

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

Call to Order

Board Chair Sattan called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, Gianna Rossi, Maureen Sattan, Gregory Sparzo, and Sam Toskin; and Superintendent Matthew Dunbar and Business Manager Eric Remington

Absent: Josh Barrows, James Mol

Recognition

The Board of Education recognized Joe Grimard, Suffield High School Science Teacher, and presented him with a plaque in recognition of his dedication and hard work in creating the Outdoor Learning Lab for the students of Suffield Public Schools. Justin Kaput, K-12 Science Instructional Coach, reviewed the many community projects Mr. Grimard has been a part of and the extensive grant funding that he has secured for the district over the years. Superintendent Dunbar and the Board members thanked Mr. Grimard for his exceptional service.

Chad Lemmens will be recognized at the January 6, 2025 Board of Education meeting.

Suffield High School Student Representatives

Olivia Mishtal, Class of 2026, shared the news and events at McAlister Intermediate School and A. Ward Spaulding School. Student Representative Mishtal said many grade level traditions took place at various locations. Second graders are learning about Greek gods and philosophers in their current Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) unit. Preschoolers made cards for veterans and learned about Diwali. Fifth grade students at McAlister Intermediate School had a field trip to the Old State House. Construction of a Gaga Pit will begin soon. Fourth and fifth grade students attended the Final Mile field trip and celebrated McAlister's 10-year anniversary of participating in the Funky Foot program.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

- Board member Finnigan welcomed everyone back from Thanksgiving break.
- Board member Dudack thanked Mary McPheat for the November 18 artificial intelligence presentation to the Board of Education and thanked Board members for contributing to the thank you gift. She encouraged Board members to look at the Board of Education news article

in The Suffield Observer and share any feedback. She thanked Joe Grimard for his service to Suffield Public Schools.

- Board member Fry congratulated Domenico Casolari who was recently recognized as the CIAC Cross Country Coach of the Year and thanked Mary McPheat for her presentation on artificial intelligence. He thanked the Board of Education members for contributing to a thank you gift.
- Board member Toskin thanked Joe Grimard for his service.

Reports to the Board

A. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Dunbar congratulated Domenico Casolari on being recognized as the CIAC Cross Country Coach of the Year. Twelve high school musicians were selected to the CMEA all-region ensembles: Madisyn Beyers, Tommy Bishop, Az Eckley, Anish Jindal, Eliana Lavoie, McKenna Lepage, Beatrice Marcavitch, Sam Melendez, Heidi Storey, Jack Tautic, Kylie Tinnirella, and Nayandeep Tummalapally. Superintendent Dunbar congratulated the students and the Music Department. The Suffield High School Counseling Department, led by Gina Garfield, was selected to write an article for UCONN Magazine's winter issue on the district's process for registering students in UConn Early College Experience Program courses. FY26 budget preparations are underway. The Permanent Building Commission (PBC) has a meeting scheduled for Thursday, December 5 at 7:00 pm to discuss the educational impact of the current state of our school buildings.

B. Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Sattan thanked Board member Finnigan for taking part in the Suffield Education Association (SEA) Teacher Contract Negotiations. Negotiations are complete and the SEA and Teamsters contracts will be finalized in an upcoming Board of Education executive session. Thank you to Board member Rossi for representing the Board on the district Wellness Committee. A meeting was held with First Selectman Colin Mol, Board of Finance Chair Eric Harrington, Superintendent Matt Dunbar, and Board of Education Chair Maureen Sattan to discuss the upcoming budget process and timeline. The Advisory Committee on Capital Expenditures (ACCE) is planning to complete walkthroughs in support of the district's capital expenditure requests sometime at the end of January. Brian Kost, Board of Finance Vice Chair, will be the Board of Finance Liaison to the Board of Education.

C. Business Manager's Report

Business Manager Eric Remington said budget preparation is progressing. Salaries make up 80% of the budget and contract negotiations have delayed budget development. The district's new Food Services Director, Matthew Lillibridge, started November 12. There are no transportation updates. The backup boiler at McAlister needs to be replaced and bids are due December 3. The State will reimburse the district 51% of the cost of replacement. An RFP went out on November 22 for the Suffield High School HVAC Roof Top Units (RTU). A walkthrough with potential bidders is planned for next week and bids are due January 22, 2025. It is estimated that the cost of replacing the HVAC RTUs will be an approximately \$3.5 million dollar project. The RTUs are custom built and thus have long lead items. The district hopes to place an order by mid-February and have the work done next summer.

D. Board of Selectmen's Report

None

E. Board of Finance Liaison's Report
None

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #25-23: Dudack moved, Fry seconded to approve the Board of Education regular meeting minutes of November 4, 2024 and November 18, 2024. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

Olivia Mishtal left the meeting at 7:00 pm.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #25-24: Fry moved to approve the following on the consent agenda:

- A. Suffield High School Field Trip Request – Ecology Project International (EPI) – La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico – March 2026

Rossi seconded the motion. In response to a question from a Board member, Superintendent Dunbar noted that the district will monitor safety in the area leading up to the trip. All members voted in favor of approving the consent agenda. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

Discussion/Action Items

A. 2024-2025 Class Size, Staffing, and Enrollment Report

Superintendent Dunbar thanked Melissa Bielonko for compiling the data in the report and Kathy Carney for the information on staff turnover trends. The format of the report remained similar to years past and Board member feedback on how the report can be adjusted is welcomed. District enrollment and class sizes were reviewed. Elective course enrollment may be down at the high school due to the senior class having lower enrollment. Special Education numbers are up compared to last year and Superintendent Dunbar noted that Special Services Director, Diana Kelley, Ed.D., is doing a wonderful job of managing special education students and staff. Budgeting special education costs can be difficult and it is an issue throughout the state. The three-year historical summary of positions and exit interview information were reviewed. Superintendent Dunbar said he is impressed with the course offerings being provided to the students.

Board members discussed if changes to teacher schedules would be considered after reviewing student enrollment and discussed the need for teachers to market courses to students. Board members asked questions related to special education enrollment, the open school psychologist position, and if a class size comparison against other districts has been done. Board members see the value in the report and welcome any suggested changes from Superintendent Dunbar going forward.

B. Social and Emotional Learning Programs

Superintendent Dunbar said the district's advancement plan and the schools' advancement plans included social emotional learning (SEL) in their goals. Gina Olearczyk, A. Ward Spaulding School Principal, and Kris Pryce, McAlister Intermediate School Principal, reviewed the social and emotional education program for grades prek-5. Principal Olearczyk reviewed the needs and the benefits of social emotional learning. Principal Pryce discussed the Center for Responsive Schools, which has been used at the elementary level for the last 20 years, and discussed Fly Five which is now in year two at McAlister Intermediate School. Fly Five is grounded through research of the Center for Responsive Schools. The core competencies of Fly Five and the benefits of SEL were

discussed. Pilot materials are being ordered for Spaulding in hopes of starting the program there next year. Superintendent Dunbar said the possible addition of an SEL program would need to be done with care because teachers are also working on the new reading and math curriculum. Principal Pryce said DESSA has traditionally been used as the universal screener for social emotional data and needs but it was missing students that staff had concerns about. In time, the data management within PowerSchool will eventually be able to house the SEL data. Board members discussed the need for the program and asked questions related to scheduling time for the program.

Anthony Hibbert, Suffield High School Principal, and Ken Smith, Suffield Middle School Principal, presented their SEL program recommendation for the secondary level. The RULER Approach is an age-appropriate program for middle and high school students that supports the entire school community. RULER outcomes based on research were reviewed. Students are dealing with social and emotional issues on a daily basis. The four anchor tools for RULER were reviewed. RULER creates change and can improve academic achievement. Principal Hibbert said the program has been vetted through the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and that he has practical experience utilizing it in his prior district. RULER is about teaching students how to understand emotions, build emotional intelligence, and create positive school climates. Principal Smith sees it as a means for students to help themselves regulate emotions and behaviors. Board members asked questions related to the instruction of the program, the cost, and how to know if the program is the right choice. Board members asked when the program would begin and encouraged student and teacher input on the development of charters for the program. They also discussed how the program is more of a philosophy and how teaching moments will fit into the daily schedule. Board members asked if RULER identifies students in need and asked about the components that it teaches.

C. October Financial Report

Business Manager Eric Remington said the October Financial Report is still being finalized. Special Education tuition and transportation will affect the FY26 budget. Retroactive pay for Teamsters members is being worked through. Food Services had the highest cash sales in October since Covid.

Subcommittee Reports

- A. November 12, 2024 – Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee Meeting – Subcommittee Chair Melissa Finnigan said the Career and Technical Education (CTE) team provided an overview of the middle school program and discussed how to move it through the high school. Three course proposals were presented and will be brought to the Board for final approval.
- B. November 21, 2024 – Finance and Facilities Subcommittee Meeting – Subcommittee Chair Sam Toskin said grants were discussed and the budget is being worked on.
- C. November 22, 2024 – Policy Subcommittee Meeting – Subcommittee Chair Brian Fry said three policies were reviewed and discussed. Amy Muska and Larry Plano shared concerns about the policy covering the use of facilities. AI documents were reviewed and will be discussed at the next policy meeting. Board Bylaw #9311 was discussed and will be brought back to the next policy subcommittee meeting.

Board Liaison Reports

- A. Capital Region Education Council (CREC) – No report
- B. Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) – Board member Finnigan said she, Board members Sattan and Dudack, and Superintendent Dunbar attended the CABE/CAPSS Convention.
- C. Agriscience – No report

Future Business

None

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

- Board member Dudack feels it would be beneficial to have a conversation among the full Board about the middle school building project.
- Board member Fry thanked principals for their presentations and thanked Superintendent Dunbar for the exit interview information. He would like to see a more robust tool used for exit interviews in the future.

Adjournment

Toskin moved, Finnigan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: [02DEC2024 BOE Regular Meeting](#)

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of January 6, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary