

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

- Board member Finnigan thanked the students for the poem.
- Board member Dudack thanked the students for the tribute, highlighted the Living Library event held at McAlister Intermediate School, and recognized the Suffield Middle School drama production. She urged community members to contact legislators to advocate for special education funding.
- Board member Fry thanked the students for poem. He recognized that it is Women's History Month and Irish American Recognition Month. He supports advocating efforts for state education funding and emphasized the state's budget surplus and the need for increased education support.
- Board members Mol, Rossi, and Sepko thanked the students for the poem.
- Board member Toskin thanked the students for the recognition. As a parent of a child with special needs, he strongly supports funding efforts for special education services.
- Board member Sparzo acknowledged the challenges in stepping into a vacant Board of Education position and expressed appreciation for the Board's efforts.

Keila Silva and Olivia Mishtal exited the meeting at 6:53 p.m.

Reports to the Board

A. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Dunbar highlighted recent school events including the middle school play, the upcoming high school musical, Literacy Night at Spaulding Elementary School, and the Living Library event at McAlister Intermediate School. Professional development was held on February 19. Elementary faculty focused on the new reading and math curriculum implementation and high school faculty attended an artificial intelligence workshop. Dr. M. Jackson, Glaciologist and National Geographic Explorer, visited the district and gave several presentations including conducting a TED Talk writing session for seventh graders. It is Read Across America Week and many activities are taking place.

B. Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Sattan said she attended a health insurance meeting on February 10 with town and district personnel. She and Superintendent Dunbar attended the Legislative Breakfast at the state capitol where special education funding was the focus of discussion. She will be speaking at the Readers are Leaders event at McAlister Intermediate School.

C. Business Manager's Report

Business Manager Eric Remington said the Food Services Director resigned and Aramark has provided an interim replacement. Capital projects are moving forward. The installation of the McAlister boiler replacement is expected by late spring. The high school HVAC rooftop replacement project equipment has been ordered through Carrier and installation is scheduled before school starts in August. The Suffield High School campus may be closed for several days throughout the project. The roof replacement project is planned for the summer of 2026. The Board of Selectmen approved the district's ACCE requests, excluding vehicle replacements and engineering costs, and will forward on to the Board of Finance.

D. Board of Selectmen's Report

None

E. Board of Finance Liaison's Report

None

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #25-39: Dudack moved, Rossi seconded to approve the Board of Education regular meeting minutes of February 3, 2025. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

MOTION #25-40: Dudack moved to approve the February 20, 2025 Board of Education regular meeting minutes with the following revisions: first paragraph of the 2025-2026 Budget section and last line should state FY25 and at the end of that sentence it should state FY26. The second paragraph of that section should state that the health insurance line item accounts for 2.36% of the district's overall budget increase. Remove the word "and" from the last sentence before Adjournment. Mol seconded the motion. Dudack, Finnigan, Mol, Rossi, Sattan, Sepko, Sparzo, and Toskin voted in favor. Fry abstained. The motion passed **8-0-1**.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #25-41: Sparzo moved to approve the following on the consent agenda:

- A. Policy #2100 Administrative Staff Organization
- B. Policy #2120 Organization Chart(s)
- C. Suffield High School Robotics Team Field Trip Request – Houston, TX – April 15-20, 2025

Rossi seconded the motion. All members voted in favor of approving the consent agenda. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

Discussion/Action Items

A. Summer School Update

Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi gave an update on the various summer programs that the district offers. Kindergarten Experience is open to all incoming kindergarten students and is fully funded by the Board of Education. Extended School Year (ESY) is offered to special education students based on their Individual Education Plan (IEP) and is funded by the Board of Education. Suffield Middle School offers recovery programs in English Language Arts and math for students who are in academic jeopardy and is tuition-based. Boot camps for pre-algebra and algebra are offered online with office hours and are tuition-based. The highly popular Music Summer Camp is is tuition-based. Summer enrichment courses require at least 10 students per session and are tuition-based. Offerings will take place at Spaulding, McAlister, and Suffield Middle School. Suffield High School will not hold any sessions due to the summer maintenance projects. Board members asked questions about course selection offerings and asked why drama offerings were not available. Enrollment numbers were discussed. Board members questioned if SAT Prep would be offered during the school year.

B. Authorized Signers of ED-099 Agreement for Child Nutrition Programs

MOTION #25-42: Mol moved to approve the authorized signers of the ED-099 Agreement for Child Nutrition Programs. Fry seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

MOTION #25-43: Sattan made a motion to switch Discussion/Action Item C and D. Sepko seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

C. January Financial Report

Business Manager Eric Remington reviewed the January Financial Report. He provided an overview of the district's financial standing and highlighted key budget changes since December and discussed potential strategies to address the projected deficit. The projected deficit has grown from \$151,000 to \$240,000. Personnel costs, special education expenses, and other budget adjustments impacted the projected deficit. Mr. Remington identified two key funding sources that could help mitigate the projected deficit. Additional Excess Cost grant reimbursement in the amount of \$192,000 has been approved by the legislature and would significantly reduce the deficit if the governor does not veto it. The district identified \$80,000 in unclaimed FY24 excess cost expenses which would be reimbursed via the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant. ECS funds go directly to the town and the Board of Education will need to coordinate with the town for reallocation of those funds back to the district. A soft spending freeze remains in place to control expenditures. Mr. Remington continues to monitor open purchase orders and is identifying areas where uncommitted funds can be used to offset the deficit.

D. Discussion and Possible Action on the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget

Superintendent Dunbar and Mr. Remington presented an update on the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget, which started at an 8.34% increase over FY25 and is now down to a 6.59% increase due to reductions of positions, the elimination of CAFE dues, and other cuts. The changes had been discussed and advanced by the Finance and Facilities subcommittee. The updated FY26 budget represents a proposed reduction of five certified positions and one non-certified position: two elementary teaching positions, one school psychologist, one secondary English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, one SMS Library Media Specialist and one non-certified facilities position.

The FY26 budget was prepared based on anticipated expenditures, contractual obligations, and projected revenue sources. A significant budgetary gap is anticipated and is largely driven by increases to special education outplacement costs, health insurance premiums, and personnel costs. Employee salaries and benefits constitute approximately 75% of the total budget. Contractual salary increases for teachers and support staff contribute significantly to rising costs. Health insurance premiums are projected to increase by 20% compared to FY25. The district transitioned to an in-house substitute management system which increased staffing coverage, however, higher utilization of substitute teachers has resulted in additional expenses. Growing demands on special education services have placed additional financial pressure on the budget. Rising costs include tuition for outplaced students attending specialized programs, increased transportation costs for special education placements, and a demand for paraprofessionals, behavioral interventionists, and therapy services. Uncertainty over state funding for special education excess cost reimbursement remains a major concern. State Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant allocations remain uncertain. Governor Lamont's expected veto of a \$40 million special education funding package could provide some relief to the district. The town has indicated limited flexibility for increased education budget allocations which may require additional difficult spending decisions. Operational and facility expenses are projected to increase.

Administration has reviewed areas where potential savings can be achieved while preserving educational quality. Some non-instructional roles may be reassessed to optimize personnel costs. Continued facility upgrades and energy-efficient projects aim to reduce operational costs in the long

term. Certain enrichment and extracurricular programs may require revised funding models, including increased grant applications and community partnerships.

Board members engaged in an extensive discussion regarding how to balance the budget while maintaining essential programs. Board members discussed eliminating the middle school librarian position and the need to advocate for full funding of special education excess cost reimbursement at the state level. Board members discussed potential cuts to academic and extracurricular programs if state funding falls short. Board members discussed alternative revenue sources such as grant opportunities for special programs, expanding shared services with the town to reduce operational costs, and potential increases in pay-to-play fees for athletics. Board members discussed the impact of cost-cutting measures on class sizes and student-teacher ratios, paraprofessional staffing, and the elimination of enrichment programs. Board members encouraged parents, educators, and community members to reach out to state lawmakers and urge them to support increased school funding, particularly for special education. Board members acknowledged the financial challenges ahead and committed to further discussions on responsible budgeting. Budget deliberations will continue at a future meeting.

Subcommittee Reports

- A. February 28, 2025 – Policy Subcommittee Meeting – Policy Subcommittee Chair Brian Fry said the subcommittee reviewed and discussed the Generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) Policy #6141.3273 and is placing it on First Read.
- B. February 11, 2025; February 27, 2025 – Finance and Facilities Subcommittee Meeting – Board Chair Sattan said the subcommittee met on February 11 to discuss special education costs. The February 27 meeting covered student activity funds, accrued time off, an HVAC update, and the January Financial Report.

Board Liaison Reports

- A. Capital Region Education Council (CREC) – Board member Toskin said the budget process was discussed.
- B. Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) – Board member Finnigan said legislative updates were discussed.
- C. Agriscience – Board member Mol said the ASTE review will take place later this month.

Future Business

Board member Dudack would like a review of Board of Education Goals.

Public Comment

Victoria Copes, 223 Hickory Street, expressed appreciation for the Board's dedication and passion in advocating for high-quality education and emphasized that the majority of taxpayers share the same desire for educational excellence. She supported Board members Dudack and Sparzo's comments and shared concerns regarding staffing cuts.

Board Member Comment

- Board member Dudack thanked all for tonight's discussion and looks forward to continued conversations.
- Board member Fry appreciated the genuine interest and sharing of ideas concerning the budget and thanked Ms. Copes for her input.
- Board member Mol thanked Mr. Remington and Superintendent Dunbar for their work on budget and Ms. Copes for thoughtful comments.

- Board member Rossi thanked everyone for their comments and effort in putting the budget together and thanked Ms. Copes for her comments.
- Board member Sepko echoes all comments and said it is important that the Board work as a team.
- Board member Sparzo recognizes it is a challenging budget season and looks forward to further discussion.
- Board member Toskin thanked everyone for the professional and courteous discussion.
- Board member Finnigan said the Board may need to look at a better budget process for next year regarding budget communication.

Adjournment

Fry moved, Mol seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:36 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: [03MAR2025 BOE Regular Meeting](#)

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of April 7, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary