

Suffield, Connecticut Approved by Bd. of Ed. 04/01/2024

Board of Education Regular Meeting
March 18, 2024

Call to Order

Board Secretary Dudack called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Present: Board members Josh Barrows, Tracy Cloyd, Debra Dudack, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik (at 6:33 pm), James Mol (at 6:41 pm), Sam Toskin and Maureen Sattan (via Zoom); and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi and Director of Special Services Diana Kelley, Ed.D.

Absent: Melissa Finnigan

In honor of March being Board Member Appreciation Month, Board members were treated to pizza and cookies made by SHS and SMS culinary arts students. Board members thanked SPS staff members Julie Haefner and Julia Porter, and all participating students for their contributions.

Discussion/Action Items

- Discussion and Possible Approval of Increasing Educator Diversity Plan as Required by Public Act 23-167, Section 10(a)

Superintendent Van Tassel presented the district's draft Increasing Educator Diversity Plan for the Board's input. Dr. Van Tassel noted that the state legislature required all Boards of Education to adopt a plan by March 15, 2024 and Suffield requested a one month extension. The plan includes three required areas: Recruitment, Hiring & Selection, and Retention. Board members discussed the state's requirement and local control; the plan's focus on very specific elements of diversity; and the Board's primary intent to hire excellent teachers. They discussed the state taking a more active role in encouraging diverse candidates to pursue careers in the education field.

Board members discussed the district adding additional items into the plan related to activities to recruit diverse candidates for open positions or advisory roles; efforts to invite students to join clubs or advisory groups; monitoring retention for team members; incorporating the use of inclusive language in job descriptions, web content and other areas; and expanding the distribution of job descriptions and job fair participation to reach more diverse populations. Board members requested additional changes related to the Hiring & Selection section of the plan.

All Board members expressed general support of the discussed changes. While some Board members were comfortable approving the plan with requested changes to be made, other Board members expressed interest in reviewing the document one additional time before approving it.

MOTION #24-39: Dudack moved, Fry seconded to approve the Increasing Educator Diversity Plan as Required by Public Act 23-167, Section 10(a). Dudack, Fry, Gazdik and Mol voted in favor. Sattan, Barrows, Cloyd and Toskin voted against. The motion failed **4-4-0**. The plan will be on the agenda in April.

- Suffield Middle School Building Project Update

Dr. Van Tasel updated the Board on the proposed Suffield Middle School Building Project, noting that the Suffield Board of Selectmen will hold a meeting at the school on Wednesday, March 20 to learn more about the project and tour the school. Dr. Van Tasel shared the district's planned PowerPoint presentation with the Board for input. The District plans to publish a new web page devoted to the project after the Board of Selectmen meeting. In addition, a flyer to raise awareness about the benefits of the project will be published soon.

Board members requested an update on potential timing for a new school build. They discussed how the district and Board hoped the Board of Selectmen would move the project to a town meeting for a vote this spring; however, the Board of Selectman recently tasked the town's Permanent Building Commission with reviewing the results of a study by Tecton Architects that prioritized the middle school as the town's most pressing area of need, as they prefer additional validation of the study before moving forward. The PBC review is expected to take months, as they plan to look at one to two buildings per month. Instead of getting final approval from the state legislature in 2025, Board members discussed how we are now looking at an additional year, with final approval potentially coming in the 2026 legislative session.

- District Gifted and Talented Student Identification Update

Diana Kelley, Ed.D., presented an update on the District's Gifted and Talented Program, which has seen a small number of students identified as such. Per state law, districts are required to identify Gifted and Talented students but they are not required to provide services for them. The district plans to begin the Otis-Lennon (OLSAT) screener at McAlister Intermediate School next year to potentially identify additional Gifted and Talented students. The district is considering potential enrichment opportunities to provide for those who are identified.

- Board of Education Agriscience Liaison Update

Board member Mol serves as the Board liaison to the Agriscience program. Mol provided a PowerPoint presentation to share recent activities in the program. Highlights included the program's first-ever invitation to participate in the Connecticut Flower and Garden Show in May; a Dog Spa Day and Dog Treat Fundraiser; the Greenhand and Chapter FFA Degree Night; Geranium Planting; and updates on the Large Animal Facility.

Adjournment

Fry moved and Cloyd seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:08 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of April 1, 2024.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary