superintendent will be developing a set of expectations surrounding next steps should the mask mandate be lifted.
- Board Chair's Report
 - Board Chair Sattan outlined the budget process for Board members.
 - She said an Executive Session on district security will be scheduled.
 - Board Chair Sattan said State Representative Tami Zawistowski will attend the March 7th BOE meeting to discuss relevant legislative priorities.
 - She said the search for the new high school principal has begun and encouraged the community to participate where able.
- Business Manager's Report
 - Mr. Hoff reported on bids for the AgSci Food Science project.
- Board of Selectmen's Report
 - No report
- Board of Finance Liaison's Report
 - No report

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #22-38: Melissa Finnigan moved, Terry Antrum seconded to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of January 3, 2022, January 10, 2022, and January 18, 2022. Board members Mol and Fry would like the January 18, 2022 minutes to reflect that there was an interruption of the Executive Session. Board member Drzyzga would like the January 18, 2022

minutes to correctly reflect her arrival time of 6:53 p.m. Melissa Finnigan amended the motion without objection to include the requested changes in January 18, 2022 meeting minutes. All members voted in favor of the motion as amended. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

None

Discussion/Action Items

- **COVID-19 Update**

Superintendent Van Tassel thanked the community for their continued support. Schools remained open during the month of January which is when the district saw a wave of positive cases. The Governor announced that he will be making recommendations to the legislature to extend the executive order through February 28th and then the mask order would be lifted. The Governor and the Commissioner for the Department of Public Health no longer believe that this requirement should be mandatory there by leaving it up to the local districts to make decisions for their communities. Superintendent Van Tassel went through the timeline of events during the pandemic. In the event that a decision is made to move forward without masks, we have strategies in place and will continue monitoring the pandemic. The Governor and Commissioner of Public Health are conveying that there has to be a degree of personal responsibility as it relates to our way forward with this pandemic. BOE members shared their thoughts and asked questions about how we will proceed once the state lifts the mask mandate for public schools. Other mitigating strategies (social distancing, tracking) were discussed and DPH recommendations will be forth coming as we consider the mask mandate being lifted in the near future. It was shared that other states including some in New England are already not requiring masks within schools. As stakeholder groups meet at the end of this week, we will wait to see how the vote turns out at the state level and then hold a special meeting if deemed necessary regarding the wearing of masks within our schools.

Discussion and Possible Action on Fiscal Year 2022 Budget

- **Suffield High School Textbook Purchase**

MOTION #22-39: James Mol moved, Melissa Finnigan seconded to approve the request of \$110,932.41 for the purchase of Suffield High School Textbooks. Motion passed **9-0-0**.

- **Suffield High School Graduation Stoles Purchase**

MOTION #22-40: James Mol moved, Tracy Cloyd seconded to approve the request of \$1,000.00 for the purchase of Suffield High School Graduation Stoles. Motion passed **9-0-0**

- **December Financial Report**

Mr. Hoff reported the projected year-end shows a net surplus of \$13,919 which is a reduction of \$99,363 from the November projection. There was a \$52,380 increase in the projected health insurance expenses due to enrollment changes. There was an increase in projected SPED costs of \$154,104 due to a reduction in projected Excess Cost reimbursement based on our December 1, 2021 state report. There were no significant changes in projected grant expenses. Five additional ESSER and ARP ESSER grants totaling \$201,682 were added. These grants are for

SPED related expenses and the majority will be expended in 2022-23. Food Service shows a year-to-date surplus of \$68,402 compared to a \$117,944 deficit at this time last year. A small surplus is projected for the year and some adjustments to expected expenses will need to be made. Health insurance, electricity and natural gas costs will be closely monitored over the next few months to maintain a surplus. The goal is to avoid reductions in discretionary accounts such as supplies and professional services.

Discussion and Possible Action on Fiscal Year 2023 Budget

- Grant Revenue Presentation

Bill Hoff gave a presentation on the 2022-23 Grants to give further clarity around what grants the district has. Mr. Hoff explained the difference between the grants, who benefited from each grant, and how monies were dispersed.

- Budget by Object Code

Superintendent Van Tassel and Mr. Hoff reviewed Budget Object Codes 3000 through 8000. The 1000 and 2000 Object Codes will be reviewed at another meeting.

Subcommittee Reports

- Community Engagement & Public Relations - no report
- February 3, 2022 - Finance & Facilities - Board member Finnigan reported that there were no major significant findings in the town audit. Hiring a registered nurse versus a licensed practical nurse would cost the district an additional \$15,000. On February 10, 2022 the subcommittee will meet with the town to discuss the possibility of switching to a state run health plan. Larry Plano shared information on the ACCE project.
- Curriculum & Instruction - no report

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – Board Chair Sattan said that CREC presented their annual comprehensive financial report review.
- Agriscience – Board member Fry reported that on February 2, 2022 the upperclassmen in the AgSci program presented their Capstone projects. He congratulated all participants. Board member Fry said AgSci acceptance letters went out to new AgSci students and that not everyone was accepted. He took that as an excellent sign of the program and a sign for potential for growth. Board member Fry said the program has a great future in Suffield.
- CABA – Board member Finnigan reported that she is the new CABA representative.

Future Business

Board member Lingenfelter said the list of future items should be listed on the agenda.

Public Comment

Liz Warren, 185 N Main Street, asked for clarification of a board member's comment regarding Covid-19 illness in children and that there were children with serious cases of Covid. Board member Antrum clarified that he had not seen serious illness in children on the job.

Chris Nikolis, 162 Quail Run Road, requested that his written correspondence be read. Board Chair Sattan read the correspondence aloud. Chris Nikolis wrote that banning books is not a good idea and he looks forward to a discussion and working against any effort to ban books from our schools and libraries and asks that others join him in doing so.

Board Member Comment

Board member Drzyzga said the district has sound procedures and practices in place and the librarians also have sound procedures and practices in place that they follow. The freedom to read is vital to us as a public school system. Board member Drzyzga likes the policies currently in place and hopes that not much is changed.

Board member Finnigan attended a portion of the AgSci Capstone presentations and said that they were amazing. She commended the high school for the four new courses that are construction related and provide different avenues for students.

Board member Fry said that the district has handled COVID in an excellent way and there is a lot of credit to go around. He said listening to experts worked and that it is critical to listen to the CDC and DPH as a guiding light.

Board member Lingenfelter said that when BOE meetings are held via Zoom, BOE members should not engage in the chat feature as this is a public meeting. He said the chat transcript should be included in the minutes. Superintendent Van Tassel clarified and said the chat transcript would be included in the minutes.

Board member Mol asked how many reconsideration requests had been processed for review at the February 10, 2022 Policy Subcommittee meeting. Superintendent Van Tassel said two were received but were able to be handled in the informal part of the process.

Adjournment

James Mol moved, Jamie Drzyzga seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:44 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FB9NS2NL8S4dEfn5hRujb-wkTNj7dKXp/view?usp=sharing>

Click here to view the Zoom chat:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qpltSeGFNOiB1aUjE7trIyiA8qxRR8eK1h9RsbilyNc/edit?usp=sharing>

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of March 7, 2022.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Drzyzga
Secretary