

Board of Education Special Meeting
Suffield High School Library Media Center
and via Zoom
January 3, 2023

Call to Order

Board Chair Sattan called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Terry Antrum, Tracy Cloyd, Jamie Drzyzga, Brian Fry, James Mol and Maureen Sattan; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel and Business Manager Bill Hoff (via Zoom)

Absent: Josh Barrows, Melissa Finnigan, Glenn Gazdik

MOTION #22-94: Maureen Sattan made a motion to move Discussion/Action Item A. Booster Club Fundraising Concept – Advertisement Signage to Item VI. B, James Mol seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed **6-0-0**.

Recognition

Schools in the Spotlight

- Suffield High School Agriscience Mechanics Team
Laura LaFlamme, Director of Suffield High School Agriscience Program, and Celia Wagner, SHS Agriscience teacher, introduced the 2022 Suffield Agriscience Mechanics Team National Silver Winners. The Suffield Agriscience Mechanics Career Development Event Team consisted of Class of 2023 member Matthew Tini and Class of 2022 members Henry Butler, Grace Sheldon and Logan Sopelak. The students shared their experiences from the event and how the SHS Agriscience Program helped shape their plans for furthering their education. Director LaFlamme noted that Celia Wagner is the first female coach in Connecticut to run an agriscience mechanics team, another positive and powerful message that the SHS Agriscience Program is sending. Board members congratulated the group for their outstanding accomplishment.

Suffield High School Student Representatives

Milo Graham, Class of 2024, shared the news and events at McAlister Intermediate School and A.Ward Spaulding School. Student Representative Graham said MIS is holding grade level traditions and families should keep an eye out for notifications. The Invention Convention is also approaching. Joy Tierney, MIS Library Media Specialist, is currently working on a Global Read Aloud. AWS and MIS held a Pajama Day to benefit CCMC. Danielle Bennett, fifth grade teacher and District Teacher of the Year, was recognized at a ceremony held at the Bushnell.

Sophia Mormino, Class of 2023, shared the news and events at Suffield High School and Suffield Middle School. Student Representative Mormino said SHS began rehearsals for the spring musical, *The Adams Family*, which will premiere in March. The Agriscience Program will be conducting interviews for students who would like to attend beginning the 2023-2024 school year. SHS midterms will be held January 17-20. Suffield Middle School clubs have resumed after winter break. The Drama Club is continuing rehearsals for their musical that will take place in February.

Public Comment

Neil Hornish, 864 Thrall Ave, congratulated the recognized students. He said he does not have children in the school system and was concerned that Superintendent Van Tassel's end of year Observer article didn't mention the issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. He said the community should be informed of district issues without revealing student information.

Laura Corville, no address given – Berlin resident, said she saw on Facebook that the Black Wall Street event was not taking place and would like to know why. She said she was disappointed and frustrated.

Annie Hornish, 864 Thrall Ave, said she feels efforts are being made to make town Zoom meetings less transparent. She said she feels the BOE has had an anemic response to the racial incidents that have occurred in the school system and that town members should be informed when racial incidents occur. She asks that the Board do better.

Amy Healy, 210 Academy Drive, thanked the BOE for bringing D2C to the district. She said it is important to provide the skills and language needed to address racial incidents in the moment that they occur. She said she was disappointed in the attendance at the evening D2C session. She said it will be difficult to transfer the solutions if it is not a community effort.

Olivia Rickens, no address given – New London County, said she would like to know the reason for cancelling the Black Wall Street event.

Tamara Jones, no address given - New London County, said she learned from Facebook that the Black Wall Street event was cancelled and would like to know what was being done about it.

Board Member Comment

- Board member Fry wished all a happy new year.
- Board member Mol congratulated the recognized students on their accomplishments.
- Student Representative Milo Graham said he is hearing similar concerns from his peers and believes there is capacity to open doors and take everyone's prospective into consideration.

Booster Club Fundraising Concept – Advertisement Signage

Chris Nikolis, Booster Club President, shared information for a fundraiser that would involve community businesses. Mr. Nikolis said the Booster Club is a non-profit organization committed to supporting the athletic programs and has assisted in the development, safety and overall enjoyment of sports for our athletes and coaches. The Boosters provide financial support with funds raised by approximately 50 parent volunteers. The Booster Club funds are used to purchase supplies, equipment and make capital improvements beyond what the school athletic budget provides. Mr. Nikolis said businesses would be able to purchase 4x6 mesh banners that would be hung on the athletic fields' fencing. The initial goal would be to sell 25 banners for the spring season. The banners would be uniform in design and would be subject to Board approval. Board members discussed management of the banners and how appropriateness of the banners is determined, how other districts are utilizing this method of fundraising and that BOE policy would need modification to accommodate this type of fundraising.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Van Tasel extended his condolences to the family of Jeanette South and to the SMS community. A donation will be made to the Joseph D. South Scholarship Fund on behalf of the Board of Education

Superintendent Van Tasel acknowledged Mr. Hornish's comment regarding his end of year review Observer article, and the school district can try to find ways to communicate with the town. He recognized Milo Graham's comments and the need to keep the district moving forward. He acknowledged that the Board is committed to the work with D2C and SERC, among other initiatives in the district.

Superintendent Van Tasel provided a formal statement regarding the Black Wall Street event that had been scheduled for February 2023. He said the administration has received numerous reach-outs regarding the cancelation of this event and he hoped to provide clarity on the topic. The district is supportive of the concept of the Black Wall Street event and has devoted a tremendous amount of time participating in meetings, corresponding on the phone and through email, as well as, meeting in person to discuss it. In addressing some of the concerns noted, Superintendent Van Tasel referenced specific email communications that conveyed the administration's support for this project and the meetings that had already been attended by administration. In addressing some of the concerns with the event planning that took place, he explained that referring to the Black Wall Street Fair as a Voices United Club event was misleading. He stated that the faculty advisor to the club, the administration, and the students have had very little knowledge or input regarding any planning, vendor communications, the identification and solicitation of donors, grant applications, or the advertising that was being done. He also noted reasonable concerns the administration had with an eight-week timeline to get this event coordinated. He referenced an email that was sent on December 13 that stated that the administration supported the event, but that the planning that was going to need to take place between December and February was a very real and reasonable concern. He highlighted that what was being proposed was going to be a multi-day event that would include 50+ vendors, fundraising, facility-use planning, and possibly over 200 visitors. He further noted that a timeline of 8 weeks to do the Black Wall Street Fair successfully was a concern that the administration was uncomfortable with. He correlated this project with another student group that took over a year to prepare their event. The timeline for the Black Wall Street event was a concern, but the district never said no to the project as a whole. He noted that Suffield High School Principal Carrie Apanovitch and Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi agreed to the curriculum links and that could be accomplished by February 2023. An additional correspondence on December 16 was also referenced that stated that this event could take place next year. Superintendent Van Tasel said the district continues to support this project and believes it can be accomplished, but that more time is needed and greater involvement with the club is also necessary.

Principal Apanovitch said she would want nothing more than to live in a world without hate and racism. She said it gave her great pleasure to help work on a student's Capstone project to develop resources for the district, to enhance the curriculum in celebration of Black History Month. She said she is looking forward to the Black Wall Street event as it will provide a lot of opportunity for community members to demonstrate successes. The event is creative and ambitious but its proper execution would require a lot of work and the timeline was not in their favor. She said students play a pivotal role and that students lead the charge in advocating for change and it shouldn't fall only to one student. She said she would like this event to be part of annual celebrations.

- Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Sattan thanked Board member Finnigan for her work with D2C. She thanked Todd Zenczak, the Suffield High School administrators and Central Office administrators for their work with D2C. Board Chair Sattan said the budget workshop is on January 21 and there will be no meeting on January 17. Board member Finnigan will be creating a database of questions to help the budget process. Board Chair Sattan attended a CAFE Board Chair meeting and the state mandated ELA curriculum was discussed.

- **Business Manager's Report**

Business Manager Bill Hoff said the ACCE Capital walkthrough is scheduled for January 12, 2023 at 5:30pm.

- **Board of Selectmen's Report**

None

- **Board of Finance Liaison's Report**

None

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #22-95: James Mol moved, Terry Antrum seconded to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of December 5, 2022 and December 19, 2022. The motion passed **6-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #22-96: James Mol moved to approve the following on the consent agenda: Policy 4131 – Staff Development, Policy 6143 – Advanced Coursework, Policy 6172.7 – Remote Learning, Policy 0200 – BOE Goals & Objectives. Tracy Cloyd seconded the motion. All members voted in favor of approving the consent agenda. The motion passed **6-0-0**.

MOTION #22-97: James Mol moved to approve the following on the consent agenda:

- A. Suffield High School Music Department Field Trip Request to Philadelphia, PA – April 22, 2023. Jamie Drzyzga seconded the motion. All members voted in favor of approving the consent agenda. The motion passed **6-0-0**.

Discussion/Action Items

- **November Financial Report**

Business Manager Bill Hoff reported on the general operating budget, federal and state grants, and food service income. The projected year end shows a net surplus of \$1,679.00. This number does not allow for flexibility and must be watched closely. Board members asked about the overage on SPED figures.

- **Discussion and Possible Action on the Capital Improvement Plan**

The Capital Improvement Project descriptions are for 2023-2024 requests to ACCE and the spreadsheet are the project requests proposed for the next 10 years. The ACCE request for next year is broken out by priorities. Business Manager Bill Hoff said that the town will decide how to implement the final approved plan. There are no requests for capital projects for 2023-24 for the middle school as we wait for a final decision on the implementation of the Master Facilities Plan. Director of Facilities Larry Plano went through the 19 ACCE Requests for 2023-2024. Board members discussed HVAC approval dates, elementary playscapes, how the ACCE process works, the possibility of moving the priority level of the AWS parking lot and the need for Viewsonics.

MOTION #22-98: Maureen Sattan moved, James Mol seconded to approve the Capital Improvement Plan as presented by administration. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **6-0-0**.

Tracy Cloyd left at 7:51, returned at 7:54.

Subcommittee Reports

- December 19 – Finance and Facilities – Board Chair Sattan said the November Financial Report was reviewed. Director of Student Athletics & Student Activities Todd Zenczak proposed implementing an athletic spectator admission fee. Additional information can be found in the subcommittee meeting minutes.

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – No report
- Agriscience – Board member Fry said applications for admission into the 2023-24 Agsci Program were completed in mid-December. Elsa the lamb is in good health. The FFA Holiday Sale was a success this year. The Rotary Club recognized students of the month from the Agriscience Program, Joan Mascena and Arya Patel.
- CABE – No report

Future Business

- Nursing Review (TBS)
- Gifted and Talented Population (TBS)

Key: RTS (Referred to Subcommittee), SNT (Scheduled Near-Term),
TBS (To Be Scheduled), HLD (On Hold)

Public Comment

Dr. Kristina Hallett, 1211 Halladay Ave, said she is an original founder of ABAR and also a member of the Rotary. She discussed the process of review of the Black Wall Street grant for both the Rotary Club and ABAR. She said there was never a formal request from the school district for ABAR to sponsor the event. She said that eventually the district had communicated that no student groups could be involved on the intended timeline and that is why it appears that the event was cancelled by the school.

Sandra Janik, 380 Prospect Street, thanked Superintendent Van Tassel for his statement and Principal Apanovitch for her comments. She was happy to hear this was and is an important event to them. She said she did not understand the oversight on the project and was confused how a school event, with a teacher advisor, had no scope or timeline.

Neil Hornish, 864 Thrall Ave, thanked Superintendent Van Tassel for increased transparency. He said he supports the Black Wall Street event and looks forward to its fruition.

Leslie Aryee, 190 East St S., said she is frustrated with the narrative around the Black Wall Street event. She said the BOE has made it their job to shade things going on in school. She would like to know what guidance was given to students.

Dr. Cassandre Victor-Vega, 2 Melrose Lane, said the Black Wall Street event was meant for students, faculty and parents to celebrate black excellence and focus on school unity while simultaneously having students lead the event. She said it was meant to unify the community. She said the narrative that one person canceled the whole school event is a false narrative. She would like to know how this can move forward.

Amy Healy, 210 Academy Drive, thanked the BOE and asked that they provide comment. She said it sends a message when no comment is given and people do not feel heard.

Annie Hornish, 864 Thrall Ave, said she was disappointed that the Black Wall Street event was cancelled and how it was handled. She said she felt Superintendent Van Tassel's statement was gaslighting. She said the majority of people in the room are white people in position of privilege and we have to stop this type of behavior.

Board Member Comment

Board member Drzyzga said she is processing the information and a lot of the information is new to her.

Board member Antrum thanked everyone for their comments and said they were helpful.

Board member Cloyd thanked everyone for their comments

Board member Fry said in his tenure on the BOE he has made it a point to use any communication that comes his way to help him in his decision making process. He said a lot of what he is hearing tonight is new information and he will be giving it thought and consideration.

Board member Mol echoes Board members Drzyzga and Fry. He said he would like a digital version of the budget and ACCE documents.

Board Chair Sattan said she strongly discounts any suggestions that the administration would try to take the Black Wall Street project off the rails because of lack of support for diversity initiatives.

Adjournment:

Jamie Drzyzga moved, James Mol seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:39 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: [03JAN2023 BOE Meeting](#)

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of February 6, 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Drzyzga, Secretary