

**SWEET HOME CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETINGS
SATURDAY, JANUARY 30, 2021**

**APPROVED
by the
BOARD OF EDUCATION
FEBRUARY 9, 2021**

MINUTES

A meeting of the Sweet Home Board of Education was held on Saturday, January 30, 2021 in the Norman Vergils Community Room. President of the Board, Mr. Johnson, called the meeting to order at 8:20 am.

Mr. Johnson led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

PRESENT: Amy Battaglia, Joshua Feldmann, Marianne Jasen, Scott M. Johnson, Brian Laible, Kailey McDonald (via Zoom), Nadine Ocasio (via Zoom), Delaney Graham

ABSENT:

Upon motion made by Mrs. Jasen, seconded by Ms. McDonald, the Board of Education accepted the roll as called.

The vote on the foregoing resolution was as follows:

Yes	7	No	0	Absent	0
Carried	X				

Also present: Anthony J. Day, JoAnn, Balazs, Donald G. Feldmann

BUDGET STUDY SESSION

The Board of Education discussed the long term direction for the District, and the Board of Education studied and reviewed the budget for the 2021/2022 school year. The board budget study will continue and dates will be advertised.

OPEN SESSION

Dirk Rabenold, former BOE member: The projection of state aid to public schools still leaves a \$3 million shortfall for Sweet Home.

Response – Anthony Day: The federal aid will offset that for 1 year only and there will then be a gap going forward. If we use the federal stimulus to offset the cut in aid we would still have a \$1 million shortfall and would need to make reductions in spending to alleviate the gap.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion made by Mrs. Jasen, seconded by Mr. Laible, the budget study session was adjourned at 9:54 am.

The vote on the foregoing resolution was as follows:

Yes	7	No	0	Absent	0
Carried	X				

After a short break, the voting meeting of the Sweet Home Board of Education was called to order by President of the Board, Scott M. Johnson at 10:08 am.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and Roll Call were dispensed with because the voting meeting followed the budget study session at which time Board President, Scott Johnson, led the Pledge and Roll Call.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Upon motion made by Mrs. Jasen, seconded by Mrs. Ocasio, the following resolution was offered:

RESOLVED: That, the agenda set forth for the Board of Education voting meeting held Saturday, January 30, 2021 is hereby adopted in its entirety.

The vote on the foregoing resolution was as follows:

Yes	7	No	0	Absent	0
Carried	X				

COMMUNICATIONS

1. Communications received by District Clerk.

OPEN SESSION: Agenda Topics – Policy 1512

Mr. Johnson read a statement.

Simone Clifford, parent: Ms. Clifford thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak. She has 2 children that play basketball. She expressed concern that the Board didn't have confidence in the coaching staff, students & parents. She spoke of the mental struggles of students due to isolation during the pandemic. She stated the precautionary measures for sports to go ahead will be substantial, and that sports play a very important role for the students, they need the relationships and connections. There has been no data showing sports as dangerous, they have just been labeled high risk.

Jeremy Zimmer, teacher/coach: It was great to see the fall sports be successful. Supervised sports are safer than unsupervised activities. Individuals and families make choices about which activities they partake of during COVID, in how they obtain groceries, or if they dine in or take out, if their children do remote learning or go to in person school. By approving sports you would reaffirm your belief in this community. Not everyone needs to be pro sports, but I believe you all are pro family. Other families outside of Sweet Home will be able to make the choice for their family if their child will play sports.

Jon Campolo, teacher/coach/parent: Thank you all for your time in dealing with this pandemic. I understand that student safety and education are the top priority. Also important to educate the whole child and the last year has presented mental health challenges for students. Worry about the students if this season is cancelled. Sports are an extension of the classroom, give the kids the experience they long for in the absence of other events. Sports motivate them, it is a safe structured environment. Public schools are also the great equalizer in this time of pay to play sports. Let our Sweet Home family take the next step and help them do it safely.

Jailen Gaines, student: Thank you for having me here to speak on behalf of seniors. We make so many memories playing sports and some kids rely on athletic scholarships to move on to the next part of their education. Seniors want to look back and be able to say we played with our friends one last time.

Kelly Lewis, parent: My son has been a basketball player here since he was a freshman. He was happy until now. The joy drained from his face when he heard it was possible they wouldn't be allowed to play. It was approved by the Governor and the county health commissioners. We wouldn't put the most important things in our lives in danger. Let us sign a waiver to take full responsibility. Please make the right decision for our kids and let them be kids and have some normalcy.

OPEN SESSION: Agenda Topics – Policy 1512-continued...

Dominic Lewis, student: I'm a senior and a basketball player. A big part of our basketball program was to create a family. We worked hard and dedicated ourselves to this sport. We will keep each other in check and set a bar for each other. It's bigger than basketball, more than about winning, it's standing thru adversity. We will do what needs to be done, we don't take the virus lightly. We will follow the protocols to keep our families safe. We play for each other and carry ourselves better because of this program.

Heather Goscinski, parent: Mother of 2 juniors, a swimmer and a basketball player. Your main concern of safety is also my main concern. There's a greater risk to not opening. Kids may go elsewhere to outside organizations who may or may not follow guidelines and that will put all at risk, instead of playing here where the district and coaches follow protocols. Have kids tested before they return to play.

Jonathan Goscinski, student: I am a swimmer and a member of the student government and am in favor of sports beginning. The athletic director and coaches will make sure we follow the protocols. Confident with the same tenacity as the swim team that other teams can play as well.

Thomas Edwards, student: Understand where you are coming from and I'm not angry. Sports teach us to face adversity. We play for something bigger than ourselves, play for the family. We learn to come back bigger and better after mistakes. My coach never gave up on me and pushed me to keep going. There will always be challenges in life. Know it will be safe here. Know your decision comes from the best place in your hearts.

Tyrell Laws, student: Make Sweet Home the safest place to be. Give us a chance.

Eric Abbate, student: Am a senior hockey player. Thanks for the opportunity to be in this meeting. Will respect the outcome. As captain, it's part of my job to make sure my teammates do the right thing. As a senior this is my last chance, will follow whatever rules it takes. Live for sports and the game of hockey. Some kids won't play again after this year, it can determine where they go in life. Asking you to let me enjoy the short time I have left at Sweet Home.

Augie Trifilo, student: Sports are our lives. Have learned more from this team than anywhere else. Stats are very, very low that a young person can die of COVID. Sure that we will follow precautions. With the help of Ms. Dauria, know we can have a safe season. This school can accomplish anything and everything.

Lauren Hubert, student: Am a sophomore and multisport athlete. Know the student athletes will follow the protocols as we have been this year. Mental health and grades will be positively impacted by having a season.

Melodie Baker, parent: Am an education advocate as well as a parent. Brought my kids here because of the diversity of ideas and solutions. You brought everyone together to solve the pandemic issues. Have looked at the data, the transmission rate is low among athletes. Have great confidence in staff and students and their understanding how important it is for them to maintain their safety. Mental health and physical health are important. The #1 pathway to college for underserved students is athletics. Consider who this is affecting most.

Marissa Dauria, Athletic Director: Am proud of our students athletes, their voices today are a testament to what they learn at Sweet Home. It is difficult to cultivate grit. Leave the rest of my time to Ms. Clifford.

Simone Clifford: As an elected official you need to remove personal feelings, decisions should be base on child welfare. Faced with an unmotivated child, look for ways to motivate. Exposure can happen at any time, can't control every instance. They will adhere to rules and represent Sweet Home well.

OPEN SESSION: Agenda Topics – Policy 1512-continued...

Upon motion by Mrs. Jasen, seconded by Mr. Laible, a resolution was offered to extend the length of open session beyond 30 minutes.

The vote on the foregoing resolution was as follows:

Yes	7	No	0	Absent	0
Carried	X				

Brandon Woods, counselor/coach: Wanted parents and students to be able to speak first. It's important to educate in different ways. Sweet Home is a family, it's one of the reasons I came here. The protocols in place make me feel safe as an employee. Trust as a coach I will make sure the kids embrace the restrictions, all the coaches will. It's about the kids.

Dirk Rabenold, former BOE member: There's an important correlation between extra-curricular activities and academic performance. The whole child matters. What do we have if we don't have the activity part, especially in this pandemic. Read about a district somewhere that had to reopen in a hurry due to the number of student suicides. There's a family component to the lockdown, the culture we've created here is really important for the students.

Tom Gerber, parent: Have 3 kids who've gone thru Sweet Home. Fall went well with the protocols in place. A year ago the answer wasn't to shut everything down but to find new ways to do things safely. Have complete confidence we can do that. This is truly important for our kids.

Neal McLoughlin, teacher/parent: We have a choice to display grit and offer hope. The Board made the decision to open schools, rolled up sleeves and did what we needed to do. Give the kids a chance.

NEW BUSINESS

Upon motion by Mrs. Jasen, seconded by Mr. Laible the following resolution was offered:

A. SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH

RESOLVED: That, The Board of Education appoint and indemnify Dr. Lynn Marie Fusco, District Superintendent of Erie1 BOCES, as search consultant for the position of Superintendent of Schools for the Sweet Home Central School District at no compensation and agrees to reimburse the Erie 1 BOCES for incidental costs associated with the search process, costs not to exceed \$6,000.00.

The vote on the foregoing resolution was as follows:

Yes	7	No	0	Absent	0
Carried	X				

PERSONNEL

Upon motion made by Mrs. Jasen, seconded by Mr. Feldmann, the following resolution was offered for consent agenda on personnel item IA:

I. Teaching**A. Regular****1. Discontinuance****a. Retirement**

RESOLVED: That, the *retirement* in the **TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE SECTION OF THE PERSONNEL MEMORANDUM NO. 671 dated January 30, 2021** be approved as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools.

Anthony Day		
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PERSONNEL-continued...

Board of Education statements:

Brian Laible: Thank you for all your feedback. I am in favor. On this day, 18 years ago, I was diagnosed with malignant melanoma. Have been fine since surgery but every time I go outside I take a small risk. So I take precautions – stay out of the sun, use sunscreen. Can't live in fear, not suggesting unnecessary risks, but we will take responsible measures. The data shows in random testing of almost 1000 students and staff, we've had 4 positives. Sports are an important part of the school experience. MLK said education is about intelligence and character, and much is learned about character on the field. In a world of division, sports brings us together, focus on something greater than ourselves. What lessons are we teaching our kids – we don't stop when faced with a challenge. Give them an opportunity to lead. We can choose to tell them we can solve our problems. Like a call on the field that has been challenged, clear and convincing evidence must be shown to overrule. This call has been made, no one on this board is qualified to overrule that.

Scott Johnson read a statement by parent Holly Weiskerger.

Josh Feldmann: Thanks to all who came. It's a civics lesson in progress. I will vote to approve. The role of the board is to set policy. The personnel section is not the place to do that. That's a procedural veto on the Superintendent's ability to do his job. It's a slippery slope and one we shouldn't have. It undermines the role of the Superintendent. I believe I am a community representative and I have not heard anyone who is not in favor. I'm not a scientist so I look to the experts and science, not anecdotes. My lay opinion has no role here. Fall sports have shown we can do this successfully. There's a risk vs reward, and mental health and emotional health need to be recognized. Only those who can afford to can play right now. Our Board goal #5 is about equity and if we don't approve this we set a divide. If we need a policy, we should set one. We should leave the decision about playing with masks to the administration.

Marianne Jasen: I love the passion you have come here with. As a nurse I have spent the last 40 years taking care of people. I knew this wouldn't be easy when it came up. We have to think about all the students and staff members. We have spent countless hours reading and are not taking this lightly. There is no absolute data on high risk sports. Last week I was against, even yesterday I had doubts. I want to make it clear the only way I can support this is if masks are worn, all the time. Coaches you will need to enforce the protocols. The success of this will affect future programs. I will support starting these sports but will be watching closely.

Delaney Graham: We held a special student government meeting on Thursday to discuss this issue. Some things brought up were - low risk sports were successful, athletes will do what it takes, private organizations are less strict, athletes do better in school when they are playing. Overall safety comes first but sports are wanted. Personally on Tuesday I felt it was too high risk. Have shifted opinion with wrestling off the table, and orange/yellow zone restrictions lifted. If I were a voting member I would vote yes. Since athletes are willing to wear masks, Sweet Home can lead by example.

Amy Battaglia: Appreciate those who came out today. NYS Education Law 209 says the Board's duty is to create a safe and healthy environment on school grounds. Some of these games will take place off site. Masks have to be worn, administrators and coaches need to enforce this. You will sit the next game if you don't wear a mask. Haven't heard from families who disagree, they are afraid to come out and have a conversation. I represent the community, my kids are also athletes. As an adult I teach them to follow the guidelines. Tuesday I'd have said no, the mask policy has to be followed.

PERSONNEL-continued...

Board of Education statements continued:

Nadine Ocasio: Everyone knows my decision. My kids are athletes. I'm not against sports, though the media has portrayed it that way. I am for safety in a pandemic. Not about the coaches or athletes. Wasn't given data. Have consistently said I'd look at pro sports. Our #1 goal as a board is health & safety. To keep kids in school. Other students haven't had a voice. This is high risk sports. On January 25, the CDC talked about NFL protocols and said transmission occurred in less than 15 minutes of interaction. Our community rates are higher than fall. No ability to engage in social distancing. The NHL had 9 games postponed. The bubble for women's hockey in Lake Placid didn't work. College basketball required significant games to be rescheduled and their season just started. It's spreading without a mask. Our students can't be in a bubble, they will interact with our schools. My job is to keep all students and staff safe. The data I find goes against that.

Kailey McDonald: There are accusations by the media, parents, and students that we are guided by emotions and are liberal, tyrannical disciples of the Governor. That's not true. The main goal as a board, our legal mandate, is to keep education safe. It's why we are here. Our #1 goal for this year is to keep school open and we just closed an entire elementary school because we couldn't guarantee the building was safe. The reason I'm on Zoom is because a family member has COVID. He followed the guidelines and it didn't protect him. What data am I supposed to look at. Whom do I go to when making a decision affecting 3000 people. Just this week, wrestling wasn't safe, then it was, now it's not. Cohorting, masking and social distancing is what has been agreed on, high risk sports are not part of that. On a side note, those who have threatened to vote down the budget in response to a no vote, that is your prerogative. But that will prevent your kids from having access to sports, as it would invoke an austerity budget. Do your homework, come to us if you have questions about the budget. I'm proud of our student athletes for their advocacy, hope this teaches you something and leads you to help others. I admire your dedication to your sport. Parents have given permission to expose their kids to risk but they don't get to make that choice for others.

Scott Johnson: The data out there is difficult, you can find what you want to find. This has been a political football from the state to the Depts. of Health. They are reasonably qualified to make this decision and they don't even all agree. Ms. Dauria and Mr. Day have worked on plans and I think it's the best thought out in the region to safely protect our athletes. They are more likely to come across the virus in their unstructured time. We also need to start up other activities.

Upon motion made by Mr. Feldmann, seconded by Mr. Laible, the following resolution was offered for consent agenda on personnel item IC:

I. Teaching**C. Interscholastic Activities****1. Interscholastic Activities, High School, (WINTER) 2020-2021**

RESOLVED: That, the *interscholastic activities appointments, High School* in the **TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE SECTION OF THE PERSONNEL MEMORANDUM NO. 671 dated January 30 2021** be approved as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools.

Brandon Woods	Michael Licata	Neil McLoughlin
Andrew Murak	Crystal Carlson	Chris Monaco
Brian Turner	Richard Beaudet	Kristy Neeson
Lisa Floreano		

PERSONNEL-continued...

The vote on the foregoing resolution was as follows:

Yes	5	No	2	Absent	0
Carried	X	(McDonald/Ocasio)			

Statement from Mr. Day: No one should short sight the motives of our Board members. The basic nature of these activities run counter to what we've been told we should do. You are also with other students in school who may not want to take the risk you do. This virus has exposed how interconnected we all are. We have built plans. We ran sports in fall. I'm an advocate for trying to figure out how we can. I'm proud of the athletes who spoke today, the way you are conducting yourselves. That's how you address a problem, it may be the most valuable piece of learning you have here. The nature of responsibility on you is higher. Everyone will get tested before we start. We will test during the season. It's not outdoors, you must play near one another and therefore wear masks. I trust you will do the right thing and your coaches will help you. You will be held accountable. Respect all positions, they are all right. The Board has shown faith. If someone on a team is positive, the team is shut down for 10 days. A second case can shut it down for the season. What will you be doing when you are not here. Thanks to the Board for their work in this. Any leader has to be prepared to take an unpopular position and stand by it.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion made by Mrs. Jasen, seconded by Mrs. Battaglia, the meeting was adjourned at 11:44 am.

The vote on the foregoing resolution was as follows:

Yes	7	No	0	Absent	0
Carried	X				



Sherry A. McNamara
Secretary, Board of Education
District Clerk
Sweet Home Central School District