

Board of Education Special Meeting
Suffield High School Media Center
and via Zoom Webinar
April 8, 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, James Mol, Gianna Rossi, Michael Sepko, Greg Sparzo, Maureen Sattan, and Sam Toskin; and Superintendent Matthew Dunbar, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi and Business Manager Eric Remington

Absent: None

Recognition

The Board of Education recognized Joy Tierney, McAlister Intermediate School Library Media Specialist, and presented her with a plaque in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the students of Suffield Public Schools. Kris Pryce and Melissa Todd, McAlister Intermediate School Principal and Assistant Principal respectively, gave a presentation highlighting Ms. Tierney's impact on literacy, student engagement, and community outreach. Superintendent Dunbar thanked her on behalf of the entire district. Board members shared personal tributes and said her love of teaching is evident in her work. Assistant Superintendent Zawawi thanked Ms. Tierney for being the constant that keeps everyone together.

Suffield High School Student Representatives

Olivia Mishtal, Class of 2026, shared the news and events at all schools. Student Representative Mishtal said Suffield High School had a successful production of *The Wizard of Oz* and the Music Department had many events taking place. A. Ward Spaulding School students participated in DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) and McAlister Intermediate School students participated in annual traditions.

Public Comment

- Anthony Ferreira, 95 Bridge Street, thanked the Board of Education, Superintendent Dunbar, and Assistant Superintendent Zawawi for their work on budget. He advocated for retaining the Suffield Middle School library media specialist position.
- Board Chair Sattan read a statement on behalf of Amy Healy, 210 Academy Drive. Ms. Healy is opposed to the proposed elimination of the Suffield Middle School library media specialist position.
- Board Chair Sattan read a statement on behalf of Libby Begin, 50 Cross Street. Ms. Begin is opposed to the proposed elimination of the Suffield Middle School library media specialist position.

Board Member Comment

- Board member Finnigan said the elimination of the library media specialist position at the middle school was discussed during finance meetings. Administration felt that a pause in hiring for the position would allow for review of the K-12 library media curriculum and

refinement of the posting. Receiving the resignation prevented the Board from having to remove other non-tenured teachers who are making an impact on our students.

- Board member Dudack congratulated Joy Tierney on her recognition and for her work with students. She thanked those who spoke or submitted public comment. She thanked residents who reached out to her and said it's important for elected officials to maintain communication with the community. She said she was disappointed in the Board of Finance for cutting the budget by another \$250,000 when the town's general fund unassigned balance is \$12.5 million.
- Board member Fry thanked Joy Tierney and said library media specialists are indispensable. He thanked Anthony Ferreira for his comments and thanked Board Chair Sattan for reading the letters sent in. He acknowledged he's heard from dozens of community members who support maintaining the middle school library media specialist position. He said he was disappointed with the Board of Finance and felt they ignored constituent concerns.
- Board member Mol said International Night at Suffield Middle School is an important event that recognizes diversity and should be promoted more. He thanked Devlyn Bent and Marilyn Kopf, Suffield Middle School World Language Teachers, for organizing it. He thanked Joy Tierney for all that she does and shared an extensive list of what the job of a library media specialist entails. He said he does not agree with eliminating the library media specialist position.
- Board member Rossi appreciates the work that has gone into this challenging budget and thanked everyone involved for the work put into it. She stands by the administrators and has full trust in their recommendations.
- Board member Sepko recognizes that budget cuts are difficult and it is not an easy discussion to have.
- Board member Sparzo supports Board member Finnigan's comments. He said due to financial realities, tradeoffs must be made. He noted that one or two current employees would conceivably be let go to restore a vacant and difficult to fill role. He extends his support to the Board of Finance for the difficult decisions that have been made.
- Board member Toskin said the library media specialist position is important, as are a number of other roles. He said we are in an era of record inflation and uncertain economic times and choosing to forego filling a position so that other roles may remain is something to consider. Board members need to trust administration and give them support to make decisions to lead our schools.

Olivia Mishtal exited the meeting at 7:17 p.m.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Dunbar enjoyed his first International Night at Suffield Middle School and appreciated those involved with organizing the event. The Agricultural Science and Technology Education (ASTE) Review done by the Connecticut State Department of Education concluded. He attended a Rotary Club event on April 2 where he had the opportunity to share more about our schools and the vision he has moving forward. The district has many field trips taking place with students traveling to Ireland, Washington D.C., and Houston. Justin Kaput, K-12 Science

Instructional Coach, has some great events planned for Earth Week including special guest Dan Kinzer.

- Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Sattan participated in Read Across America at McAlister Intermediate School. The Board of Education presented its budget to the Board of Finance on March 31 and she thanked Board members and district administrators who came in support of the presentation. The Board of Education also shared a budget summary to the Board of Finance last night.

She noted that, in defense of the Board's scheduling processes, tonight's Board of Education meeting needed to be moved from April 7 in response to date pressures on the budget process. The Board of Finance's budget vote last night was required for tonight's deliberation. The Board of Education's second meeting of the month was too close to the date of the upcoming public hearing. Board members were polled for availability on different days this week and tonight was a date all Board members were available. There was no intent to link to a prescheduled Library Commission meeting, and she said every Board member can attest to that.

- Business Manager's Report

Business Manager Eric Remington said the district is currently operating with an interim Food Services Director, provided by Aramark. The state review of Food Services will take place the week of April 21, the last review was done in 2019. A report will be provided when the review is final. The Suffield High School rooftop unit project is under way. All units have been ordered through Carrier and the delivery schedule is forthcoming. The Permanent Building Commission is now the lead of that project. The district is working with the town on the roof reshingling project and is in the process of going out to bid to hire an architect.

- Board of Selectmen Liaison's Report

None

- Board of Finance Liaison's Report

None

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #25-46: Finnigan moved, Sparzo seconded to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes of March 3 and 17, 2025. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #25-47: Fry moved to approve the following on the consent agenda:

A. Policy #6141.3273 Generative AI (Artificial Intelligence)

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

Discussion/Action Items

- Discussion and Possible Approval of Suffield High School Field Trip Request

MOTION #25-48: Finnigan moved, Toskin seconded to approve the Suffield High School Field Trip Request – Canada – February 2026. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

- Discussion and Possible Approval of the 2025-2026 Healthy Foods Certification
Mr. Remington said the state is requiring two motions to accept the Healthy Foods Certification and the Board needs to approve this for next year's program.

MOTION #25-49: Mol moved, Pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the Suffield Board of Education certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups. Finnigan seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

MOTION #25-50: Mol moved that the Suffield Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An "event" is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The "regular school day" is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. "Location" means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food sales. Rossi seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

- Non-Renewal of Staff in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes
Superintendent Dunbar said this action is required yearly, and not an indication of any performance-related evaluation. These individual's roles were for a finite amount of time, and their efforts have been appreciated.

MOTION #25-51: Dudack moved to approve the non-renewal of staff as presented in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes. Toskin seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

- Discussion and Possible Action on the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget
Board Chair Sattan said the Board of Finance voted to reduce the district's budget proposal by \$250,000. A public hearing on the budget is scheduled for April 23 with a town vote scheduled

for May 7. Superintendent Dunbar and Mr. Remington developed a plan to reduce the budget by \$250,000 without further personnel cuts. Superintendent Dunbar said to reach the \$250,000 reduction, the district can apply \$92,000 from changes to OPEB (other post-employment benefits), increase projected personnel turnover savings by \$50,000, and pay \$60,000 budgeted for the new reading program and \$48,000 budgeted for new textbooks out of the district's non-lapsing fund. The second and third year of the new reading program could also be paid out of the non-lapsing fund, leaving approximately \$6,000 remaining in the account. Superintendent Dunbar noted that the items paid out of the non-lapsing account are intentionally one-time expenses that won't need to be added back into future budgets.

Board members discussed the non-lapsing fund and legislative changes that allow Boards of Education to access such funds without approval from the Board of Finance. They discussed the Advisory Committee on Capital Expenditures (ACCE) budget in regard to the modular units at A. Ward Spaulding School. Board members discussed whether options were considered to eliminate other positions instead of the library media specialist position. They also discussed the district's plan for coverage of the Suffield Middle School Library.

MOTION #25-52: Finnigan moved to approve the 2025-2026 Board of Education Budget as presented in the amount of \$42,025,928 which is an increase of \$2,528,540 or 6.40%. Board members discussed their views on the budget, the State's role in fully funding excess costs for special education, cost and revenue issues, the economic future, and the State's surplus of funds. Rossi seconded the motion. Finnigan, Rossi, Sattan, Sepko, Sparzo, and Toskin voted in favor. Dudack, Fry, and Mol voted against. The motion passed **6-3-0**.

- **Math Initiatives at McAlister Intermediate School**

Superintendent Dunbar thanked Principal Pryce and Heather Goldstein, K-5 Math Instructional Coach, for the presentation on math intervention at McAlister Intermediate School. He said there will be a shift with math intervention next year by moving a second interventionist to McAlister Intermediate School. The middle school will continue to have two math interventionists and the high school math intervention model will be revamped.

Board members discussed the shift in intervention and discussed moving from the STAR to Number Sense screener. Board members discussed the evidence for intervention in the younger grades and the impact the change in math intervention may have at the high school.

Finnigan left at 8:32 p.m., returned at 8:34 p.m.

- **U.S. Department of Education Discussion**

Superintendent Dunbar said the U.S. Department of Education sent a communication to all states saying that the states are going to need to certify that they are in compliance with Title VI by April 24 or funding will cease. The Connecticut State Department of Education is responsible for the certification and an official response has not yet been received.

Zawawi left at 8:39 p.m., returned at 8:42 p.m.

Dudack exited the meeting at 8:43 p.m.

- February Financial Report

Business Manager Eric Remington reviewed the anticipated deficit and excess cost reimbursement. He said the new projected deficit is \$42,000. A soft spending freeze has been in place since the beginning of the calendar year. He has continued to make updated projections, though uncertainties remain. There are several potential outplacements pending and game officials need to be paid which would leave a \$3,500 surplus for the year.

If the district is successful in collecting the \$80,000 in excess cost funding due to the town at the end of April, that would bring the surplus to \$83,500. Typically, excess cost reimbursement comes to the Board, but, due to timing, this payment will go to the town first as the education cost share (ECS) payments typically do. The Board of Finance is expected to pass that funding on to the Board. Superintendent Dunbar said the State has formed a committee on special education reform and one possibility that is being discussed is to potentially have districts responsible for the special education costs of students that are in their district for the full year, even if they change districts.

Subcommittee Reports

- March 21, 2025 – Community Engagement and Public Relations Subcommittee Meeting – Board Chair Sattan said the graduation ceremony, articles for the Suffield Observer, potential legislative testimony, and the Suffield Middle School building project were discussed.
- March 25, 2025 – Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee Meeting – Subcommittee Chair Finnigan said math intervention and English Language Arts were discussed. The Suffield High School Math Lab class will be discussed at a future meeting.

Board Liaison Reports

- CREC – Board member Toskin said CREC is focused on budget work.
- CABA – Board member Finnigan said CABA is busy with legislative work.
- Agriscience – Board member Mol said Agriscience students visited D’Gata Farm and he shared news on the large animal facility. Agriscience students were busy in the greenhouse planting geraniums and the Advanced Floral Design class participated in the CT Flower and Garden Show. The ASTE Review took place and he thanked Board members who participated in that. FFA members left for Ireland today.

Future Business

Board member Fry would like to request an end of year report from the AI Committee.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

- Board member Finnigan said the Suffield Middle School Students vs. Faculty basketball game was exciting and that the cast and crew of *The Wizard of Oz* did a great job.
- Board member Fry said his vote opposing the budget was exclusive to the Suffield Middle School library media position. He thanked Board members for supporting the AI Policy.

- Board member Rossi said she and fellow Board member Mol are on the Wellness Committee. The objective is to get students outside learning as much as possible. She will keep the Board updated.
- Board Chair Sattan said she supports the return of the library media specialist position when and if the budget allows. She thanked the Board of Finance for their work in a difficult year. She stated her advocacy for fully funding the district's special education excess costs at 100%.

Adjournment

Mol moved, Finnigan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:06 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: [08APR2025 BOE Special Meeting](#)

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of May 5, 2025

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary