

Suffield, Connecticut

Approved by Bd. of Ed. 02/03/2025

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Suffield High School Library Media Center
and via Zoom Webinar
January 6, 2025

Call to Order

Board Chair Sattan called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, James Mol, Gianna Rossi, Maureen Sattan, Gregory Sparzo, and Sam Toskin; and Superintendent Matthew Dunbar, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Eric Remington

Absent: Brian Fry

Recognition

The Board of Education recognized Chad Lemmens of Lemmens Creative Design, LLC and presented him with a plaque in recognition of his work in promoting Suffield Public Schools. Superintendent Dunbar thanked Mr. Lemmens for featuring drone footage of events held throughout the district on his YouTube channel, providing Agriscience students with a drone demonstration, and teaching McAlister students about the importance of math in his job. Mr. Lemmens volunteered his time to capture the spirit of the Kindness Matters Movement during convocation, filming and photographing the entire staff wearing their Kindness Matters t-shirts. Photographs from that day are displayed in all four schools and Central Office.

The Board of Education recognized Domenico Casolari, 6-12 Math Instructional Coach, and presented him with a plaque for being named Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) 2024 Boys Cross Country Coach of the Year. Superintendent Dunbar said Mr. Casolari began coaching the Suffield Boys Cross Country team in 2003. Over the last 21 years, the team has had a record of 211 wins and 40 losses that includes 9 titles and 6 undefeated seasons. Superintendent Dunbar thanked Mr. Casolari for the positive impact he has had on students.

MOTION #25-25: Finnigan moved, Sparzo seconded to move Discussion/Action Item A. Discussion with State Representative Tami Zawistowski to agenda item IV. A. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

Discussion with State Representative Tami Zawistowski

Board Chair Sattan introduced State Representative Tami Zawistowski. Representative Zawistowski said the state legislature has placed special education as its highest priority for this legislative session and excess cost grants and special education outplacement tuition costs will be discussed. She discussed historical special education tuition costs and said she is looking into relief for districts that have students transferring in with high special education needs and costs, especially for those who arrive during the middle of a school year since district budgets are already set. She noted the

expansion of paid sick leave is creating scheduling problems in school districts and will be looked into further. Public hearings are available via Zoom and she encouraged interested students to participate. Representative Zawistowski said she appreciates the work of the Board of Education.

Board members sought advice on advocating for special education. Superintendent Dunbar thanked Representative Zawistowski for her time and for making special education a priority. Mr. Remington would like funding for Agriscience to be reviewed more closely.

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 said Suffield Middle School raised \$1,400 for Connecticut Children's PJ Day for the Kids. The Suffield Middle School Counseling Department is recognizing students who have consistent attendance. Suffield High School Model UN students attended the Connecticut World Affairs Council (CTWAC) Conference at the University of Hartford. Students Anwasha Chandra, Noora Khaled, and Olivia Mishtal received Best Delegation for their resolution on the safety of journalists. The International Thespian Society Troop 12275 inducted eight students in December: Eva Adappoor, Ethan Boldt, Azura Eckley, Bea Marcavitch, MaryKate Mormino, Maggie Nikolis, Jack Tautic, and Nayandeep Tummalapally. Winter sports are starting at the secondary level and many choral and performing arts events have taken place.

Olivia Mishtal, Class of 2026, shared the news and events at McAlister Intermediate School and A. Ward Spaulding School. Student Representative Mishtal said the elementary schools raised \$2,100 for Connecticut Children's PJ Day for the Kids. Spaulding students are finishing their unit on sequencing and kindergarten students completed their unit on plants with a visit from Julie Harrison, owner of Willow View Farm. Recent Spaulding events included an ice cream social, book fair, and Stuff a Cruiser night. McAlister students visited the Water Pollution Control Authority facility and learned about the water treatment process. Twenty-seven students participated in the Global Traveling Mural Project dedicated to the memory of Meghan Voisine. The Aaron Judge All Rise Foundation recognized Owen Viscel, fourth grade, for his love and dedication to reading.

Keila Silva and Olivia Mishtal exited the meeting at 7:04 pm

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

- Board members Finnigan, Mol, and Rossi thanked Chad Lemmens and Dom Casolari for their work with and for Suffield Public Schools.
- Board member Dudack thanked Representative Zawistowski for her time. She is excited for the budget presentation and thanked Superintendent Dunbar and Mr. Remington for their efforts.
- Board member Toskin congratulated Chad Lemmens and Dom Casolari on their recognition and appreciates having wonderful people to support our schools and community. He congratulated the music department and band, choir, and drama students for their recent performances.
- Board member Sparzo looks forward to budget presentations.

Reports to the Board

A. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Dunbar enjoyed the winter concerts and was impressed by the student leaders. He congratulated BOE Student Representative Olivia Mishtal on her piano performance and all the students involved in the concert. He wished athletes and teams a successful winter season.

B. Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Sattan said the Board received a resignation from Josh Barrows and an assignment is needed by next Thursday, January 16. The vacancy shall be filled by the same political party and the appointment to the Board of Education shall be for the remainder of the term, November 2025. Board members Dudack, Finnigan and Sattan attended the Permanent Building Commission meeting where building principals presented on their building structure and how it relates to learning. Superintendent Dunbar has provided a proposed calendar of data presentations that will be shared with the Data Ad-hoc Committee and then with the full Board. After the submission of its final report, the Data Ad-hoc Committee will be dissolved.

C. Business Manager's Report

Business Manager Eric Remington said excess cost reimbursement from the state of Connecticut had been budgeted at 75% for FY25 but is coming in at 62%. The contract with M&J Transportation ends in FY26. There is expected to be a substantial increase to the FY27 transportation budget as costs are now higher than negotiated in the expiring contract. Board members questioned if bids for bus transportation would be sent out.

D. Board of Selectmen's Report

None

E. Board of Finance Liaison's Report

None

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #25-26: Dudack moved, Mol seconded to approve the Board of Education regular meeting minutes of December 2, 2024 and December 16, 2024. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

MOTION #25-27: Sattan motioned to remove Item B. Policy #6141.3273 Generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) from the Consent Agenda. Rossi seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #25-28: Mol moved to approve the following on the consent agenda:

A. Policy #6141.322 Bring Your Own Technology

Toskin seconded the motion. All members voted in favor of approving the consent agenda. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

Discussion/Action Items

A. November Financial Report

Business Manager Eric Remington reviewed the November Financial Report. Despite it showing a surplus, other expenses have been identified that may alter the outlook by the end of the fiscal year. The Teamsters contract and electric generation contract have added to the budget. The excess cost

reimbursement is less than what was anticipated, and additional special education outplacement costs have added to the budget.

Board Chair Sattan explained that the Finance and Facilities Subcommittee will do a deep dive into special education costs. Superintendent Dunbar said special education is budgeted on what the district knows and that it cannot anticipate the unknown. Board members discussed legal obligations to special education students. Superintendent Dunbar said there will be a significant impact on future budgets and an alternative plan for current outplacements will need to be looked at. Board members asked about using the non-lapsing fund to pay for outplacements and suggested documenting current struggles in testimony to the state legislature. The cost of outplacements was discussed.

Board Chair Sattan left at 7:36 pm, returned at 7:39 pm

B. Approval of Fiscal Year 2026 Capital Project Requests

Board Chair Sattan explained that the Advisory Commission on Capital Expenditures (ACCE) funds items for the district that are outside the normal operating budget. The Finance and Facilities Subcommittee reviews and prioritizes capital projects prior to submitting requests to ACCE for approval. Superintendent Dunbar said the Finance and Facilities Subcommittee reviewed the requests over the course of several meetings. Mr. Remington reviewed the prioritized list of requests. Board members questioned leasing versus owning equipment.

MOTION #25-29: Finnigan moved to approve the Fiscal Year 2026 Capital Project Requests as presented by administration. Toskin seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

C. Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Proposal

Superintendent Dunbar thanked Mr. Remington and his entire team for his work in putting the budget together. The proposed budget for FY26 is \$42,789,928, an 8.34% or \$3,292,540 increase over the FY25 budget. Superintendent Dunbar reviewed the major points making up the budget and said it is a lean budget even though it is coming in at an 8.34% increase. Health insurance rates, salaries, and special education tuition/transportation make up 7.58% of the budget increase. There are no additional staffing requests in this budget and certified teachers have until February 1 to notify the district of retirement but no notices have been received at this time.

Superintendent Dunbar was pleased to hear from Representative Zawistowski that special education is a priority and hopes some relief will be provided in the future. Staff turnover and health insurance were discussed. Board Chair Sattan said the Board will receive budget presentations from building and department leaders.

MOTION #25-30: Finnigan moved to add the following Discussion/Action Item to the agenda: Action Item: Discussion and Possible Approval of Suffield High School Course Proposals. Rossi seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

D. Discussion and Possible Approval of Suffield High School Course Proposals

Board member Finnigan presented Suffield High School Course Proposals for approval.

MOTION #25-31: Finnigan moved to approve the following Suffield High School Course Proposals:

- AP Music Theory
- Introduction to Oceanography
- UCONN Early College Experience (ECE) Introduction to Sociology
- PARE (Principles of Applied Robotics and Engineering)
- UCONN Early College Experience (ECE) Plant Breeding and Biotechnology
- Practical Home Repair

Mol seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

Board members expressed gratitude for adding the agenda item and including the courses in the program of studies, and also questioned the associated arts credits for some courses.

Subcommittee Reports

- A. December 4, 2024; December 17, 2024 – Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee Meeting – Subcommittee Chair Melissa Finnigan said course proposals were reviewed at the December 4 meeting. The December 17 meeting focused on World Language Review, with discussions covering the Seal of Biliteracy, the graduation requirement pertaining to World Language, and the access to World Language instruction throughout our schools.
- B. December 13, 2024 – Policy Subcommittee Meeting – Board Chair Sattan said the following policies will be reviewed for acceptance: Policy #1330 Use of School Facilities, Bylaw #9311 Formulation, Adoption, Amendment and Suspension of Policies, Bylaws and Regulations.
- C. January 2, 2025; January 6, 2025 – Finance and Facilities Subcommittee Meeting – Subcommittee Chair Sam Toskin said the budget was discussed.

Board Liaison Reports

- A. Capital Region Education Council (CREC) – No report
- B. Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) – Board member Finnigan said there is no report but she will follow up regarding Education Cost Sharing (ECS) and legislative items.
- C. Agriscience – Board member Mol shared the news and events that occurred in the Agriscience Department. He discussed the 2024 FFA National Convention, the Annual Holiday Sale, Make & Take Night, and the Agriscience Consulting Committee. Interviews will be held for incoming Agriscience students. On January 30, the senior Agriscience students will be presenting their Capstone projects.

Future Business

Finnigan would like to have a follow-up visit with State Representative Tami Zawistowski as the legislative session progresses.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

- Board member Dudack appreciated the transparency of special education information and the budget proposal and looks forward to learning more about the budget during upcoming presentations.

- Board members Mol and Toskin appreciated the budget proposal.
- Board Chair Sattan said her daughter participated in the Model UN program. She thanked Kelly Blais, Suffield High School Social Studies Teacher, for her work and appreciates the program.

Adjournment

Toskin moved, Sparzo seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:33 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: [06JAN2025 BOE Regular Meeting](#)

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of February 3, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary