

Board of Education Special Meeting
Suffield High School Library Media Center
January 27, 2025

Call to Order

Board Chair Sattan called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Present: Board members Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry (via Zoom), Michael Sepko, Greg Sparzo, Sam Toskin, and Maureen Sattan; and Superintendent Matthew Dunbar, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi and Business Manager Eric Remington

Absent: James Mol, Gianna Rossi

MOTION #25-32: Finnigan made a motion to move agenda item II. A. 3. Athletics to II. A. 1. Sparzo seconded the motion. Dudack, Finnigan, Sparzo, Toskin, and Sattan voted in favor. Sepko abstained. The motion passed **5-0-1**.

Superintendent Dunbar thanked everyone for presenting their work on the budget. Board Chair Sattan introduced new Board member Michael Sepko who is rejoining the Board after several years off.

Board of Education Workshop - Proposed 2025-2026 Budget Presentations

● Athletics

Amy Muska, Director of Athletics and Student Activities, reviewed the Athletics proposed budget. Current year program highlights included NCCC, Allstate and All American honors. Coach Casolari was named CIAC Boys Cross Country Coach of the Year. Uniforms for several teams were replaced, a new scoreboard timer for the turf field was purchased, and a full-time athletic trainer was hired. Budget requests included new athletic uniforms for two teams and continued funding of cooperative teams. Mrs. Muska reviewed the reductions and/or omissions from the FY26 budget requests and discussed future needs. Superintendent Dunbar said Suffield Middle School projects, such as new scoring systems, should be requested through ACCE. Board members discussed fundraising as an option and questioned if the Student Activities budget was included in the Athletics budget. Board members stated that specific line items were decreased and questioned how that decision came to be. Mr. Remington said budget reductions were taken from many line items and the Supplies line item is comprised of everything that does not have a specific category. He said coaching stipends are listed under salaries.

● Information Technology

Superintendent Dunbar thanked Rebecca Osleger, Director of Technology, and her department, along with administration, for the work done in ensuring efficiency of digital memberships. Ms. Osleger said digital membership usage is routinely reviewed. Current year department highlights included the implementation of student analytics and the implementation of Two Factor Authentication (2FA). Budget requests included hosting fees, service maintenance contracts, and digital memberships. Ms. Osleger reviewed the reductions and/or omissions from the FY26 budget requests and discussed future needs. Superintendent Dunbar said he is reviewing policy

around AI in the district. Board members asked about cybersecurity strength and questioned if an analysis on the usage of digital memberships has been done. Board members asked if software associated with curricular changes was listed under the Technology budget or the Curriculum and Instruction budget. Board members questioned if object codes were associated with specific departmental budgets and expressed a desire to have the budget exhibit split by department, if feasible. They thanked Ms. Osleger for the work she is doing with the AI Committee.

- Special Services

Board Chair Sattan said the Finance and Facilities Subcommittee met with Diana Kelley, Ed.D, Director of Special Services, to specifically discuss Special Services. Dr. Kelley thanked her Special Education Supervisors, Dr. Sharon Goulet and Jana Volpe, for their work. She reviewed the Special Education proposed budget. Current year program highlights included the work of the Transition Coordinator, students with IEPs enrolling in AP classes and attending two or four-year colleges or entering the workforce, CSDE grant funding allowed for improvements to the Life Skills classrooms, and NAEYC accreditation for the preschool will be applied for in the spring. The requested budget maintains current staffing levels. Dr. Kelley reviewed the reductions and/or omissions from the FY26 budget requests and discussed future needs. She said the district budgets for what they know concerning special education outplacements and it is hard to budget for the unknown. Reduction in the excess cost reimbursement and outplacement transportation costs have affected the budget significantly. The district is exploring options to share costs with neighboring districts on a shared outplacement program. Board members questioned if the Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) position would help offset costs in other special education areas. The availability of state grants and incentives to help offset costs was questioned. Board members asked if there was a special education prevalence rate compared to other districts in our DRG. Board Chair Sattan said Special Services had its own Finance and Facilities Subcommittee meeting because it is an area of great concern and a significant increase to the budget.

- Facilities

Larry Plano, Director of Facilities, thanked his staff for their work. He reviewed the Facilities proposed budget. Current year department highlights included the responsibilities and areas of maintenance employees, HVAC projects, grounds maintenance, and effective equipment to focus on cleaning and sanitizing. Budget requests included preventative and corrective maintenance work and capital requests. Mr. Plano reviewed the reductions and/or omissions from the FY26 budget requests and discussed future needs. Board members questioned the number of district vehicles and their purpose, storage areas, and the timeline for ACCE request approvals and PBC reports. Specialized licensed maintenance positions were discussed.

- General Services/Food Services/Transportation

Eric Remington, Business Manager, reviewed the General Services/Food Services/Transportation proposed budget. Current year highlights included management of a significant shortfall in the FY25 budget due to lower excess cost reimbursement and higher special education outplacement costs, successful HVAC grant applications, and the development of a transition plan for long tenured district business office employees. The greatest challenge to the General Services budget is health insurance. Mr. Remington explained how the health insurance plan works and said the cost to employees is determined by collective bargaining. Electricity is projected to go up 19.5% over the current year. The Staff Turnover Factor was

reduced as well as the Salary line item. The 401(a) Plan is matched and continues to grow exponentially. Audit fees are increasing and are dictated by the negotiated rate that the Board of Finance has with the audit firm. Substitute teachers are a significant expense over the course of the year. The Central Office administration salary line item was increased due to the Human Resources position being reclassified to an administrative position and is not an increase in FTE. Mr. Remington said this is a very difficult budget and it leaves the district vulnerable to unforeseen circumstances and managing the budget next year will be challenging. The M&J Transportation contract expires June 2026 and a substantial increase is expected in FY27. Board members questioned the employee cost share of health insurance, the surge in health insurance costs, and suggested talking with the Board of Finance to consider use of surplus funds from prior years when claims fell under budget to decrease this line item.

Discussion/Action Items

- Discussion and Possible Approval of Suffield High School Course Proposals
Assistant Superintendent Zawawi and Board member Finnigan presented Suffield High School Course Proposals for approval.

MOTION #25-33: Finnigan moved to approve the following Suffield High School Course Proposals:

- Chemistry in the Community
- Advanced Manufacturing Design

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

At 7:58 p.m., the Board took a short recess. The meeting resumed at 8:01 p.m.

Executive Session

Sattan moved to go into executive session for the purpose of discussing a legal issue, inviting Superintendent Dunbar to join the meeting. Finnigan seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

The Board came out of executive session at 8:27 p.m.

Adjournment

Sattan moved, Finnigan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:27 p.m. All members voted in favor.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary