

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Suffield High School Library Media Center
and via Zoom Webinar
January 2, 2024

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, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry (arrived at 6:38pm), Glenn Gazdik, James Mol, Maureen Sattan and Samuel Toskin; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi and Business Manager Eric Remington

Also in attendance: State Representative Tami Zawistowski and Board of Finance Liaison Brian Kost

Absent: Josh Barrows, Debra Dudack

Recognition

Schools in the Spotlight

Allison Daly, Suffield Public Schools Transition Coordinator, presented on the special education transition planning at the high school. Transition planning is a requirement of special education law as part of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process. Students involved with Ms. Daly's Transition Planning Program work with their team to develop desired post-secondary outcomes, outcome goals that align with post-secondary education goals, employment goals and independent living goals. Ms. Daly shared positive student and staff feedback on the program. A recent survey of SHS special education students found that some students are not confident in their strengths, and many are fearful of their future, leaving the constant structure and routine that school provides. The evolution of transition work at Suffield Public Schools was reviewed as well as the four elements required of post-secondary transition work. Ms. Daly said working with EastCONN over the past few years has helped the team to establish goals, realign priorities and include student voice. Ms. Daly and her team recently held a Transition Training and Trade Expo where 32 vendors with a variety of trade and training backgrounds attended. A Transition Night has been planned for March 6, 2024 and will include representatives from different local agencies to talk with parents about partnerships. Ms. Daly also coordinates transition program shadow visits for students in need of 18-22 year old programming. In looking ahead, Ms. Daly hopes to hold monthly career panels highlighting different career clusters. Focusing on ninth and tenth graders and their executive functioning skills is a department goal.

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 AWS and MIS raised over \$1,500 for the CCMC Pajama Day fundraiser and collected over 350 toys to be donated to children in need. AWS students are doing an outstanding job of composting, accumulating 576 pounds during the month of December. Students are currently working on unplugged coding. MIS held their first assembly created by the MIS Student Council and is looking to hold monthly assemblies focusing on CARES values. The service dog program has returned to MIS.

Student Representative Milo Graham was not in attendance.

Keila Silva left the meeting at 7:04 p.m.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

- Board member Finnigan is excited for budget season and wished all a happy new year.
- Board member Cloyd welcomed all back, thanked Allison Daly for the presentation and thanked Board of Finance Liaison Brian Kost and State Representative Tami Zawistowski for attending the meeting.
- Board member Fry was out of state for the December 18 BOE meeting but was able to familiarize himself with the assessment information. He is concerned and worried that we are not adjusting and correcting for student achievement trends. Suffield is a well-funded district with bright students and engaged families and our assessment scores should reflect that.
- Board members Gazdik and Mol wished all a happy new year.
- Board member Toskin thanked Allison Daly for her presentation.
- Board Chair Sattan found the PSAT results concerning, with only 37%-43% of students meeting or exceeding benchmark on math. Though she supports the district leadership analysis and their remediation planning, and she understands that it is complicated, she believes even more is required. She believes the intervention model is not the entire answer as fully half the student population is not meeting or exceeding goal. Chair Sattan advocated for adding more instructional time for mathematics to be able to get through more material with more rigor. Adding a double block at the middle school level and extended time at the elementary level for math instruction should be considered. Board Chair Sattan understands there may be constraints on the scheduling but something new must be tried. In addition to other interventions, she asks administration to consider the feasibility of more math instruction time. It is time for an aggressive approach.

Reports to the Board

● Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Van Tasel wished all a happy new year. He said the feedback being received tonight from Board members are all things that have been taken into consideration when looking at results of student outcomes and budget discussions will touch upon some of the areas noted.

● Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Sattan said Brian Kost is now the BOE Board of Finance Liaison and thanked him for taking the role. The next BOE meeting will be Tuesday, January 16, due to no school on Monday. An additional BOE meeting will be held on January 29 and will primarily focus on budget. Board Chair Sattan will be representing the BOE at several meetings throughout the district including graduation preparation, planning for Teamsters negotiations, SMS building walkthroughs and the ACCE meeting.

● Business Manager's Report

Mr. Remington said his focus has been on the budget. Transportation has been running smoothly over the last month and he thanked Jackie McDunnah, M&J Transportation Coordinator, for the work she does daily. Food Service has increased breakfast sales at Suffield Middle School thanks to

SMS administration making changes to the drop off procedure which increased participation. The SHS food cart is pending approval from the health department. Food service staffing is now stable. The district continues to struggle with collecting negative balances for meals that students charge. The district does not have a governance structure around the 401(a) plan and Mr. Remington recommends putting one in place. A committee should be looking at investment options and controls over the plans. It could be at the Board level, or if the Board agrees, the Retirement Commission may be able to oversee it. Board members discussed the possibility of offering breakfast options later in the day for interested students.

- Board of Selectmen's Report

None

- Board of Finance Liaison's Report

Board of Finance Liaison Brian Kost said this is a revaluation year in town. He estimates one-third of households will see a 10% increase in property taxes due to the revaluation. On years of revaluation, it is typically prudent to have a tight budget. He said compromise is needed, investments in facilities is needed, it is time for major renovations to be done. If taxpayers have to choose to invest largely in the infrastructure, there needs to be savings in the operational budgets. It is important that Capital planning have an interrelationship with operating budgets.

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #24-26: Melissa Finnigan moved, James Mol seconded to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of December 4, 2023 and December 18, 2023. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

None

Discussion/Action Items

- Discussion with State Representative Tami Zawistowski

State Representative Zawistowski thanked the Board for inviting her to the meeting. The short legislative session begins in February and lasts until May. The budget has been favorable over the last few years but that is all changing now. The 2017 changes socked away money to pay down pension debt. This year there is pressure to break the spending cap and pressure to put money into higher education. The CSDE reading waiver has been an issue. At the end of January, the Education Committee will provide an update on why waivers are being denied, this will be a public meeting. Representative Zawistowski is hearing concerns from parents about kindergarten start age eligibility. Teachers are concerned about school climate and behavioral issues; more discipline is needed in schools and this is part of the reason for the teacher shortage. Recommendations for staffing shortages will be addressed. A commission has been formed to work on mandate relief and will push for metrics on fiscal and organization impacts on any of the laws that are unfunded mandates. Agriscience transportation is still being worked on. Representative Zawistowski discussed student safety and the use of cameras inside school buses. She said she would like to see the state fully fund special education reimbursements. The state has allocated \$7.2 million for state agriscience programs.

Dr. Van Tassel said the district applied for the reading waiver and set up a meeting after the denial was received, the decision was appealed, and the district is waiting to hear any response that may be forthcoming. The district has budgeted \$135,000 for a reading program at Spaulding School and that is a lot to put on a public school. He said funding should be provided to districts who were

denied waivers. Beginning this year, towns are only going to be responsible for 56% of tuition costs for agriscience students and the state is guaranteeing that they will pick up the remaining balance. This will need to be monitored and is a concern.

Board members discussed student assessment scores factoring into the reading waiver decisions, private school taxes, the HVAC Grant and what could be done to make Representative Zawistowski's job easier. They discussed concerns with the responsibility of the CT Department of Administrative Services.

BOF Liaison Kost said the budget for the town is paid by property tax, state aid and fees. The portion of the budget paid by the state has been steadily declining over time. The town should be getting reimbursed for the prison under the pilot program. Hartford should be funding their commitments. He said we have yet to receive the State's share of the cost of construction of Suffield High School.

7:56 p.m. Glenn Gazdik left, returned at 7:58 p.m.

- 2024-2025 Preschool Planning

Dr. Diana Kelley, Director of Special Services, provided an update on the Suffield Public Schools Integrated Preschool Program. Dr. Kelley reviewed Special Education requirements, peer model selection, and the Preschool Team staffing model. Current preschool classes were broken down by morning and afternoon sessions, 3 year old and 4 year old classes, and students with IEPs and peer models. A shift in the program is being suggested, the 50/50 ratio is not being met. Next year the team would like to shift to a half-day model for all students for a total of six sessions. It would be ideal to have more peers and there is a wait list. 58% of preschools have half-day programs. Board members discussed if services and kindergarten readiness can be met with a half-day program, when the switch from a half-day to full-day program occurred, what the impact would be on Birth to Three referrals and if this was a budget neutral recommendation. Board members discussed whether this model is to be in opposition of what the district is trying to accomplish in terms of preparing students.

- November Financial Report

Mr. Remington said the salary line item currently projects a surplus, but a number of staff will be going out on FMLA and that surplus could diminish. Health benefits continue to show a surplus and that will carry over into next year. The equipment repair line is showing a deficit due to fire code work. Transportation is showing a surplus due to fewer buses running.

Zawistowski exited the meeting at 8:21 p.m.

- FY25 Budget Proposal

Dr. Van Tassel said this year budget materials will be shared with BOE members via a digital studio. He gave special recognition to the administrators and Business Manager Eric Remington for their work on the budget. Dr. Van Tassel read a summary paragraph of the budget transmittal. The proposed budget for FY2025 is \$40,149,671, a 4.19% or \$1,615,778 increase over the FY24 budget. Dr. Van Tassel reviewed decreased, increased and budget neutral personnel changes. Personnel requests that were made but were not included in the budget proposal totaled \$380,690. Salaries and health benefits make up 78% of the operating budget. Dr. Van Tassel said student enrollment should include outplaced students as the district is paying for those students. He highlighted budgeted programs and reviewed ARP ESSER Grant Expiration positions that were moved to either the BOE

Budget or Open Choice Grant. Potential additional savings and/or liabilities were reviewed. Mr. Remington explained the gross expenditures, grants, and BOE Net of Grants. He said the bottom line for the budget proposal is \$40,149,671. Dr. Van Tasel reviewed the 5-year budget analysis that included the CPI. Student enrollment was reviewed, excluding outplaced students.

Brian Kost exited the meeting at 9:00 p.m.

Subcommittee Reports

- December 18, 2023 – Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee Meeting – Board member Finnigan said the Subcommittee discussed the topics for upcoming meetings, best meeting times and days.
- December 21, 2023 – Finance and Facilities Subcommittee Meeting – Board member Gazdik said the November Financial Report was reviewed, ACCE priorities were recommended and the Suffield Middle School Facilities Presentation was discussed.

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC (Capitol Region Education Council) – Board Chair Sattan said there was no council meeting in December. Board member Toskin will be the CREC Liaison moving forward.
- Agriscience – Board member Mol thanked Board member Fry for passing the position of Agriscience Liaison to him. The ASTE-required Agriscience Consulting Committee held a December meeting to review the progress on the recommendations from the five-year program review, last completed in 2020. The December meeting provided positive feedback regarding the program and some recommendations were given on how to improve the program, including adding a position to maintain the AgSci Extension and improving recruitment of Agriscience students. The mechanics lab has some dated equipment that does not meet current OSHA standards, and improvements are recommended. Eighth grade AgSci interviews will take place next week with acceptance letters going out on January 24. The FFA Senior Capstone presentations will take place on January 25. A Greenhand Chapter Degree Night will take place in February.
- CABE (Connecticut Association of Board of Education) – No update.

Future Business

No additions.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

- Board member Finnigan thanked Dr. Van Tasel for the budget transmittal. She appreciated the list of requests that did not make the budget being included. She asked administrators to share their needs with the Board.
- Board member Cloyd said administrators need to notify the Board with what they need.
- Board member Fry said the decrease in outplaced special education students is a credit to Dr. Kelley and her programming. He said the district is under-recognizing the gifted and talented population and he would like to see budget movement toward screening tools. He thanked Brian Kost for attending and mentioning the reimbursement amounts due from the state.
- Board member Mol thanked Dr. Van Tasel for the budget and for creating a digital budget studio to save trees.
- Board member Toskin thanked Dr. Van Tasel for the budget.

- Board Chair Sattan said Board member Fry’s budget recommendation for gifted and talented should be placed on the link to the BOE Budget Question document and that is where all BOE members should populate budget questions.

Adjournment

Tracy Cloyd moved, James Mol seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:14 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: [02JAN2024 BOE Meeting](#)

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of February 5, 2024

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan
Board Chair