

Suffield, Connecticut

Approved by Bd. of Ed. 04/06/2026

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Suffield High School Library Media Center
and via Zoom Webinar
March 2, 2026

Call to Order

Board Chair Sattan called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, James Mol, Dustin Rose, Gianna Rossi, Maureen Sattan, Greg Sparzo (via Zoom), and Sam Toskin; and Superintendent Matt Dunbar, Assistant Superintendent Laura Norbut, Ed.D., and Business Manager Eric Remington

MOTION #26-46: Sattan moved, Mol seconded to move Discussion/Action Item A. Discussion with State Representative Tami Zawistowski to agenda item IV. A. Dudack, Finnigan, Fry, Mol, Rose, Rossi, and Sattan voted in favor. Sparzo experienced technical difficulties with the Zoom and his vote was not registered. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Recognition

A. Board of Education Appreciation

Superintendent Dunbar recognized the Board of Education in honor of Board of Education Recognition Month, thanking members for their dedication, preparation for meetings, committee work, and volunteer service on behalf of the district. Student representatives expressed appreciation for the Board's commitment and the amount of time dedicated to educational leadership and decision-making and distributed commemorative aluminum medallions with the Wildcat logo to Board members. Suffield High School Technology Education and Engineering Teacher Michael Sanchez explained the process of making the commemorative aluminum medallions in the new STEAM Lab.

B. Band, Choral, and Theater Program Successes

The Board recognized the accomplishments of the district's band, choral, and theater programs. The upcoming high school production of *Les Misérables* was highlighted, with performances scheduled for Friday and Saturday evenings and a Sunday matinee. Special recognition was given to Kelly Blais and Naomi Urquhart for their leadership of the drama. Cast member Eliana Lavoie performed a solo from the show.

Corey Killian, K-12 District Music Team Leader, shared updates on the district's music program. He spoke about the program successes including a large number of All-State musicians and upcoming travel opportunities. Mr. Killian also highlighted strong course enrollment and several newer offerings. He thanked the Board for its continued support. Board members discussed the recent district band concert, which brought together approximately 300 students from grades five through twelve.

Discussion with State Representative Tami Zawistowski

Board Chair Sattan introduced State Representative Tami Zawistowski who provided a legislative update. She noted her appreciation for opportunities to engage with Suffield Public Schools, including visits with students, Veterans Day events, and hosting student visits to the State Capitol. Representative Zawistowski reported that the legislative session is in its early stages, with many bills currently in the public hearing phase. She encouraged community members to submit testimony, particularly regarding education-related proposals. She highlighted several topics under discussion, including potential adjustments to the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) foundation amount, possible increases in funding for magnet schools and agriscience programs, and ongoing efforts by a legislative subcommittee to address special education funding. She noted proposed legislation related to private equity involvement in special education services, a contingency special education grant, potential statewide “bell-to-bell” cell phone restrictions in schools, legislation related to equivalent instruction requirements that may affect homeschool and private school oversight, a forthcoming mandate relief bill intended to gather feedback from districts, and proposals related to free school meals for families under a certain income threshold and state-funded stipends for student teachers. Representative Zawistowski noted that the legislative session is scheduled to adjourn in early May.

Board members thanked Representative Zawistowski for attending and expressed appreciation for her continued engagement with the district and local schools. The Board discussed special education funding and proposed statewide policies, the importance of fully funding state grants, and the proposed statewide bell-to-bell cell phone restriction, agriscience tuition rates, mandate relief, and the possibility of submitting testimony or recommendations to the legislature regarding education funding and policy issues.

Suffield High School Student Representatives

Olivia Mishtal, Class of 2026, shared the news and events at Suffield High School and Suffield Middle School. Student Representative Mishtal reported on several high school activities, including the upcoming production of *Les Misérables*, a Purse and Power Tool Bingo fundraiser, and a Class of 2027 Game Night. She said students had field trips to Quebec and New York City where students attended a performance of *Marjorie Prime*. She noted that the middle school musical, *Finding Nemo*, is scheduled for March 12 and March 14.

Lucy McCoy, Class of 2027, shared the news and events at McAlister Intermediate School and A. Ward Spaulding School. Student Representative McCoy shared updates from the elementary schools, including Spaulding School’s literacy night and “Take Your Graduate to the Library” event, first grade traditions at Spare Time, and the upcoming Kindergarten Information Night. She also highlighted the Reading Around the World event involving high school students, the 100th Day of School celebration, and recognition of two students by the Connecticut Association of Schools Celebration of the Arts. She also shared that the CKLA curriculum is currently focusing on the American Revolution and described a Valentine’s community outreach effort to deliver messages to residents in nursing homes.

Representative Zawistowski and Student Representatives Mishtal and McCoy all left the meeting at 7:45 p.m.

Public Comment

Anna-Kristin Daub-Murphy, 107 East Street South, spoke in support of implementing a bell-to-bell ban on personal devices in schools. She shared concerns about the impact of phones on student interaction and focus and referenced other districts that have adopted phone-free policies.

Emily Boone, 65 Barry Place, also spoke in support of a districtwide cell phone ban, noting that devices can be highly distracting and may interfere with both academic engagement and student relationships.

Kristen Lefferts, 1382 North Street, echoed the previous speakers and expressed concerns about the impact of increased device use and one-to-one technology on academic performance and classroom interaction.

Board Member Comment

- Board member Dudack thanked Representative Zawistowski and the public commentators for sharing their perspectives. She suggested that the Policy Subcommittee review the topic of student cell phone use. She expressed appreciation for the district's band, choral, and theater programs, noting the strength of the offerings. She also thanked the Permanent Building Commission, Colliers and Tecton for their presentations and for the continued progress on district projects.
- Board member Rossi thanked Michael Sanchez and team for their gift and recognition, and praised the soloist for her performance to the Board.
- Board member Finnigan thanked Michael Sanchez for the Board Appreciation. She thanked the public commentators for their input and acknowledged the challenges surrounding student device use. She also thanked the soloist and expressed appreciation for the band, chorus, and theater programs.
- Board member Fry recognized Board of Education Recognition Month and thanked fellow Board members for their service. He also thanked Representative Zawistowski and the public commentators and supported reviewing the issue of cell phone use in the Policy Subcommittee due to its impact on education.

Board member Finnigan left the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

- Board member Mol expressed appreciation for the Board of Education and noted that he learns something each time the Board meets. He congratulated the band, chorus, and theater programs on their successes and thanked the public commentators for their remarks. He shared his support for a bell-to-bell cell phone ban and noted the importance of addressing the issue.
- Board member Rose thanked the team for the recognition gift and the public commenters, noting that the issue resonates with families. He complimented the student soloist, noting the broader impact of the district's work.

Board member Finnigan returned to the meeting at 8:02 p.m.

- Board member Toskin thanked the public commentators for speaking and expressed appreciation for the recognition of the Board of Education.
- Board member Sparzo thanked the public commentators and noted the consistency of support expressed across the speakers. He shared his support for their perspectives.
- Board member Sattan noted that Eliana Lavoie was the soloist recognized earlier in the meeting.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Dunbar explained that the decision-making process for school delays or closures, which are made based on the best available information at the time.

Assistant Superintendent Norbut provided information on two surveys recently shared with families. The first, the Voluntary Family Reading History Questionnaire, was distributed to families in grades K–3 and asks biological parents to share information about how they learned to read. Moving forward, the questionnaire will also be included in the student registration process. Dr. Norbut also reported that the School Climate Survey was sent to all district families and staff and will be administered to students in grades 3–12 later in the week. The survey is used to support ongoing efforts to improve school climate across the district.

Superintendent Dunbar also reported that the recent professional development day received positive feedback from staff. Elementary sessions focused on mathematics and reading programs, while secondary staff had opportunities to select from a variety of professional learning options. Some sessions also explored the role of artificial intelligence in education, including its potential applications as well as considerations related to balance and academic integrity. He wished the district's athletic teams success in upcoming state competitions and congratulated the drama programs at both the high school and middle school as they prepare for their upcoming productions.

- Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Sattan reported that the Board is planning a training session with the Executive Director of a Regional Educational Service Center (RESC), scheduled for the second Board meeting in April. Additionally, members were reminded that the Board of Education budget presentation to the Board of Finance is anticipated for March 30th.

- Business Manager's Report

Business Manager Remington reported that the district is working to increase participation in the school food service program. Aramark is utilizing a program called "Fresh Eyes," which brings in staff from other districts to review current meal offerings, processes, and operations. He also reported that voters approved \$5.5 million in school related capital projects at the recent Town Meeting. The approved projects include approximately \$2.5 million for a roof and solar project at Suffield High School, \$725,000 to complete the replacement of the first-floor flooring at the high school, \$1.25 million for exterior improvements at Spaulding including brick repointing and door replacements, and \$1 million for renovations to the bathrooms at Spaulding. He noted that the approval of these projects reduces pressure on the district's capital improvement (ACE) requests. District staff are coordinating the planning and management of the projects due to the number of initiatives moving forward simultaneously. Mr. Remington noted that the roof project is eligible for state reimbursement and federal incentives. Approximately 51% of the roof project and 51% of the solar installation are eligible for state reimbursement, and the solar portion may also qualify for an additional 30% federal tax credit. The \$2.5 million figure represents the gross cost before reimbursements.

- Board of Selectmen Liaison's Report

No Report

- Board of Finance Liaison's Report

No Report

Approval of Minutes

Board Chair Sattan explained there is one correction to the February 2, 2026 minutes. The minutes should reflect that Board member Dudack rejoined the Board meeting via Zoom at 7:48p.m.

MOTION #26-47: Sattan moved, Dudack seconded to approve the Board of Education Regular Meeting minutes of February 2, 2026 with the specified correction. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

MOTION #26-48: Sattan moved, Dudack seconded to approve the Board of Education Regular Meeting minutes of February 19, 2026 and the Board of Education and Permanent Building Commission Joint Special meeting minutes of February 19, 2026. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **9-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

None

Discussion/Action Items

- January Financial Report

Business Manager Remington reported that the projected salary surplus has decreased due to fluctuations in staffing related to employee leaves. As leaves begin and end, salary costs shift between salary and substitute line items, which has impacted projections. He reported a positive adjustment in health insurance costs, as enrollment is trending lower than anticipated. This change represents approximately \$105,000 in savings compared with the December projection. Mr. Remington expressed concern about increasing special education outplacement costs. Between December and January, five students requiring outplacements were added due to new placements and families moving into the district. These placements are projected to add approximately \$297,000 in costs through the end of the fiscal year. Because the placements occurred later in the year, they will fall under the cost cap and the district will not receive excess cost reimbursement for those expenses. As a result of these changes, the district's projected year-end deficit has increased from \$159,000 in December to approximately \$212,000 in January. Mr. Remington noted that the district is reviewing spending in discretionary areas such as repairs and. The district may also utilize its non-lapsing fund if necessary. He indicated that a plan will be developed to ensure the budget closes without a deficit.

Superintendent Dunbar added that the district is monitoring the special education costs. He stated that the current projection may increase further as additional factors are reviewed, including cases where Suffield is financially responsible for students placed in other districts. He noted that the district hopes the new program recently implemented at McAlister Intermediate School will help reduce outplacement needs over time, although it is too early to determine its impact. The said the district builds its budget based on information available at the time of development, which can result in significant financial shifts when circumstances change later in the year. Board members asked clarifying questions regarding the \$297,000 cost increase and confirmed that the amount reflects combined tuition and transportation expenses associated with the five additional placements.

- Discussion and Possible Action on Fiscal Year 2027 Budget

The Board discussed the Fiscal Year 2026–2027 budget and reviewed updated information since the Superintendent's proposed budget was presented in January. Business Manager Eric Remington first walked through materials provided to Board members, including a summary of capital (ACCE)

accounts, ten years of budget history, examples of cost avoidance from adding staff positions, and projected education-related revenue. The capital accounts summary showed approximately \$1.94 million in outstanding balances for projects that carry over from year to year, some of which fund multi-year work or remain open due to delayed projects. Mr. Remington noted that the Spaulding renovation project came in under budget and that the district may request that surplus funds be swept to help support future capital needs. Superintendent Matt Dunbar also reviewed examples where adding staff helped avoid higher costs. Mr. Remington then summarized projected education-related revenue for FY27, noting that major sources such as Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding are expected to remain flat, while some reimbursements appear higher due to rising special education and health insurance costs.

The administration then presented proposed adjustments to the FY27 budget based on updated information. Two additions were identified: converting an academic support role back to a full-time position due to contractual requirements (\$11,000 increase) and correcting an underestimation related to expanding Spanish instruction (about \$40,000 additional cost). Several reductions were also proposed. Updated enrollment in the district's health insurance plan allows a \$200,000 reduction, and updated pension estimates allow another \$20,000 reduction. The administration also recommended eliminating a high school secretarial position following a resignation (about \$110,000 savings) and eliminating the secondary English and math instructional coach positions, with those staff members filling two teaching vacancies created by retirements (approximately \$275,000 savings). In total, the proposed adjustments would reduce the budget by approximately \$553,000 while maintaining the district's current programs and services.

MOTION #26-49: Dudack moved, Toskin seconded to approve the 2026-2027 Board of Education Fiscal Year 2027 Budget as presented in the amount of \$44,112,210 which is an increase of \$2,086,282 or 4.96%. Dudack, Finnigan, Fry, Mol, Rose, Rossi, Sattan, and Toskin voted in favor. Sparzo abstained. The motion passed **8-0-1**.

Toskin left the media center and joined meeting via Zoom at 9:05 p.m.

- Open Choice Program Review and Seat Declaration
Superintendent Dunbar reported that the district submitted its annual Open Choice seat declaration, maintaining the same number of seats as last year—a total of 32 across multiple grade levels that were chosen to align with key student transition points. Current participation remains around 2% of the district, and the district will continue efforts to maintain or slightly increase that percentage.
- Discussion and Possible Action on a Contractual Grievance Filed by the Teamsters' Union
This discussion was not held due to the sudden illness of the union representative.

Subcommittee Reports

- February 11, 2026 – Community Engagement and Public Relations – Subcommittee Chair
James Mol reported that the subcommittee met to discuss several items - they resumed publishing articles in the Observer, with a recent piece on the budget process (excluding specific numbers) and a potential April article in development. The discussed ongoing community outreach related to the middle school and the need for standardized communication from staff to parents, especially for those with students at multiple schools. The technology department plans to address this over the summer. The subcommittee will continue meeting monthly through the school year.

- February 13, 2026 – Curriculum and Instruction – Subcommittee Chair Finnigan reported the meeting was cancelled due to lack of quorum.
- February 26, 2026 – Finance and Facilities Subcommittee Meeting – Subcommittee Chair Toskin reported that the subcommittee reviewed reports and exhibits in advance, covering topics discussed earlier in the board meeting, including budget and facility matters.

Board Liaison Reports

- Capital Region Education Council (CREC) – No update.
- Agriscience – Board member Mol reported that in February, students participated in public speaking competitions and the Greenhand Chapter Degree Ceremony. Last week was FFA Spirit Week, featuring themed dress-up days such as Career Day, FFA Year Day, and PJ Day (“Farmers of Day”). He outlined the upcoming Agriscience events.

Future Business

High School Graduate Outcomes

Public Comment

No public comment.

Board Member Comment

- Board member Dudack thanked Superintendent Dunbar, Mr. Remington, and the team for their budget work; thanked the secondary coaches; thanked colleagues for the board appreciation gift; supported seeking Board of Finance assistance for extra special education costs.
- Board member Rossi thanked public commentators for speaking; acknowledged Dr. Norbut, Mr. Remington, and Superintendent Dunbar for their diligence during the budget process.
- Board member Finnigan thanked staff and colleagues for budget support and praised the district’s innovative approaches to special education.

Adjournment

Fry moved, Mol seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:22 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: [02MAR2026 BOE Regular Meeting](#)

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of April 6, 2026.

Respectfully submitted,

Gianna Rossi
Secretary