Suffield, Connecticut Approved by Bd. of Ed.

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Suffield High School Library Media Center
February 20, 2025

Call to Order
Board Vice Chair Finnigan called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

Present: Board members Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Gianna Rossi, Michael Sepko and Sam Toskin; and Superintendent Matthew Dunbar, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, Business Manager Eric Remington and Board of Finance Liaison Mark Englander.

Absent: Brian Fry, James Mol, Maureen Sattan and Greg Sparzo

Discussion/Action Items
Open Choice Program Review and Seat Declaration: Superintendent Dunbar shared that school districts need to declare the number of seats they plan to make available in the Open Choice Program lottery by next week. Suffield is planning to offer 32 seats in various grade levels. Last year, the district offered 34 seats and received a total of 10 students. Currently, Suffield has 32 students in the Open Choice program throughout the district.

Board members asked questions about how the district determines the number of seats to open in each grade, which district pays transportation and special education costs, and when the district will learn the outcome of the lottery. Superintendent Dunbar noted that the district reviews class sizes in each grade and prefers to open seats at transition points, although seats are opened in other grades. He stated that Hartford pays transportation and special education costs for Open Choice students. The district is expected to learn about placements by June.

2025-2026 Budget: Superintendent Dunbar noted that the landscape pertaining to next year's budget proposal is changing weekly. He mentioned that the district is seeing some reductions in special education costs due to students moving out of the district. In addition, the state legislature is considering a $40 million relief package for excess cost reimbursement for districts in the current fiscal year that may allow for increasing expected reimbursement in next year's budget.

Board members asked a number of questions related to the budget. In response to a question about legal expenses over the past five years, Superintendent Dunbar stated they have consistently ranged between $97,000 and $110,000 each of those years. A board member asked about the joint town/WPCA/school district health insurance fund and what steps are being taken to request the town offset this year's premium increases with surplus dollars. In response, Business Manager Remington stated that claims for the past two years were lower than expected resulting in a surplus to the fund; however, claims this year have been higher than expected. The health insurance line item accounts for 2% of the district's budget increase. Board members also asked questions related to stipends, academic support positions, the cost of dues charged by the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, social/emotional programming at Spaulding, and whether any line items in the AgriScience budget can be covered under the state grant the

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program receives. In response to a question about the math intervention positions at the middle school and high school, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi reviewed steps being taken to increase the number of students who work with these teachers. She also mentioned plans to launch a math lab for select 9th and 10th grade students next year, which is anticipated to offer five sections with 10 students per class. Board members also asked about what to expect with the budget process going forward. The Board of Finance liaison asked about any potential impact to the district's budget based on potential changes being made in Washington as a result of the new administration. Superintendent Dunbar noted that the district is actively monitoring developments as they unfold. In response to a question about whether the Board of Finance has indicated a percentage increase that they would support, Business Manager Remington stated that the district is facing a perfect storm of increases related to special education and health insurance costs, and also noted that the town has similar issues with health insurance costs and faces challenges with a decreasing Grand List of taxable properties and in town.

Adjournment

Toskin moved, Rossi seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:05 p.m. All members voted in favor.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary

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