Suffield, Connecticut Approved by Bd. of Ed. 03/03/2025

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Suffield High School Library Media Center
and via Zoom Webinar
February 3, 2025

Call to Order
Board Chair Sattan called the meeting to order at 6:43 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Debra Dudack, Brian Fry, James Mol, Gianna Rossi, Maureen Sattan, Michael Sepko, Gregory Sparzo (via Zoom), and Sam Toskin; and Superintendent Matthew Dunbar and Business Manager Eric Remington

Absent: Melissa Finnigan

Recognition -reschedule
Olivia Matthews will be recognized at a future 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 A.Ward Spaulding School celebrated the 80th day of school and preschool students took part in a Royal Tea Party. McAlister Intermediate School fifth grade students participated in the annual Ping Pong Tournament and winter concert. The Suffield High School music program was busy with various activities and performances.

Public Comment
Sandra Janick, 380 Prospect Street, spoke about guidelines the State Department of Education issued in response to federal changes in immigration enforcement policies. Superintendent Dunbar confirmed that the district is in compliance and has a plan in place with a designated point person.

Board Member Comment
- Board member Dudack acknowledged Black History Month and emphasized the importance of school curricula. She thanked school administrators for their efforts in preparing the annual budget. She said a former Board member reached out to all current Board members highlighting the challenges students are facing in accessing traditional arts courses and suggested a review of how the district meets state arts requirements.
- Board member Sparzo thanked Sandra Janick for her comment and the district for having plan in place.
- Board member Toskin recognized the music program.

Reports to the Board
A. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Dunbar thanked Drs. Eleanor and Richard Seiler for their donation to the music program in support of providing guest artists throughout the district. He thanked those who attended Permanent Building Commission (PBC) meetings regarding the Suffield Middle School Building Project. The January 17 Professional Development sessions were well received by teachers. The Advisory Commission on Capital Expenditures (ACCE) Walkthroughs on January 23 were successful. Three students were recognized on January 24 at the North Central Chamber of Commerce Act of Kindness presentation: Dymond Nelson, Valerie Torrez-Flores, and Jackson Dapo. Suffield High School Music Department held a Coffee House Concert highlighting student performances.

B. Board Chair's Report
Board Chair Sattan attended the PBC and ACCE meetings and looks forward to learning what has been accepted and advanced forward. She attended the Suffield High School graduation planning meeting. Graduation is June 14, 2025.

C. Business Manager's Report
Business Manager Eric Remington provided updates on the HVAC project, including bid selections and financial allocations. The Carrier bid was accepted and approved by the PBC.

D. Board of Selectmen's Report
None

E. Board of Finance Liaison's Report
None

Olivia Mishtal exited the meeting at 7:04 p.m.

Approval of Minutes
MOTION #25-34: Mol moved, Dudack seconded to approve the Board of Education regular meeting minutes of January 6 and 21, 2025 and the special meeting minutes of January 15 and 27, 2025. Dudack, Fry, Mol, Rossi, Sattan, Sparzo, and Toskin voted in favor. Sepko abstained. The motion passed **7-0-1**.

Consent Agenda
MOTION #25-35: Dudack moved to approve the following on the consent agenda:

A. Policy #1330 Use of School Facilities and Grounds
B. Policy #9311 Formulation, Adoption, Amendment and Suspension of Policies, Bylaws and Regulations

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

Discussion/Action Items
A. Discussion and Possible Approval of the Data Ad-hoc Subcommittee Final Report
Board Chair Sattan thanked those who were involved with the subcommittee to help execute the role of Board oversight and determine desired data. The subcommittee studied and provided feedback on the performance, demographic and other data they would like to see. Superintendent Dunbar and Assistant Superintendent Zawawi were involved in setting out the schedule as shown in

Attachment A of the Final Report. Board members discussed receiving reports in advance of the BOE meetings and thanked all who were involved with the subcommittee.

MOTION #25-36: Mol moved, Toskin seconded to approve the final report of the Data Ad-hoc Subcommittee and dissolve the Data Ad-hoc Subcommittee. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

B. Discussion and Possible Approval of the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 District School Calendars
Superintendent Dunbar presented the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 district school calendars for acceptance. The administrative group, a smaller group of Board members, a select group of teachers, and several parents reviewed the calendars in stages and provided feedback. The 2025-2026 calendar includes an additional professional development day for staff due to the ongoing rollout of new math and reading programs at the elementary level. The 2026-2027 calendar reverts to the traditional number of professional development days as it is expected that the new programs will be fully implemented by that time. Teacher days remain at 188 days in both calendars as per contractual obligations, while the student days are 181 for 2025-2026 and 182 for 2026-2027. Adjustments to the parent-teacher conferences have been made based on feedback. The cutoff date for considering adjustments to April vacation due to school closures will be one week after the last day of school with specific language for consideration to reduce April break in both calendars.

Board members support approving two consecutive years of district school calendars and would like to see information placed on the backside of the calendars consistent with previous years such as school hours and marking periods. Board members thanked everyone involved in creating the calendars and requested steps be taken to limit testing on significant cultural observance days. Calendars with corrected items will be recirculated.

MOTION #25-37: Sattan moved, Fry seconded to approve the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 District School Calendars as presented with the addition of June 18 as the date limit before consideration to reduce April break on the 2025-2026 calendar and June 16 as the date limit before consideration to reduce April break on the 2026-2027 calendar and approve the page 2 as shared by Superintendent Dunbar. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

C. Discussion and Possible Action on the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget
Superintendent Dunbar reviewed the currently known adjustments to his official Superintendent's FY 2026 budget. Special Education costs, specifically tuition and transportation, resulted in a decrease of approximately $100,000 due to changes in student population. The budget update reduces the Special Education increase from 2.11% to 1.85%. The district confirmed one teacher would retire which could lead to a $40,000 savings in salary lowering the overall salary increase from 3.11% to 3.01%. The net effect of these changes has reduced the overall proposed increase in the FY26 budget from 8.34% to 7.98%. Mr. Remington reviewed Board of Education Net of Grants, Grant Revenues, and Gross Expenditures versus Net Expenditures. He provided further detail about Excess Cost reimbursement and Open Choice reimbursement. Superintendent Dunbar reviewed enrollment trends and projections. He said projections indicate a slight increase over the next few years, especially at McAlister Intermediate School and Suffield High School. Staffing changes over the last six years were reviewed. Superintendent Dunbar discussed legislative mandates and the concerns around Special Education costs, which are a major budget concern. He said the new paid sick leave laws in Connecticut do not impact the district's bottom line as sick time is already included in existing contracts.

Board members discussed whether the position of the retiring teacher was necessary to replace. The question of whether there was a surplus from the previous year's budget was raised. Board members inquired about the use of the non-lapsing fund and shared concerns about operating with such narrow estimates. Communication between the Board of Education and the Board of Finance was discussed. Board members stated formal budget presentations to the Board of Finance are expected to occur in March. Board members questioned factoring ASTE funds and ECS into the budget. Year-over-year increases to Special Education outplacements was discussed. Board members advocated for continued conversations with the Board of Finance to offset health insurance costs and questioned if Connecticut's Paid Sick Leave would create a problem for the district.

Toskin left at 8:00 p.m., returned at 8:01

Sparzo exited the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

D. Discussion and Possible Approval of Suffield High School Field Trip Request – Germany and Austria – April 2026.

Anthony Ferreira, Suffield High School Director of Vocal Music, said the Suffield High School Concert Choir and the AP Human Geography class are organizing a joint education trip to Vienna, Austria and Munich, Germany currently scheduled for April 15-23, 2026. Students will visit museums, historical sites, and cultural landmarks. They will be performing in centuries-old cathedrals, touring the United Nations building in Vienna, and visiting sites associated with Mozart and other historical figures. Mr. Ferreira said the trip is open to current and selected former students. Funding for the trip will come from families, fundraising efforts by music boosters, and scholarships offered by the travel company World Strides.

Board members questioned how the Suffield High School Concert Choir and AP Human Geography class paired to create this trip. The dates of the trip were questioned given the recent school calendar approved.

MOTION #25-38: Dudack moved, Mol seconded to approve the Suffield High School Field Trip Request – Germany and Austria – April 15-23, 2026. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

Toskin exited the meeting at 8:16 p.m.

E. December Financial Report

Mr. Remington reviewed the December Financial Report. He reviewed salaries, health benefits, reimbursements, and utilities. The non-lapsing fund has a balance of $147,000. Mr. Remington is projecting a $186,000 deficit due to salary adjustments following retroactive pay increases for Teamsters and Excess Cost reimbursement being lowered from 75% to 62%. Choice reimbursement was overestimated and required adjustments. Utilities and maintenance costs fluctuated. He said a soft freeze on spending has been put in place. Repairs and maintenance is an area of concern. The Education Cost Sharing grant was discussed. If necessary, preventative maintenance projects may be deferred but doing so could create future budget problems. Board members questioned the deficit. They acknowledged the tight budget situation and the impact of Special Education costs. Board members discussed the importance of ensuring students receive necessary resources.

<u>Subcommittee Reports</u>

A. January 10, 2025 – Community Engagement and Public Relations Subcommittee Meeting – Subcommittee Chair Dudack said the group continues publishing Suffield Observer articles and monitoring updates on the potential building project. The subcommittee is exploring possible legislative testimony opportunities.
B. January 14, 2025 – Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee Meeting – The subcommittee approved two additional courses for the upcoming year and reviewed a presentation on outdoor learning for students.
C. January 24, 2025 – Policy Subcommittee Meeting – Policy Subcommittee Chair Brian Fry said the AI policy is being developed and a review of other districts' AI policies will be done. The following policies will be placed on First Read: Policy #2100 Administrative Staff Organization and Policy #2120 Organization Chart(s)
D. January 23, 2025 – Finance and Facilities Subcommittee Meeting – Board Chair Sattan said a deep dive on Special Education funding was conducted. Budget shortfalls and potential solutions were discussed.

Board Liaison Reports

A. Capital Region Education Council (CREC) – No report.
B. Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) – No report.
C. Agriscience – Board member Mol shared the news and events that occurred in the Agriscience Department. He said the SAE Senior Capstones took place. Upcoming events include the Chapter Public Speaking Competition and the District-wide Public Speaking Competition.

Future Business

Board member Dudack would like a review of the Program of Studies to be done by the Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee before presenting it to the full Board for review.

Public Comment

Victoria Copes, 223 Hickory Street, is concerned about the projected budget increase, potential state funding reductions, and whether declining enrollment would reduce costs.

Board Member Comment

- Board member Dudack appreciated the two-year school calendars, efficient BOE meetings, and public comments.
- Board member Sepko would like to work together with the Board and community to fulfill the Mission statement by continuing to develop pathways for students who are not planning to pursue a college education.
- Board member Sattan said the Board has invested in the Career and Technical Education Program and she would like to see Suffield High School administration promote those courses and programs.

Adjournment

Dudack moved, Mol seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:43 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: 03FEB2025 BOE Regular Meeting

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

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary