

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Suffield High School Library Media Center
and via Zoom
March 6, 2023

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 Josh Barrows, Tracy Cloyd, Jamie Drzyzga, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik (moved to phone at 8:35 p.m.), James Mol and Maureen Sattan; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi and Business Manager Bill Hoff

Absent: Terry Antrum

Recognition

Schools in the Spotlight

- Board of Education Appreciation

Students from the SHS Culinary Arts and Farm to Whisk classes, along with Julie Haefner, SHS Family and Consumer Sciences Teacher, presented Board of Education members with charcuterie cups and cookies that were prepared in class. Mrs. Haefner's students enthusiastically shared their appreciation for the newly renovated Family and Consumer Sciences classroom. Board members also enjoyed musical performances given by the 4th Grade Ensemble, SMS General Music Class, SHS Chamber Choir and SHS Jazz Ensemble. Students were directed by Amy Wilson, MIS Music Teacher; Laura Noonan, SMS Chorus and Music Teacher; Anthony Ferreira, Vocal and Music Teacher; and Corey Killian, SHS Band Director and District Music Team Leader, respectively. Mr. Killian said that over 500 students in grades 4–12 participate in the music program. Mr. Killian, on behalf of the entire Music Department, thanked the BOE for their continued support of the music program.

Suffield High School Student Representatives

None

Public Comment

Gayle Demko, 1238 Mountain Road, said she is a member of the Economic Development Commission and is charged with spearheading an initiative to amend signage regulations to include digital signs. She would like to know if the BOE would like to join the EDC in bringing this initiative forward to the Planning and Zoning Commission. She said digital signs would inform, advise and unify the community through a common loop of communication.

Board Member Comment

- Board members thanked the students for the culinary treats and musical performances. BOE members were happy to see the teachers so passionate about what they are doing and the students so enthusiastic about program opportunities.

- Board member Fry said the State of Connecticut is now providing free breakfast and lunch to all students.
- Board Chair Sattan thanked BOE members for their token of sympathy on a personal matter.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Van Tasel thanked BOE members for their tremendous commitment to the job. He said BOE decisions are impactful and have provided quality programming opportunities for our students and families, some of which were showcased tonight. Superintendent Van Tasel thanked Rebecca Osleger, Director of Technology, for her work in partnering with the National Home Builders Institute and the Connecticut Home Builders Association. Ms. Osleger secured a \$13,000 grant to begin a pre-apprenticeship program for all students in Suffield Public Schools that aspire going into the trades. Suffield is the second school in the state to offer this program. Superintendent Van Tasel said Ms. Osleger has launched the Staff and District Spotlights on the district website. He said monthly programming videos will be posted as well as a staff member spotlight.

- Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Sattan said she attended a graduation planning meeting and graduation is set for June 10, 2023. BOE members participate in the ceremony by handing out diplomas to graduates and are seated on the stage. She and Board member Barrows attended a District Equity Meeting facilitated by SERC. Board Chair Sattan will attend a budget planning meeting with Superintendent Van Tasel, Mr. Hoff and several town representatives next week to prepare for the Board of Finance presentation on March 23, 2023.

- Business Manager's Report

None

- Board of Selectmen Liaison's Report

None

- Board of Finance Liaison's Report

None

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #22-106: Melissa Finnigan moved, James Mol seconded to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of February 6, 2023. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #22-107: James Mol moved to approve the following on the consent agenda:

- A. Suffield High School Agriscience Field Trip Request to SUNY Cobleskill – April 18, 2023
- B. Suffield High School AP Literature Class Field Trip Request to New York, NY – April 19, 2023
- C. Suffield High School Robotics Team Field Trip Request to Houston, TX – April 18-23, 2023
- D. Suffield High School Agriscience Field Trip Request to Washington, DC – April 27-29, 2023

Glenn Gazdik seconded the motion. All members voted in favor of approving the consent agenda. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Discussion/Action Items

- Discussion and Possible Approval of the 2023-2024 District School Calendar

Board Chair Sattan said this Discussion/Action Item was on the agenda last month, but it was not fully approved. April Break 2024 was approved at the February 6 BOE meeting. Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi summarized the early release and professional development days. Board members discussed feedback they received from community members regarding the Tuesday early release days as being difficult for working parents. Assistant Superintendent Zawawi said Suffield Parks & Recreation would work with SPS to create a program on those days but staffing could pose an issue. Superintendent Van Tassel said Parks & Recreation would need to survey families to gauge programming needs and cost. Board members said that community members expressed preference for Friday early release days and would like the calendar committee to reconsider. Calendar Committee representatives stated the four early release Tuesdays work well because of the extended teacher time and noted that our district is deficient in teacher professional development compared to other districts. BOE committee representatives also stressed the importance of providing this block of time to our staff to meet our BOE professional development goals.

MOTION #22-108: Maureen Sattan moved to approve the 2023-2024 District School Calendar with modifications to the four Tuesday early release days to be moved to Fridays as chosen by administration. Brian Fry seconded the motion. Barrows, Cloyd, Fry, Mol and Sattan voted in favor. Drzyzga, Finnigan, and Gazdik voted against. The motion passed **5-3-0**.

- Discussion and Possible Action on Fiscal Year 2024 Budget

The Superintendent's proposed budget that was presented in December has been modified based on a deeper knowledge of this year's expenses and the projected expenses for next year. The current set budget has a 6.75% increase. This includes cuts to middle school positions but also includes additions such as a security officer and an interventionist. Business Manager Bill Hoff reviewed the changes to Open Choice, increases to building maintenance and repairs, adjustments to health insurance and additional costs to special education. Mr. Hoff said transportation was up significantly, as well as transportation of special needs students and tuition. He said the Open Choice account at the end of this fiscal year will be \$33,982.

Superintendent Van Tassel explained how Open Choice funds are received from the State based on enrollment. The district will be offering roughly 20 seats for the 2023-2024 school year but not all may be filled. There is concern that the Open Choice fund will deplete itself and that backup fund that has been utilized to offset some facilities work and staffing will no longer be available. Superintendent Van Tassel said Open Choice funds are unique in that there are no restrictions on how the district spends that money. Board members inquired as to the historical seat declarations offered over the years. Mr. Hoff explained that Suffield is one of the furthest districts for potential Open Choice participants to get to know and credited Alaina Decesare, School Family Liaison, with helping connect families to the district. Board members discussed not relying on Open Choice dollars because those funds can vary. Board members said Mr. Hoff has been always been clear with the BOE about the use of the Open Choice account.

Board members discussed the 6.75% increase and considered possible areas to reduce to get the percentage down before presenting to the BOF. Eliminating positions only to add new positions was discussed. Superintendent Van Tassel shared surrounding districts' proposed budgets and stated Suffield is consistent with other districts in the state. He said Grant and ESSER funds created artificially low budgets.

Board Chair Sattan said the 6.75% includes cutting a team from Suffield Middle School and a 6-8 Humanities Instructional Coach and also has additions for a SHS Math Interventionist, a SMS Counselor and a shared reading interventionist for AWS/MIS. Board members discussed the number of school psychologists and how they are funded. Superintendent Van Tasel said the School Family Liaison position and a district nurse are paid through ESSER and will remain as there are enough ESSER funds to support those positions next year. One school psychologist was funded by ESSER and has been removed and will not be replaced next year. The district will have five school psychologists budgeted for next year. Dr. Diana Kelley, Director of Special Services, said she supports one psychologist in each building and two psychologists at the high school based on student population with mental health needs.

Superintendent Van Tasel reviewed the possible impacts from the removal of various positions and programs. Board members discussed how to hone in on what percent can be defended to the BOF. Board members also said the district is coming off of several years of a percentage that has been artificially low due to an infusion of money from Open Choice and ESSER. Programming should not be compromised and the district would not want to reverse positive trends that have been put in place. There have been improvements in reading and math because of investments made. Mill rate, consumer price index and inflation rates were discussed. Board members discussed the Suffield school system as being a major draw for families looking to move to Suffield and if we begin cutting our programming it affects the community as a whole. Class size and SHS math enrollment were reviewed.

Various expenses were considered by Board members for removal from the proposed budget, including the following: SHS Math Interventionist, SMS Counselor, Financial Assistant, Transportation Nurse, HBI, and Summer School.

With those removals, the modified proposed budget was brought to a 5.96% increase. Board members discussed if the addition of a security position and a shared interventionist should remain in the proposed budget.

Glenn Gazdik left at 8:58pm, joined via Zoom.

MOTION #22-109: Melissa Finnigan moved, James Mol seconded to approve the 2023-2024 Board of Education Budget in the amount of \$38,633,902 which is an increase of 5.96% over last year. Board Chair Sattan called for a vote. The motion passed **8-0-0**. Board member Gadzik submitted his vote by phone.

- **School Marquee Signs**

Board member Fry said digital marquee signs are being considered for the town and the Planning and Zoning Commission would need to revise their policy prior to any approvals. The concept had been brought to the Board of Selectman who was receptive to the idea. Board member Fry is looking for an indication from the Board if they support the general idea of digital signage. Specifics will be considered later. Business Manager Hoff said this has been considered at Planning and Zoning in the past. The more groups that signal their support, the higher the likelihood of a policy change. It is anticipated that grants may cover the cost of signs. All Board members expressed generalized support of the digital signage and Board Chair Sattan will draft a letter of support and send it to the P&Z Commission.

- **January 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 \$133,978. Mr. Hoff said there was a reduced cost in SPED tuition due to an increase in expected Excess Cost reimbursement based on the March 1 filing and also an increase in payments due for Open Choice students.

Subcommittee Reports

- March 2 – Finance and Facilities – Board member Finnigan said the January Financial Report was discussed. HVAC Grants are hopefully in final review. Safety and security grants were submitted and LAF bids are coming in.
- March 3 – Policy – Board member Fry said three policies were discussed. Policy #3280 Gifts, Grants and Bequests will be put on 30-day read. Policy #6174 Summer Learning Academy is being revised and will be reviewed further at another meeting. Policy #5123.3 Graduation Ceremony was discussed with a focus on adornments worn by students, the language will be revised and reviewed further at another meeting.
- March 6 – Curriculum and Instruction – Board member Drzyzga said the American Government Civics textbook was reviewed, the current textbook is over 20 years old. The proposed textbook has a cost of approximately \$27,000 that would include 60 hardcopy textbooks and a three-year license for online resources and online textbook. Students would be able to highlight and annotate the online text. An additional resource, available through Brown University, is called the Choices Program and would be available to the whole Social Studies department for a cost of \$1,600 and includes a two-year membership. These items have already been included in the budget. The textbook will be available in Central Office for 30 days. SMS Flextime and SHS Wildcat were discussed.

Jamie Drzyzga left at 9:32pm

Glenn Gazdik left Zoom at 9:34pm

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – Board Chair Sattan said BOE members interested in becoming the CREC Liaison should reach out to her. The CABE CREC Legislative Forum took place on February 16. There was a presentation on House Bill 5003, a student-centered funding bill, that would fully fund educational cost sharing grants.
- Agriscience – Board member Fry said Agsci students were visited by rosarian Marci Martin, who worked with students on grooming and preparing roses that were then brought to the Connecticut Flower and Garden Show. National FFA Week was recently celebrated. A ceremony was held for students earning Chapter Level Degrees. Agsci has several field trips planned for April, one to New York and one to Washington DC.
- CABE – None

Future Business

- Nursing Review (SNT) – will be targeted for presentation in April/May
- Gifted and Talented Population (TBS)

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

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

None

Adjournment:

Melissa Finnigan moved, James Mol seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:40 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: [06MAR2023 BOE Meeting](#)

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of April 3, 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Drzyzga, Secretary