

Suffield, Connecticut

Approved by Bd. of Ed.

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Suffield High School Library Media Center
May 19, 2025

Call to Order

Board Vice Chair Finnigan called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

Present: Board members Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, James Mol (arrived at 6:32 pm), Gianna Rossi, Maureen Sattan (arrived at 7:47 pm), Michael Sepko, Greg Sparzo, and Sam Toskin; and Superintendent Matthew Dunbar, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Eric Remington

Absent: None

Recognition

The Board of Education recognized Kevin Mattia, Suffield Middle School Technology Education Teacher, and presented him with a plaque in recognition of his outstanding contributions to Suffield Public Schools. Rebecca Osleger, Director of Technology, and Ken Smith, Suffield Middle School Principal, spoke of Mr. Mattia's collaborative and enthusiastic work ethic and recognized him for developing and launching the successful Home Builders Institute program for 8th grade students. Superintendent Dunbar praised Mr. Mattia for the energy and sense of purpose he brings to his teaching, and thanked him for all that he does for Suffield Public Schools. Board members also expressed their gratitude.

Discussion/Action Items

A. Home Builders Institute Update

Rebecca Osleger, Director of Technology, shared about the first year of the Home Builders Institute (HBI) saying it consisted of 21 students and was funded by grants and donations. Students in the class learn through building projects, tool and safety training, and community partnerships. Lessons focus on safety, construction math, tool recognition and employability. Only a few districts in Connecticut offer the program starting in 9th grade. Suffield is the only program to start in 8th grade. Superintendent Dunbar thanked Ms. Osleger for her work in coordinating the program.

Suffield Middle School 8th grade eight students Ailison Hespelt and Kruthi Komalla spoke to Mr. Mattia's teaching of the HBI class. They described various projects including making a stool, designing and building a shed, and constructing picnic tables. They talked about the skills learned in the course including teamwork and problem solving. Board members asked the students if the course is helping them determine what careers they would like to pursue and what they would say to other students who are considering taking the course next year.

B. District Artificial Intelligence Committee Update

Ms. Osleger, Shannon Inero, Suffield High School Assistant Principal, and Lisa LaForte, Grade 3 Teacher at McAlister, provided an update on the district Artificial Intelligence (AI) Committee. Ms. Osleger thanked the Board for adopting an AI policy that provided a structure for the committee's work. The committee is now developing guidelines to oversee the district's AI work, which will help students and staff to navigate the AI landscape. Once the guidelines are finalized, the committee will recommend resources for teachers to utilize and schedule professional development. Next year, some teachers may pilot various ways to incorporate AI into their lessons, including through the use of free versions of Gemini and Magic School. Superintendent Dunbar expressed his excitement about the work being done with AI and thanked all of those involved in the committee.

Board members asked questions about how teachers are incorporating AI into classrooms, which lessons are appropriate for AI, how AI can be used in a way that complements rather than replaces learning, and how students are taught to determine whether the information they obtain through AI is accurate. Board members also asked whether students learn to develop and refine prompts to maximize the information they get, whether teachers are taking into consideration studies that assess what is developmentally appropriate for students, and what steps will be taken to get parents involved in understanding the technology.

Maureen Sattan joined the meeting by phone at 7:47 pm.

C. Climate Survey Results

Assistant Superintendent Zawawi presented the Suffield Public Schools School Climate Survey results. The district received 430 responses from parents, 142 responses from teachers, and 1,012 responses from students. The surveys included multiple choice and open ended questions. Based on survey results, the district climate is favorable; however, district administrators are in the process of analyzing the results to identify trends and opportunities for improvement. Going forward, the surveys will be administered twice per year in alignment with changes in state law and the district's newly updated Safe School Climate Policy.

Some of the areas of improvement over past years included parents feeling there are high expectations for all students, with favorable responses increasing between 2% and 14% depending on the school. At the high school, 71% of teachers responded favorably when asked if faculty, staff and school administrators work together as a team to improve student outcomes, which compared to 44% favorability in 2023.

Board members noted their concerns regarding 17% of students at the middle school reporting they don't feel safe and lower favorability among responses from students and parents at the middle school compared to other schools. Board members requested more communication about actions taken as a result of the survey so parents, teachers and students understand the value of participating. Board members also encouraged a review of how questions are worded and the use of a 5-point scale in the future.

Superintendent Dunbar noted that some areas identified in the survey are already being adjusted such as class sizes at the middle school. He plans to review the Safe Schools Climate Policy with administrators and will focus on addressing issues such as unkind behavior and will communicate consequences going forward.

Michael Sepko left the meeting at 8:23 pm.

D. Discussion and Possible Acceptance of Revised Board of Education Policy #0100 Code of Ethics for First Reading

MOTION #25-55: Fry moved, Rossi seconded to accept the revised Board of Education Policy #0100 Code of Ethics for First Reading. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

E. Discussion and Possible Acceptance of Revised Board of Education Policy #5131.911 School Climate for First Reading.

MOTION #25-56: Fry moved, Toskin seconded to accept the revised Board of Education Policy #5131.911 School Climate for First Reading. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

F. Discussion and Possible Approval of Communication on Special Education Advocacy

MOTION #25-57: Rossi moved, Toskin seconded to approve the communication on Special Education advocacy. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Board members discussed a draft Viewpoint developed by the Community Engagement and Public Relations subcommittee that will be submitted to the Connecticut Mirror advocating for greater state reimbursement for special education. In addition, the Board plans to send letters to Governor Lamont, the majority and minority leaders of the Connecticut House and Senate, State Representative Zawistowski and State Senator John Kissel to further advocate for increased special education reimbursement. Board members mentioned being excited to advocate for this important issue as community members have asked what Boards in town are doing to pursue greater funding. Board members also noted that decreased reimbursement for special education ends up affecting services and resources for all students.

Executive Session

At 8:40 p.m., Fry moved and Dudack seconded to go into executive session, inviting Superintendent Dunbar and Business Manager Eric Remington, for the purpose of discussion and review of the:

- A. Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and Connecticut Health Care Associates (Nurses' Union)
- B. Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the UE Local 222, CILU #38 (Food Service Union).

All members voted in favor and the motion carried **8-0-0**.

The executive session ended at 8:54 p.m.

Discussion/Action Items

- A. Discussion and Possible Approval of the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the Connecticut Health Care Associates (Nurses' Union)

MOTION #25-58: Mol moved, Rossi seconded to approve the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the Connecticut Health Care Associates (Nurses' Union). The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Board members expressed gratitude and support for the work of district nurses.

- B. Possible Approval of the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the Food Service Union – UE Local 222, CILU #38

MOTION #25-59: Mol moved, Toskin seconded to approve the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the UE Local 222, CILU #38 (Food Service Union). The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Board members expressed gratitude and support for district food service workers.

Adjournment

Fry moved, Toskin seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:56 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of June 2, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary