

Suffield, Connecticut

Approved by Bd. of Ed.

Board of Education Regular Meeting  
Suffield High School Library Media Center  
and via Zoom Webinar  
February 5, 2024

Call to Order

Board Chair Sattan called the meeting to order at 6:29 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Josh Barrows, Debra Dudack (joined at 6:33), Melissa Finnigan (via Zoom), Brian Fry (joined at 6:32), Glenn Gazdik (via Zoom), Sam Toskin and Maureen Sattan; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi and Business Manager Eric Remington

Also in attendance: Brian Kost (via Zoom), Board of Finance Liaison

Absent: Tracy Cloyd, James Mol

Recognition

*Schools in the Spotlight*

Peter Davis, Head Coach of Aces High Robotics FRC Team 176, gave a presentation on the Aces High Robotics Team. Mr. Davis said participation in the program has increased steadily since 2019 and the program currently has 33 students actively participating. Mentors of the program help to bring in sponsorships, donate personal funds, and dedicate hundreds of hours supporting students in the program. Students learn project management skills, participate in community outreach, and fundraise all year long. Costs associated with the program can be quite high, with team registration fees as high as \$15,000 yearly and the cost of building a robot between \$15,000-\$20,000. Students are responsible for paying transportation and hotel costs associated with competitions. Senior students on the Robotics Team shared their experiences and what they learned from participating in the program including leadership skills, time management, prototype testing, CAD design, and mechanical simulations. Mr. Davis shared a wish list with the Board on behalf of the Robotics Team. The team is looking to reduce direct costs to the students by half. A letter from Mr. Robert Lowell was read and in it he requested the Board of Education increase funding to support the Robotics program. Mr. Lowell made a personal contribution of \$5,000 to the Robotics Team. Mr. Davis said that he recently learned that funding for the program is included in the Suffield Public Schools proposed FY25 budget. He shared a video of the students working on the team's robot. Superintendent Van Tassel said \$10,000 has been budgeted for the program next year.

Suffield High School Student Representatives

Milo Graham, Class of 2024, shared the news and events at Suffield High School and Suffield Middle School. Kelly Giannuzzi, Director of Youth Services, will be starting a Junior Youth Leadership Council. Approximately 50 students from Suffield Middle School were selected to participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Positive student behavior is being rewarded with affirmation tickets. Performances of *Beauty and the Beast Junior* will be held February 29-March 2. At Suffield High School, the Music Department held a Coffee House Concert on February 1 and a District Band Concert will be held on February 6. The Winter Dance is scheduled for February 10 and the Volleyball Marathon will be held March 21. Course selections are now open for next year and counselors are available to meet with students and families.

Keila Silva, Class of 2025, shared the news and events at McAlister Intermediate School and A. Ward Spaulding School. Student Representative Silva said Spaulding School celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> Day of School today and second grade students are starting a Lego robotics unit. Spaulding students are doing an incredible job composting, collecting 2,016 pounds of compost in the month of January alone. McAlister Intermediate School held a ping-pong tournament, the fifth grade Student Council is currently running a toy drive and working to create school assemblies to promote positivity.

***Milo Graham and Keila Silva exited the meeting at 7:03 p.m.***

#### Public Comment

Sarah Oliver, 1434 Hill Street, said she is one of the Agriscience teachers at Suffield High School. She said the program continues to have students complete a Senior Capstone project and 38 seniors presented Capstone projects last week. She said it is exciting to see many of the Agriscience students involved in other programs across the district including athletics, music, arts, and robotics, as well as the Suffield community as a whole.

Griffin Mandirola, 1667 Hill Street, said he is a senior in the Agriscience program. He said the program has taught him many skills such as public speaking and problem solving. His Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) project consisted of him working on his family's eleventh generation, 350-acre organic vegetable farm. Being part of the Agriscience program helped him to realize he would like to continue his education and he will be studying agriculture business at UCONN next year. He thanked the Board of Education for giving him the opportunity to be part of the Agriscience program.

Isabelle Sorrow, 2609 Mountain Road, said she is a senior in the Agriscience program and is a State Officer for Future Farmers of America (FFA). She is amazed by what the program offers and feels Suffield's program is a standout among other districts. She said being part of the National FFA Convention was an incredible experience. Suffield's Agriscience program continues outside of the classroom. She started with raising a few chickens and now runs a small pig farm. She thanked the Board of Education for their support.

Chris Nikolis, 162 Quail Run Road, said he was representing the NorConn Attack Baseball League. The league primarily uses Suffield High School baseball and softball fields for practices and games. He understands costs may be associated with the use of the fields in the future. The league understands it is a privilege, and not a right, to use the fields and the league donated \$500 last year to the Suffield High School Athletics program to show its appreciation. He said it is his understanding that the user fee could be \$20 per hour, which would cost the league approximately \$3,500-\$4,000 a season in addition to other team costs. He said notice was not given to programs that use the field and there was no opportunity to discuss the fee with the Board. The league is a not-for-profit program, coaches are unpaid, coaches' children pay full tuition, and all funds stay within the program. He suggested drafting a one-page user guide for field use, a one-time annual fee rather than per hour cost, or a staggered fee structure. He asks that the fee be reconsidered. Board Chair Sattan said this was discussed at a Policy Subcommittee meeting but has not yet been brought before the Board.

### Board Member Comment

- Board member Dudack thanked the Robotics team and public comment speakers. She appreciates the thorough budget work that has been done. She said it is Black History Month and she would like to know how the schools are supporting this.
- Board member Fry thanked Chris Nikolis for his public comment and the issue will be discussed at the next Policy Subcommittee meeting. He thanked the students for their public comments. He said this is Black History Month and is hopeful that students will be learning Black history. He said full day kindergarten became official in the district on this day back in 2013. He is hopeful that the district will continue with a robust preschool program going forward for all Suffield students.
- Board member Toskin thanked the Robotics program for their presentation, the public comment speakers, and the Music Department and students for the Coffee Hour Concert he attended.
- Board member Barrows thanked the Robotics team for their presentation. He said it was brought to his attention that explicit course material around a subject that is divisive was shared with students in a particular Suffield High School class. He told the parent he would mention it during Board Member Comment as he feels it is important as he has two young children in the school system. It is his opinion that something of this nature, where there is a divide on this particular topic, should be discussed at the Board level.
- Board members Gazdik and Finnigan thanked the Robotics team for their presentation.

### Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Van Tassel said Keila Silva is a national semi-finalist in ecoAmerica's *American Climate Leadership Award for High School Students*. He congratulated the Indoor Track team for winning the NCCC Conference Championship and the Volleyball team for being awarded the Barbara J. Startup Sportsmanship Award. The Meghan Voisine Kindness Fund recently provided several grants to teachers in the district and Superintendent Van Tassel thanked the Voisine family. The Suffield Middle School Building Project meeting with the Board of Selectmen may be held at the end of February or beginning of March and the Board will be notified once a meeting date has been decided. The Special Services Department received notice from the State that the district meets requirements in all categories of the 2023 District Annual Performance Reports and Determinations. Superintendent Van Tassel will attend the Legislative Breakfast with Board Chair Sattan on February 15 and Representative Zawistowski also plans to attend. Notification was received from the state that out of the 75% of reimbursement that the district should receive for excess cost as promised, it will now only receive 70.5% reimbursement. The district's Black History Month activities will be shared with the Board.

- Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Sattan said she represented the Board, sometimes with other Board members, at the Superintendent's Coffee Hour, Teamsters Negotiations planning meeting, ACCE Walkthroughs, and Suffield Middle School Building Project planning meetings. The next regular BOE meeting is Thursday, February 22, and an executive session meeting will be held February 12 for the Superintendent's mid-year evaluation. Board Chair Sattan will be attending Student Achievement Meetings, a Graduation Planning Meeting, and the Legislative Breakfast.

- Business Manager's Report

Business Manager Eric Remington said the focus is currently on refining the budget. An extensive amount of work has gone into the FY24 financial statements. Food Service continues to be challenged by negative student balances and after talking with other districts, Suffield is in better

shape than most. Outreach to parents of students with negative balances continues. Last year, Food Service ended the year with a sizable excess fund balance and the district must provide the state with a plan to work that down. Transportation is operating smoothly. The activity van and special services van are now registered and operational.

- Board of Selectmen Liaison's Report  
None

- Board of Finance Liaison's Report  
None

#### Approval of Minutes

**MOTION #24-28:** Debra Dudack moved, Sam Toskin seconded to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of January 2, January 16, and January 29, 2024. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

#### Consent Agenda

**MOTION #24-29:** Brian Fry moved, Debra Dudack seconded to approve the following on the consent agenda: Policy #6146 Graduation Requirements and #4112.4 Employee Health Exams. All members voted in favor of approving the consent agenda. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

#### Discussion/Action Items

- December Financial Report

Mr. Remington reviewed the December Financial Report. He said some line items may show negative amounts due to overruns and that fire code work is a significant expense. He said there are many moving parts with Special Services and that the district could not absorb any surprises from Special Services. The district is responsible for approximately 25% of excess costs for out-of-district placements with costs ranging from \$100,000 to \$400,000. Diana Kelley, Ed.D., Director of Special Services, explained that student needs can change, students with high needs may move into the district, it is an unknown. Board members discussed the reasons for increased Special Services costs.

#### ***Sam Toskin left at 7:45pm, returned at 7:50pm***

- FY24 Budget Transfer – Athletic Trainer Salary

Mr. Remington said an outside provider previously provided services to our athletes and that contract was terminated and an athletic trainer was hired. He is requesting to transfer \$40,600 from the supply line budget to the salary line budget for the athletic trainer salary.

**MOTION #24-30:** Maureen Sattan moved, Glenn Gazdik seconded to approve the FY24 Budget Transfer for the Athletic Trainer Salary. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

- Acceptance of Donation from Home Depot

Superintendent Van Tasel said Rebecca Osleger, Director of Technology, received a gift of \$8,000 from Home Depot to be used at Suffield Middle School and Suffield High School for the Home Builders Institute Program. Board members thanked Home Depot and Ms. Osleger.

**MOTION #24-31:** Maureen Sattan moved, Sam Toskin seconded to accept the donation of \$8,000 from Home Depot. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

- Discussion and Possible Approval of the 2024-2025 District School Calendar

Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi began by thanking the District Calendar Committee. The Committee met three times and consisted of 24 people, including members of the Board of Education, administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals and parents. Assistant Superintendent Zawawi reviewed the proposed first day of school, December Break, April Break, and the graduation date. She reviewed the proposed early dismissal dates for professional development and parent/teacher conferences. One of the biggest proposed changes to the calendar is the number of student days going from 182 days to 180 days. Assistant Superintendent Zawawi said unfunded mandates are adding to the need for teacher professional development. Board members discussed potentially adding Indigenous Peoples Day to the calendar as well as giving consideration to potentially adding one of the Jewish High Holidays. Board members discussed the documents reviewed by the Calendar Committee, the amount of hours teachers need to cover curriculum, and the reasoning behind having 182 student days. Board members discussed giving careful consideration for professional development time and not having flexibility to forgive any days with the required minimum of 180 student days. Extending the proposed cutoff of June 13 for considering a reduction to April vacation was discussed. Board members expressed interest in exploring the option of giving elementary schools additional professional development days to cover new reading and math programs. Board members decided to table the decision of approving the proposed 2024-2025 District School Calendar until next month but did approve a few aspects related to the calendar.

**MOTION #24-32:** Maureen Sattan moved, Brian Fry seconded to approve April 14-18, 2025 as April Break on the proposed 2024-2025 District School Calendar. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

**MOTION #24-33:** Melissa Finnigan moved, Glenn Gazdik seconded to approve August 28, 2024 as the Teacher Work Day and August 29, 2024 as the First Day of School for students on the proposed 2024-2025 District School Calendar. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

**MOTION #24-34:** Brian Fry moved, Debra Dudack seconded to approve December 23, 2024-January 1, 2025 as Winter Break on the proposed 2024-2025 District School Calendar. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

*Maureen Sattan left at 8:41pm, returned at 8:45pm*

*Michelle Zawawi left at 8:43pm, returned at 8:46pm*

*Glenn Gazdik exited the meeting at 8:45pm*

- **FY25 Budget Discussion**

Laura LaFlamme, Ed.D., Director of Agriscience, reviewed the Suffield High School Agriscience Program budget. Some of the 2023-2024 program highlights included placement at the National Floriculture Career Development event, food science room renovations, large animal facility storage project, statewide teacher recognition, and class retention rate. Dr. LaFlamme shared the 2024-2025 Advancement Planning Initiatives. She would like to request increasing the number of UCONN ECE courses, prepare for the 2025 State Agriculture, Science, and Technology Education (ASTE) review, and utilize the agriculture facilities and land labs to maximize student engagement. Board members discussed if the planning initiatives can be met without changes to the budget and how the addition of a Special Education teacher would impact the Agriscience program. Board members discussed if classes would be open to non-Agriscience students in the district. Superintendent Van Tasel said towns that are not in the feeder program have reached out expressing interest in having students attend the Suffield High School Agriscience program. Mr. Remington explained how tuition for out of town Agriscience students is recorded in the Town of Suffield's general fund budget, not in the Board of Education budget.

***Josh Barrows exited the meeting at 9:01pm***

Board members discussed funding for the Robotics program. Board members questioned if there was funding for screening the Gifted and Talented student population, if additional professional development time for paraprofessionals was budgeted, if the Family and School Liaison position was proving to be beneficial, and what the future plan would be for Open Choice. Board Chair Sattan reminded Board members to populate any budget questions in the Board Budget Studio document.

***Eric Remington left at 9:16pm, returned at 9:20pm***

- School Resource Officer Memorandum of Understanding  
Superintendent Van Tassel discussed updates to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Suffield Board of Education and the Suffield Police Department to address legislative changes and improve school safety. District counsel and the Suffield Police Department's counsel worked to update the MOU. Superintendent Van Tassel reviewed the newly drafted MOU including supervision, duties and responsibilities of the SRO, school responsibilities, communication, graduated response model, police activity at schools, reporting of investigations and behavioral interventions, video surveillance, and conflict. He said the Police Commission has reviewed and approved this MOU. Board members questioned how Anonymous Hotline items were handled and if that was included in the MOU. Board members discussed if the School Resource Officer (SRO) was trained in restraint training, how student privacy was managed, and how communication to families was handled.

**MOTION #24-35:** Debra Dudack moved, Maureen Sattan seconded to approve the School Resource Officer Memorandum of Understanding. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **5-0-0**.

Subcommittee Reports

- January 30 – Curriculum and Instruction – Board member Finnigan said the new health standards from the state for Grades K-5 were reviewed and will continue to be reviewed at a future subcommittee meeting.
- February 1 – Finance and Facilities – Board member Finnigan said an additional paraprofessional position was approved for this year. Plans for the Suffield Middle School Building Project, excess cost reimbursement, and Agriscience enrollment from outside districts were discussed.

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – No report
- Agriscience – No report
- CABA – No report

Future Business

- World Language Department Review

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

Board member Dudack would like consideration given for adding Indigenous Peoples Day along with Columbus Day and adding one of the Jewish High Holidays to the proposed 2024-2025 District School Calendar.

Board member Fry thanked Home Depot for the generous donation to the district.

Adjournment:

Brian Fry moved, Sam Toskin seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:39 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: [05FEB2024 BOE Meeting](#)

*Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of March 4, 2024.*

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack, Secretary