

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

Call to Order

Board Chair Sattan called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Tracy Cloyd, Jamie Drzyzga (arrived at 6:36 p.m.), 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

The Board recognized McAlister's fifth grade students who were nominated for this year's Kid Governor. From Ms. Orié's class, Donovan Boucher was nominated for his platform on Food Waste; from Ms. Ralston's class, Alex Deenihan was nominated for his platform on Funding for Youth Sports; from Ms. Popeleski's class, Emily Mosher was nominated for her platform on Pollution; from Ms. Shaw's class, Maggie O'Brien was nominated for her platform on Anxiety; from Ms. Bennett's class, Elise Pafford was nominated for her platform on Ending Animal Abuse; from Ms. Harrington's class, Ian Parker was nominated for his platform on Homelessness; and from Mr. McCarthy's class, Ayra Singhanian was nominated for her platform on Deforestation. Emily Mosher was chosen by her fifth grade peers to represent McAlister at the state competition. Superintendent Van Tassel commended the students for their hard work and congratulated Emily Mosher. The Board congratulated all the students on a job well done and thanked the parents and staff for their support.

Suffield High School Student Representatives

Keila Silva, Class of 2025, shared the news and events at McAlister Intermediate School and A. Ward Spaulding School. Student Representative Silva said STEM classes at Spaulding School have students thinking as engineers, kindergarten students enjoyed a trip to Brown's Harvest and preschool students enjoyed a visit from the Suffield Fire Department. McAlister Intermediate School students also had a visit from the Suffield Fire Department and learned how to create fire safety plans. The SFD brought the smoke trailer and students experienced what a simulated fire is like. The Final Mile Run will be taking place in Hartford for students who have walked, ran or jogged 12 miles at school.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

- Board members thanked the students for their work on the Kid Governor Program.
- Board member Cloyd thanked Assistant Superintendent Zawawi for her work on the Veterans Day program coming up this Friday. She thanked First Selectman Colin Moll.

- Board member Fry said November is Native American Heritage Month. Veterans Day is this Friday and students and staff are encouraged to wear red, white and blue in recognition of the important work and sacrifice our Veterans have given for us. He said Election Day is tomorrow and encouraged the community to vote.
- Board member Mol congratulated the Suffield Middle School Boys Cross Country Team for finishing 1st in the state at the statewide cross country meet. He congratulated the SMS Girls Cross Country Team for finishing 3rd in the state.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Van Tasel congratulated the students who participated in the Kid Governor Program. He said Fiscal Year 2025 budget planning is currently underway. The recommended budget will be presented in January as opposed to December. Parents and Guardians are reminded to have up-to-date contact information in SchoolMessenger as we are approaching our winter weather season. Agriscience students who attended the FFA Competition in Indianapolis, IN took home Gold in Floriculture, Silver in Nursery Landscape and Bronze in both Farm & Agribusiness Management and Livestock Evaluation. The SHS Homecoming Dance was a great success. Superintendent Van Tasel thanked Mark Janick and Charlene Flagg for their work in setting up the event and thanked the SHS administrative team for organizing the event. He thanked Assistant Superintendent Zawawi and the Veterans Day committee members for creating the Veterans Day Program planned for this Friday. He said the Memorandum of Understanding with the Suffield Police Department in regard to the School Resource Officer position is currently being reviewed by the district's legal counsel. Superintendent Van Tasel hopes to present the revised MOU to the Board in the near future. He congratulated the fall athletes on their many successes.

- Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Sattan said this is Board member Drzyzga's last business meeting with the BOE and thanked her for her service to the Board of Education. Board member Drzyzga has served on the Board for six years and has been the BOE Secretary and the Chair of the Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee. Board Chair Sattan said Board member Drzyzga is a teacher of students and was many times a teacher of the Board. The CABE/CAPSS Convention is November 17 and 18. Board members Gazdik, Finnigan and Fry will join the district's Calendar Committee. The BOE has received the resignation of Terry Antrum. Election Day is tomorrow, please vote. Board member Finnigan said she, Board Chair Sattan, Superintendent Van Tasel, Business Manager Remington and Director of Facilities Plano met with South Windsor Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Kate Carter to see that district's completed building project. The meeting proved to be quite valuable and provided a great deal of insight into the building process. Demographics are often a guess and it was evident with SWPS. The state requires an average over eight years for building projects. Board member Finnigan is excited to get moving on Suffield's project and hopes to get the support of the town.

- Business Manager's Report

Business Manager Eric Remington said Food Service is experiencing a chronic shortage of labor but is making progress. Breakfast participation is low across the district, it is free and he hopes to see an increase in participation. Food Service is also seeing a daily increase in negative student balances, reach outs to families are taking place. The transition of the payroll position is going smoothly. Two vans were in the Capital Expenditure Budget. An activity van was purchased last week and 13 employees are in the process of being endorsed to drive the activity van. A van for

Special Services is also being purchased and should be received next week. A claims review with CIGNA occurred last week. The district pays \$6,500,000 in health insurance yearly.

- Board of Selectmen's Report

None

- Board of Finance Liaison's Report

None

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #24-12: James Mol moved, Glenn Gazdik seconded to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of October 2 and October 16, 2023. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

Board Chair Sattan reviewed the structure of the Consent Agenda. The Consent Agenda is meant to have one motion, without controversial items, such as field trip requests and policies that come through with the approval of the Policy Subcommittee. If any Board member wants to discuss something on the Consent Agenda, it can be pulled off and discussed and a separate vote can be held.

Board Chair Sattan asked to separate Policy #5123.3 Graduation Ceremony from the Consent Agenda for consideration. Board member Finnigan asked to separate Policy #6141.22 Bring Your Own Technology from the Consent Agenda for consideration.

MOTION #24-13: James Mol moved to approve the remaining item on the consent agenda:

A. Revision of Policy: #5141.3 Health Assessment and Immunizations

Tracy Cloyd seconded the motion. All members voted in favor of approving the consent agenda. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

MOTION #24-14: Brian Fry moved, James Mol seconded to approve Policy #5123.3 with the proposed changes, which defines the adornments for the specialty recognitions of Valedictorian/Salutatorian, National and World Language Honor Societies, and Agriscience FFA, and allows lapel pins for authorized clubs, teams and activities. The Board discussed whether the use of cords or a specialty stole should be limited to academic-based honors or whether they should also be granted for Agriscience graduates due to the significant additional requirements in that key specialty program, despite it not requiring a threshold academic performance. Cloyd, Drzyzga, Finnigan, Fry, Gazdik and Mol voted in favor. Sattan voted against. The motion passed **6-1-0**.

MOTION #24-15: Maureen Sattan moved, Brian Fry seconded to approve Policy #6141.22 Bring Your Own Technology with the proposed changes. This policy had been discussed at length at the Policy Subcommittee meeting, specifically in regard to Suffield Middle School cell phone use. The Policy Subcommittee recommends restricting middle school students' access to technology as it does for the elementary schools. High school student cell phone use was not yet considered. The Policy Subcommittee members reviewed their discussions for the Board. Principal Smith explained the infraction rules and said student conversations are held regarding responsible use of devices.

Principal Smith said the school counselors, social worker and psychologist are present during lunch waves and are watchful of students who may be struggling. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

Maureen Sattan left the meeting at 7:40 p.m.

Discussion/Action Items

- September Financial Report

Business Manager Eric Remington reported on the projected surplus for the year and food service. Transportation is showing a surplus of \$183,000 for the end of the year. Health benefits are showing a surplus of \$295,000. Equipment Repair is showing a deficit of \$42,000 that is primarily due to fire code violation repairs. Substitute coverage and Special Education will be monitored. The Grant report is showing an \$800,000 swing in next year's budget. Food Service is showing an \$81,000 deficit. Board members discussed incentives to increase lunch participation. Mr. Remington said kiosks are being looked into but there is no quick fix.

- Annual Student Discipline Report

Superintendent Van Tasel provided the annual School-based Discipline Data Report for the secondary schools. The data that has been pulled for this presentation is drawn from the annual Connecticut State Department of Education ED166 Data Collection. The CSDE defines the categories of discipline. All district data collected on discipline is submitted in PowerSchool and is also submitted to the CSDE. This information is required by the CSDE. Incident types that resulted in discipline and frequency of incidents, as well as repeat offender incidents, were discussed. Principal Smith said he noticed that verbal altercations are now escalating into physical altercations more frequently than in the past. He said this increase could be due to the fact that students are now reporting inappropriate behaviors. Principal Olearczyk said she has noticed an increase in iPhones and smartwatches at the elementary level and Principal Pryce said it important for parents to understand the impact the smart watches and cell phones have on the students. Principal Pryce said students are now reporting directly to staff if they hear or see something that does not seem appropriate. Principal Apanovitch said restorative meetings are helping to deter repeat offenders and that a trauma informed response is an extremely important part of the process. She said families and staff are willing to work on making change. She said the security support staff play an important role in the school and that she feels there is a place for Advisory in the high school. Principal Pryce said MIS is dedicating time to social emotional learning. Principal Smith said students need emotional support and that counselors, school psychologists and social workers are needed. In response to a Board discussion, he said family engagement is strong within the Open Choice community and discipline issues among the Open Choice student population is on par with the resident student population. Board members discussed the spike in racial slurs/hate crimes at SMS and inquired if the elementary schools had seen an increase in incidents. They discussed what administrators may need and if the administrators found the data surprising.

- Resignation of Board of Education Member

Board Vice Chair Gazdik said that Terry Antrum submitted his letter of resignation to the Town Clerk who has instructed the Board to follow the Town Charter. Board Vice Chair Gazdik read the excerpt from the Bylaws regarding filling vacancies. Board Vice Chair Gazdik said the Town Clerk notified the political committees and letters of interest are being accepted. The 14 to 30 day window runs from November 9 – November 25.

Subcommittee Reports

- October 20, 2023 – Policy Subcommittee Meeting – Board member Fry said members discussed the oversight and conditions that might be required relative to facilities use in regard to SHS student Andrew Bombard’s proposal that was presented to the Board of Education at a recent meeting. Based on the advice of the district’s legal counsel, the administration will work with student leadership to identify alternate options, possibly a signature stone, that will build school spirit and create a senior class tradition but will not involve the painting of parking spaces.
- October 26, 2023 – Finance and Facilities Subcommittee Meeting – Board member Finnigan said Larry Plano, Director of Facilities, provided an update on the Large Animal Facility. Mr. Remington discussed the September Financial Report. Transportation was discussed as well as incentives for drivers. Legal Counsel reviewed the contract with M&J Transportation.

Board Liaison Reports

- Capital Region Education Council (CREC) – None
- Agriscience – Board member Fry said members of AgSci attended the National Convention in Indianapolis. Three students will be recognized at the national level.
- Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) – Board member Finnigan said she and Board Chair Sattan, along with the Superintendent Van Tasel and Assistant Superintendent Zawawi will attend the CABE/CAPSS Convention. The BOE received the CABE Board Recognition Award for the second year in a row. Superintendent Van Tasel said Assistant Superintendent Zawawi submitted two entries to CABE for their Communications Award and received a citation. One was for the Program of Studies at SHS and the other was for the Kindergarten Orientation at AWS.

Future Business

Board member Fry would like a workshop on Artificial Intelligence as it could have policy implications.

Public Comment

None

Board member Cloyd would like any Board members who are available to attend the Veterans Day programs on Friday.

Board Member Comment

Board member Gazdik said it is important to hear the importance of roles, such as the School Family Liaison position. He appreciated having Board member Drzyzga’s voice on the Board.

Board member Finnigan thanked Board member Drzyzga for her time on the Board and thanked Assistant Superintendent Zawawi for providing the Veterans Day Program.

Board member Drzyzga thanked Assistant Superintendent Zawawi for putting together the Veterans Day Program. She said the discipline data can be tied to coping mechanisms for students and we need to work on that with them. She said the book *What Made Maddy Run* provided a lot of insight on coping mechanisms and how reactive students can be.

Board member Fry thanked Board member Drzyzga for her years on the Board. He said he heard student IDs should have the suicide hotline printed on them and asked where that was in legislation as he feels this is extremely valuable.

Board member Mol thanked Board member Drzyzga for her years of service and advice over the years.

Adjournment

Melissa Finnigan moved, Tracy Cloyd seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:04 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of December 4, 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Drzyzga
Board Secretary