

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Suffield High School Library Media Center
and via Zoom Webinar
November 4, 2024

Call to Order

Board Chair Sattan called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, James Mol, Gianna Rossi, Maureen Sattan, Gregory Sparzo, and Sam Toskin (6:31 p.m.); and Superintendent Matthew Dunbar; Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi and Business Manager Eric Remington

Absent: Josh Barrows

Recognition

The Board of Education recognized McAlister's fifth grade students who were nominated to represent Suffield in this year's Connecticut Kid Governor competition. Assistant Principal Melissa Todd provided an explanation of Connecticut's Kid Governor Program and said it provides a wonderful lesson in civic education. From Mrs. Burkett's class, Maeve Baker was nominated for her platform on Animal Abuse; from Mrs. Orié's class, Maddie Charette was nominated for her platform on Homelessness; from Ms. Popeleski's class, James Gamache was nominated for his platform on Animal Abuse; from Mr. McCarthy's class, Skylar Mol was nominated for her platform on Microplastics; from Mrs. Bennett's class, Israel Nti was nominated for his platform on Inflation; and from Mrs. Christensen's class, Justin Zdroykowski was selected as Suffield's finalist for his platform on Supporting Students with Speech Disorders. Justin was chosen by his fifth grade peers to represent McAlister Intermediate School at the state competition. Assistant Principal Todd thanked the students, the fifth grade teachers, and Principal Pryce for the continued support of this program. Superintendent Dunbar and the Board congratulated Justin and all of the nominated 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 Suffield High School and Suffield Middle School. Student Representative Silva highlighted the end of the first marking quarter and said report cards will be distributed on November 11. The Suffield Middle School Variety Show will take place on November 7. Suffield High School held a spirit week and had a well-attended Homecoming dance last Saturday. Agriscience students competed in the Future Farmers of America National Convention.

Olivia Mishtal, Class of 2026, shared the news and events at McAlister Intermediate School and A. Ward Spaulding School. Student Representative Mishtal said spirit week was held at both schools to benefit the Booster-thon with a goal of raising \$30,000 and students exceeded that goal by raising

\$53,000. The Best Bus Program has started and recognizes students for good behavior on the bus. McAlister students took a field trip to Kent Memorial Library. Fifth grade students participated in the Connecticut's Kid Governor Program and researched information for their platforms. McAlister recognized 234 students as attendance heroes. Spaulding School held picture day on October 25. First and second grade students have been giving solo music performances at the start of class. Work on the math curriculum is running smoothly.

Public Comment

Anwasha Chandra, Suffield High School Class of 2026, requested that Diwali be considered as a holiday when creating the district school calendar and testing calendar. She named school districts that recognize Diwali as a holiday and provided data on the growing Indian population in Suffield. Miss Chandra stated that recognizing Diwali as a holiday would advance Board of Education Goal 6 (2021-2022) per policies 4118.11 and 5145.4. If the district chooses not to place Diwali on the school calendar as a holiday, she would like to see the day celebrated throughout the district with educational activities and requested that tests are not administered that day.

Board Member Comment

- Board member Finnigan said the recent review of school advancement plans shows a need for a thorough social emotional learning (SEL) program. She is requesting current administration to find a strong, embedded SEL program to assist in teaching executive functioning skills, particularly for students currently in grades 6-12. The lack of this programming is showing in student success in school and in life.
- Board member Dudack congratulated the Kid Governor finalist and nominees. She encouraged all age eligible individuals to vote on Tuesday and said she is supportive of Miss Chandra's suggestions relative to the school calendar.
- Board member Fry acknowledged that it is American Indian Heritage Month. He encouraged all eligible individuals to vote on Tuesday. He appreciated Miss Chandra's comments and encouraged the calendar committee to consider her request.
- Board member Mol congratulated all the students that participated in the Connecticut's Kid Governor Program and the Suffield Middle School Cross Country Team. He expressed support for Miss Chandra's comments and wished her a belated happy Diwali.
- Board member Rossi congratulated the Kid Governor nominees and finalist.
- Board member Sparzo was impressed with Miss Chandra's calendar request and suggestions.
- Board member Toskin congratulated all Kid Governor nominees and finalist and appreciated Miss Chandra's comments.

Olivia Mishtal and Keila Silva left the meeting at 6:57 pm.

Reports to the Board

A. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Dunbar recognized the Suffield High School Girls Soccer Team who competed in the second round state tournament game prior to the Board meeting. He thanked all of the sports teams for their hard work this fall. He thanked Assistant Superintendent Zawawi for the work put into the professional development planned for Election Day. He also expressed thanks to Director of Facilities Larry Plano, Business Manager Eric Remington, and everyone who worked in conjunction with the Town Registrars in preparation for Election Day. Professional development at the elementary level will focus on continued implementation of the reading and math programs. Superintendent Dunbar is receiving positive feedback on the new reading and math programs but there is concern about the amount of work it is for the teachers to implement. Administration will

work to find solutions for this concern. Many state laws have come into effect this year, one of which requires an agreement with Youth Services about the sharing of data. A Memorandum of Understanding has been fully executed between the Youth Services Bureau and Suffield Public Schools. Special Education costs continue to be closely monitored as they can impact the budget significantly. Superintendent Dunbar held a meeting with Assistant Superintendent Zawawi, Director of Technology Osleger and Artificial Intelligence Specialist Mary McPheat to plan for the November 18 Board of Education Artificial Intelligence workshop.

B. Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Sattan said Veterans Day is November 11 and Board of Education members are welcome to attend the schools' programs. Board member Mol will represent the Board of Education by speaking at two of the programs. The Board earned CAFE Board of Education Recognition Award Level II. To receive Level II recognition, boards must exhibit exemplary teamwork with administrators and engage in areas that focus on policy and decision making with students in mind. The award will be presented at the CAFE/CAPSS Convention on November 15. Sattan thanked Board member Toskin for his assistance on the Teamsters Negotiations. The Teamsters negotiations are complete and will soon be ratified. The Suffield Education Association teacher contract negotiations are ongoing. A Board member volunteer is needed for the district Wellness Committee which meets three times a year. Any interested Board members are asked to reach out to her.

C. Business Manager's Report

Business Manager Eric Remington said Food Services has hired a new Food Services Director, employed by Aramark, who will start on Monday. Food Services is currently fully staffed. Preparation continues for the administrative procurement review by the state in April. CREC was contacted and additional support for the state review was requested and would be of no cost to the Board as it would be paid for from the Food Services fund. A plan to spend down the \$344,000 Food Services surplus was sent to the state. Capital expenditures were primarily included on the plan and had been discussed at Finance and Facilities Subcommittee meetings. The Suffield Middle School walk-in cooler is a concern. The cooler is original to the building, it is currently not operating, and the replacement cost is \$69,000. Transportation is running smoothly. The two HVAC grant bids have been sent out. Work continues on the roof top units for Suffield High School and an RFP should be out soon.

D. Board of Selectmen's Report

None

E. Board of Finance Liaison's Report

None

MOTION #25-20: Dudack made a motion to add agenda item VIII. C. October 3, 2024 Board of Education Special Meeting Minutes to the Approval of Minutes. Mol seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #25-21: Mol moved, Toskin seconded to approve the Board of Education special meeting minutes of October 3, 2024 and the regular meeting minutes of October 7, 2024 and October 21, 2024. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #25-22: Dudack moved to approve the following on the consent agenda:

- A. Policy #5145.5 Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment (Students)
- B. Suffield High School Field Trip Request – February 7-9, 2025 – Boston, MA

Fry seconded the motion. All members voted in favor of approving the consent agenda. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Discussion/Action Items

A. McAlister Intermediate School Update and School Advancement Plan

McAlister Intermediate School Principal Kris Pryce said she and Assistant Principal Todd had the privilege of being covered in silly string by the student body after they raised \$30,000 for the PTO through its Booster-thon fundraiser. She reviewed the goals, objectives, and action steps of McAlister Intermediate School's Advancement Plan and said there is a focus to improve math instruction. The Fly Five program was purchased last year to address social emotional learning and this year the focus is making sure it is being utilized in all settings across the building.

B. A.Ward Spaulding School Update and School Advancement Plan

A.Ward Spaulding School Principal Gina Olearczyk said students worked toward the goal of a school-wide dance party. After raising \$23,000 for the PTO, students and staff went outside and had a dance party last Friday. Principal Olearczyk reviewed the goals, objectives, and action steps of A. Ward Spaulding School's Advancement Plan. Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) is a great reading program and is significantly changing how literacy is taught. It is a significant change from Teachers College which had been used for the last ten years.

Board members discussed continuing professional development and making sure teachers are supported. They stated appreciation for the work done developing the advancement plans. . Board members inquired about the Fly Five program and the connection to social emotional learning. Board members questioned why a PowerSchool module is now being used for analytics after EastConn had initially created the MTSS Google Studio.

C. Student Discipline Report

Superintendent Dunbar said discipline data had been discussed at the Data Ad-hoc Subcommittee meeting. He reviewed discipline data from the 2023-24 school year and the data for Suffield Middle School was concerning. Superintendent Dunbar said a small percentage of middle school students had been disciplined repeatedly. The district does not have a formalized SEL program at the secondary level and is looking into a system.

Board members questioned how the small percent of middle school students with disciplinary issues transitioned to high school. The data counts were discussed. Board members stated that they appreciate the administrators providing the data that was requested.

D. Climate Survey Results - Parents

Assistant Superintendent Zawawi reviewed the results of the Spring 2024 Parent Climate Survey. The same survey has been given since 2015. Parents and staff at each of the four buildings and students at three of the buildings are usually surveyed. However, last year, only parents were surveyed at all four schools due to the survey being administered too close to the end of the school year. Parents gave feedback requesting more open-ended questions. Assistant Superintendent Zawawi intends to revise future surveys with more up-to-date questions.

Board members questioned why Suffield Middle School came in low in every area of the survey and why only parents were surveyed. Board members would like to see more open ended questions on the survey and are concerned about the climate at Suffield Middle School based on the discipline report and the survey results. Board members said the Youth Needs Assessment will be done this year and also provides useful information.

E. September Financial Report

Business Manager Eric Remington reviewed the September Financial Report and budget risks and opportunities. Salaries do not reflect the higher salaries of the ratified Teamsters contract. Benefits are running favorably. Special Education tuition is being closely monitored. On January 1, 2025, the minimum wage will increase to \$16.35 and will put inflationary pressure on the budget.

Subcommittee Reports

- A. October 11, 2024; November 1, 2024 – Community Engagement and Public Relations Meeting – Subcommittee Chair Dudack said the subcommittee is looking to better leverage the Suffield Observer to share information about Board business and will also begin submitting suggested content for district social media posts. The subcommittee maintains a standing agenda item for discussions related to a potential middle school project.
- B. October 15, 2024 – Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee Meeting – Melissa Finnigan said the subcommittee discussed the Agriscience Program.
- C. October 25, 2024 – Policy Subcommittee Meeting – the following policies are being placed on 30-day read: #6141.322 Bring Your Own Technology, Policy #6141.3273 Generative AI (Artificial Intelligence). On November 18, the Board of Education will hold a workshop on Artificial Intelligence and Policy #6141.3273 may be pulled from 30-day read if further changes are needed. Policy #1330 was discussed and will be further reviewed at the Policy Subcommittee meeting.
- D. October 31, 2024 – Finance and Facilities Subcommittee Meeting – Subcommittee Chair Toskin said Business Manager Remington and Superintendent Dunbar keep the Board well informed. Board member Toskin said budget season is a time for transparency and this budget season will be challenging.
- E. October 31, 2024 – Data Ad-hoc Subcommittee Meeting – Board Chair Sattan said when the Board voted for the Data Ad-hoc Subcommittee, it was intended to be short-term. The subcommittee's requests of data from the administration have been discussed. A calendar will be created for sharing requested data with the Board and once the subcommittee receives the calendar, a final final report will be produced and the ad-hoc will be dissolved.

Board Liaison Reports

- A. Capital Region Education Council (CREC) – No report.
- B. Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) – Board member Finnigan said CABE/CAPSS Convention is November 15, 2024 and offers many great workshops.
- C. Agriscience – Board member Mol said the Agriscience Consulting Committee met and the ASTE review will take place in March. The First Look Agriscience Open House will take place on November 6. Agriscience students will attend the Equine Affair on November 7 and the FFA Holiday Sale is coming up.

Future Business

Board member Mol would like a central area for all school communications so that parents can see all that is happening throughout the district. The CEPR subcommittee plans to discuss this at a future meeting.

- World Language Department Review: Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee - December 17
- Artificial Intelligence: Board Workshop November 18
- Career Technical Education (CTE) Program: Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee - November 12

Sam Toskin left the meeting at 8:44 pm.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

- Board member Finnigan congratulated the Kid Governor nominees and finalist. She appreciated Miss Chandra's comments.
- Board member Fry commended Miss Chandra and encouraged other students to come to the Board with any issues. He looks forward to reviewing the Class Size Report and hearing the findings on exit interviews.
- Board Chair Sattan is concerned with the climate at the middle school and the parent survey results regarding schools' challenging students' academic ability.

Adjournment

Mol moved, Finnigan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:49 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: [04NOV2024 BOE Regular Meeting](#)

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of December 2, 2024.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary