

Board of Education Regular Meeting  
Suffield High School Library Media Center  
and via Zoom  
September 5, 2023

Call to Order

Board Chair Sattan called the meeting to order at 6:34 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, James Mol and Maureen Sattan; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel; Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Eric Remington

Absent: Josh Barrows

Recognition

Superintendent Van Tassel and the Board welcomed three Cultural Homestay International students to Suffield Public Schools. Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi introduced Mallory LaBonte, Developing Area Program Administrator, and Nicole LaBarre, Academic Coordinator, of Cultural Homestay International (CHI), who provided an overview of the exchange program. CHI opened in 1980, is a non-profit organization and places approximately 750-1,000 exchange students, ranging from 15-18 years old, nationwide annually. Students are here on a J-1 Visa and are required to leave within two weeks of school ending. CHI asks partner schools to allow exchange students to engage in activities just as resident students would. Ms. LaBonte said the success of the program relies heavily on the host families. Assistant Superintendent Zawawi then introduced the students and their host families. Juliette May, Grade 12, is here from France and the Calavan family is hosting her. Ferdinando Stagno D'Alcontres, Grade 12, is here from Italy and the Viggiano family is hosting him. Teresa Palacin Gonzalez, Grade 10, is here from Spain and the Plakias family is hosting her. Students and host families feel fortunate to share the experience and feel they have made lasting relationships. Assistant Superintendent Zawawi said the students have already involved themselves in Suffield High School sports and activities.

Julie Morrison, A. Ward Spaulding School Music Teacher, gave a presentation on her summer program *Music Broadway Bound*. Ms. Morrison offered five one-week sessions, to students in grades 1–6, with each session having 6-14 students. In a one-week session, students learned an entire medley of a single musical. Ms. Morrison selected musicals that were familiar to the students: Nemo the Musical, Shrek the Musical, Hercules, Wiz of Oz and Suessical the Musical. Students gained confidence, self-discipline and leadership skills. Ms. Morrison hopes to expand the summer program next year by offering two-week sessions to involve the middle and high school students.

Suffield High School Student Representatives

Board Chair Sattan said the student representatives were unable to attend tonight's meeting. Superintendent Van Tassel said the student representatives are looking forward to their roles with the BOE. On behalf of Milo Graham, Superintendent Van Tassel reported on events at Suffield High School. The senior class held their Senior Sunrise and Breakfast, Spirit Week is being planned, fall

sports tryouts were held the week leading into the first day of school, Youth Services held an End of Summer Hangout Event at the Senior Center.

### Public Comment

Dr. Cassandre Victor-Vega, 2 Melrose Lane, stated for public record that she feels the Zoom Webinar is not an effective means of communication for public meetings.

Board Chair Sattan said that Zoom Q&A and chat are not supported in BOE meetings and not recognized as a way for formal public comment.

### Board Member Comment

- Board member Gazdik thanked Cultural Homestay International and Julie Morrison for sharing information about these wonderful opportunities and hopes to see them grow.
- Board members Drzyzga and Antrum welcomed everyone back and wished for a great year.
- Board member Cloyd hopes the exchange student program continues and looks forward to the summer music program growing.
- Board member Finnigan was excited to learn about the exchange student program and host family opportunities.
- Board member Fry welcomed Eric Remington.
- Board member Mol was a foreign exchange student from Belgium and is pleased to see the program in Suffield.

### Reports to the Board

#### • Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Van Tassel welcomed back students, staff and families. He said Convocation was held last Monday and he thanked Board Chair Sattan for her motivating speech and Board members Cloyd and Finnigan for being present. Superintendent Van Tassel reminded everyone to be cautious while driving on school grounds. Bus runs are a bit longer this year and occupancy will be monitored. Dr. Laura LaFlamme, SHS Agriscience Director and SPS Teacher of the Year, has been moved to the semi-final round of Connecticut Teacher of the Year. The Annual Budget Report was successfully submitted last Friday, and the next step is for the auditors to review our financial reports. Dr. Diana Kelley, Director of Special Services, was awarded a three-year competitive mental health staffing grant in the amount of \$182,000. Superintendent Van Tassel said counsel at Shipman & Goodwin are updating the standing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Suffield Public Schools and the Suffield Police Department. Once complete, the revised MOU will be brought to the BOE for review.

#### • Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Sattan said the proposed Special Meeting tentatively scheduled for August 28 was postponed. The draft agenda items included budget training with Bill Hoff and BOE goal setting. Board Chair Sattan would like to propose using the September 18 BOE meeting for budget training. An additional meeting could be scheduled in September for the BOE Retreat to set BOE goals, or it could be pushed to the second meeting in October. Board member Mol has offered his home as the location for the BOE Retreat. Board members are asked to reach out to Board Chair Sattan with their schedule preference. The cell phone policy is being referred to the Policy Subcommittee and school administrators will be providing input. In response to public comment, Board Chair Sattan said one of the topics covered in CABE Board member training is that Board meetings are not public meetings per say, but are meetings held in public, and there is a distinction. Everyone should be able to hear everything happening in Board meetings. The Board does hold two public comment opportunities at its business meetings.

***Terry Antrum left at 7:31 p.m.***

- **Business Manager's Report**

Business Manager Eric Remington said the overlap with Mr. Hoff was valuable and the process of switching dozens of credentials over is near completion. Transportation and Food Service are up and running. The budget is referenced frequently to ensure items requested for purchase are items that were budgeted for. All schools were inspected by Fire Marshal Eric Vincent which resulted in a significant amount of fire code work prior to the start of school. The district is in compliance with fire code standards. Mr. Remington has created four categories for the fire code corrections: routine matters, new fixtures, investigations and corrections. He has also created three categories of cost related to the fire code corrections: labor, fixtures and materials, and consultants and technicians. The goal of the next Finance and Facilities Subcommittee meeting will be to provide an update on the costs of the fire code work as it was not budgeted for. Mr. Remington said he and Fire Marshal Vincent discussed scheduling fire inspections at the end of the school year, as opposed to weeks before the start of school, so that the summer months may be used to address any corrections.

Board members discussed outstanding work to be done for the fire marshal, bus transportation, PikMyKid App and the Mental Health Staffing Grant.

- **Board of Selectmen's Report**

None

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

None

Approval of Minutes

**MOTION #24-07:** Glenn Gazdik moved, James Mol seconded to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of August 14, 2023. Cloyd, Drzyzga, Finnigan, Gazdik, Mol and Sattan voted in favor. Fry abstained. The motion passed **6-0-1**.

Consent Agenda

None

Discussion/Action Items

- **Financial Update**

None

- **District and School Advancement Plan Priorities**

Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi presented on the District and School Advancement Plan Priorities. Assistant Superintendent Zawawi reviewed the three priorities and indicators of success for each Board of Education Goal within the District Advancement Plan. She said the schools focused on Board of Education Goal 2 *Student Achievement* and had each building principal report on their three priorities and indicators of success. The elementary schools are similar in focusing on MTSS & PLC Processes and Drop-in Processes. Additionally, Spaulding will also focus on the Science in Reading and McAlister will also focus on SEL: Responsive Classroom and Fly Five Programs. Suffield Middle School will focus on Tier 1 Strategies, MTSS and Curriculum Alignment, and Student Achievement. Suffield High School will focus on Tier 1 Strategies (Academic and SEL), Professional Learning Communities and Systems of Student Engagement.

Board members discussed the Science of Reading, assessments and data, and social emotional supports for students.

### Subcommittee Reports

- August 24 – Finance and Facilities Subcommittee – Board member Finnigan said Dr. Laura LaFlamme, Suffield Regional Agriscience Director, attended the meeting to discuss the ASTE grant and explained how funds are utilized. A tour of the Large Animal Facility was given. Bill Hoff, Business Manager, reviewed the current hiring and open positions in the district. Grants were reviewed and discussed. ESSER funds will end, and budgets will need to be adjusted. Mr. Hoff reported that the turnover factor is currently at \$264,000. Board Liaison Reports
- Capital Region Education Council (CREC) – No report
- Agriscience – No report
- Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) – No report

### Future Business

- A. Elementary Reading Curriculum (TBS)
- B. District Discipline Report (TBS)
- C. School Based Midyear Recap (TBS)

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

### Public Comment

Sandra Janik, 380 Prospect Street, thanked the Board for the information presented tonight. She can't see other virtual attendees on the Webinar, can generally only see the Board table, and can only hear those on microphone.

Board Chair Sattan reiterated that the Board wants all virtual attendees to be able to hear the proceedings, and will encourage all speakers to be vigilant about speaking into an active microphone.

### Board Member Comment

Board member Cloyd thanked everyone for their presentations.

Board member Finnigan thanked Dr. Laura LaFlamme for her Convocation speech and wished her luck in the Connecticut Teacher of the Year process.

Board member Fry said the request for digital signage is moving forward. The Planning and Zoning Commission tabled the vote for a future meeting.

Board member Mol thanked the principals for the pre-return to school activities.

Board Chair Sattan and Superintendent Van Tassel said open houses will be held beginning next week.

### Adjournment

Jamie Drzyzga moved, Glenn Gazdik seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: [05SEP2023 BOE Meeting](#)

*Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of October 2, 2023.*

Respectfully submitted,  
Jamie Drzyzga  
Secretary