

Suffield, Connecticut

Approved by Bd. of Ed. 06/01/2026

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Suffield High School Media Center
May 18, 2026

Call to Order

Board Chair Sattan called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry (arrived at 6:44 p.m.), James Mol, Dustin Rose (via Zoom), Gianna Rossi, Maureen Sattan, Greg Sparzo and Sam Toskin; and Superintendent Matt Dunbar and Assistant Superintendent Laura Norbut, Ed.D. (arrived at 6:45 p.m.)

Discussion/Action Items

A. Facility Dog Presentation

Patti and Mike Voisine from the Meghan Voisine Kindness Matters Foundation presented a proposal to introduce a highly trained facility dog to Suffield Public Schools, with initial placement planned for McAlister Intermediate School. Established in honor of a former student known for her empathy, the fund aims to bring a BluePath facility dog into the district to help reduce student anxiety, promote emotional regulation, increase classroom engagement, and assist in clinical or social skills groups. Following operational models from neighboring districts, the school system would legally own the dog. A primary staff handler would house and transport the dog daily, and secondary handlers would be trained to utilize the animal for various building-wide activities, supported by designated indoor rest areas and outdoor break spaces.

Board Member Fry joined at 6:44 p.m.

Addressing potential liability and health concerns, the presenters recommended the district confirm that the school system's existing liability insurance would cover the dog during school hours, mirroring successful protocols in Glastonbury, Wethersfield, and Berlin. To accommodate individuals with allergies or fear of dogs, schools would implement a simple "opt-out" mechanism for families. Financially, the initial \$10,000 acquisition cost from BluePath, which includes comprehensive handler training, will be fully funded by the Meghan Voisine Kindness Matters Fund. Ongoing costs for healthcare, food, and grooming are expected to be covered directly by the handler, local veterinary donations, and community fundraisers, ensuring a minimal financial impact on the district budget.

B. School Climate Survey Results

In compliance with Connecticut General Statute Section 10-222gg, the district administered its biennial school climate survey to students in grades 3 through 12, families, and staff members in March 2026. The survey was constructed by the district's School Climate Specialists using

evidence-based items recommended by the Connecticut State Department of Education and was reviewed by the individual school committees. Participation numbers were reviewed, with accompanying discussion about increasing parent and staff participation in the future.

Board Member Finnigan left the meeting at 8:10 p.m. and returned at 8:13 p.m.

Board Member Rose exited the meeting at 8:21 p.m.

The quantitative survey findings revealed strong benchmarks in several categories, particularly regarding student-adult trust and general school safety. While measures of personal belonging and acceptance were high among students overall, peer-to-peer relationships emerged as an area for improvement. Parental feedback was largely positive across all surveyed areas. Qualitative feedback from families included requests for more paper-based learning to reduce screen time and better coordination of tests and homework over school breaks. Staff feedback focused on the need for more consistent disciplinary consequences, clearer behavior expectations, and greater input in district decisions.

Board Member Finnigan exited the meeting at 8:46 p.m.

C. Student Achievement Results: SAT

SAT data was not able to reviewed at this time. Per State guidelines, this data must remain confidential until the state officially publishes the comprehensive results on EdSight in early June. A formal presentation on these student achievement results will be scheduled for an upcoming Board meeting following the public release.

Adjournment

Toskin moved, Mol seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:48 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of June 1, 2026.

Respectfully submitted,

Gianna Rossi
Secretary