

Suffield, Connecticut

Approved by Bd. of Ed.

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Suffield High School Library Media Center
and via Zoom Webinar
July 13, 2026

Call to Order

Board Chair Sattan called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

Absent: James Mol

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

- Board member Dudack thanked district staff for their summer work, encouraged participation in the building project survey, and noted that residents have expressed a desire for a full recreation center.
- Board members Finnigan and Toskin thanked Board member Fry for his speech at the graduation ceremony.
- Board member Sparzo was pleased with the recent *Suffield Observer* article about the middle school and firehouse projects and expressed surprise at how few residents seem aware of the impending middle school facility issues.

Reports to the Board

A. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Dunbar reported that the district is in the process of filling several staffing vacancies. A recent soil test for the middle school project revealed deep silt and clay that may require modification to the orientation of a new building and the budget for a new building. The architect and consultant are working on obtaining further information. The Permanent Building Commission (PBC) plans to review its findings at its next meeting. They hope to share a recommendation with the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance in August.

Board members questioned if the PBC will be looking for further input from the BOE. They questioned when estimates would be received on the remediation work.

B. Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Sattan thanked Board members for attending graduation and thanked administration and staff for a seamless ceremony. After a round of interviews, Olivia Nicora, Suffield High School Class of 2028, was selected as the new Board of Education Student Representative, joining senior

representative Lucy McCoy. Board Chair Sattan reported that she, Superintendent Dunbar, and Assistant Superintendent Norbut attended a meeting today with parents from the Balance Project whose goal is to discover the pitfalls of technology and screen time. Board member Sparzo requested a meeting regarding the efficacy of Building Thinking Classrooms, which was attended by Board Chair Sattan, Superintendent Dunbar, and Assistant Superintendent Norbut. Board member Sparzo requested additional information that will be added to the Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee agenda in the fall.

C. Business Manager's Report

Business Manager Eric Remington reported that the Food Service Department is preparing for the state's free breakfast program. The district signed a new five-year contract with M&J for bus transportation and is in the process of finalizing bus routes.

Mr. Remington reported that all 18 HVAC units have been installed at Suffield High School. Work to connect and integrate all of the units is ongoing. The Family Consumer Science room at Suffield Middle School is being renovated to include a fifth workstation and some new appliances. Bids for the Suffield High School roof replacement and photovoltaic project are due July 28.

The district was able to close its projected deficit for the fiscal year. Mr. Remington discussed a major liability involving the Hartford Open Choice program. He said Hartford is requesting payback due to a change in state statute regarding Open Choice special education reimbursements over the past four years. Suffield is resisting deducting this from the Fiscal Year 2026 bill. The district will be exploring a response and will update the Board at a future meeting.

Board members discussed the liability with Open Choice. They discussed district transportation and length of bus routes.

D. Board of Selectmen Liaison's Report

None

E. Board of Finance Liaison's Report

None

Approval of Minutes

MOTION #27-01: Rose moved, Finnigan seconded to approve the Board of Education Regular Meeting minutes of June 1 and June 15, 2026 and the Special Meeting minutes of June 26, 2026. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #27-02: Finnigan moved to approve the following on the consent agenda:

- A. Policy #6163.3 Live Animals in the Classroom
- B. Policy #5141.41 Reports of Suspected Abuse or Neglect of Adults with an Intellectual Disability or Autism Spectrum Disorder

Toskin seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **8-0-0**.

Discussion/Action Items

A. Student Attendance Review

Dr. Norbut reported on student attendance. She reviewed the attendance regulation, interventions, trends, and chronic absenteeism. Data shows improvements on attendance rates during the 2025-26 school year, with chronic absenteeism decreasing across all schools using 2022-2025 Edsight data, and most significantly at Suffield High School. 2025-2026 PowerSchool chronic absence data by grade was reviewed. The district continues to use Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) processes, the Family Liaison, and positive incentives to encourage consistent attendance.

Board members discussed absences at Suffield Middle School. They thanked the administration for the improvements being made in attendance. Board members questioned the tiers in the regulation and if administration had the tools needed.

B. Student Discipline Report

Dr. Norbut reported on student discipline. Data showed a concerning increase in disciplinary incident counts at A. Ward Spaulding School and McAlister Intermediate School. Discipline at Suffield Middle School remained relatively consistent with the previous year, while Suffield High School experienced a slight increase. The percent of student population with incidents ranged from 7.7% at SHS to 11.9% at McAlister. It was noted that less than 1% of the student population contributed to 49 incidents, and 20% of the incidents involved students who enrolled in the district after March 2025. Most incidents occurred in unstructured settings, including hallways, playgrounds, cafeterias, and on school buses, rather than during classroom instruction. Across the district, Dr. Norbut noted that most students were involved in only a single disciplinary incident during the school year, indicating that interventions implemented following the initial incident were generally successful in preventing repeated behaviors.

Dr. Norbut reviewed suspension data. In-school suspensions increased at the elementary level, reflecting both the increased behavioral challenges and the district's emphasis on consistent disciplinary responses. Suspension rates at the middle school level remained relatively stable compared with the previous school year, and bus suspensions remained low.

Several initiatives intended to strengthen behavioral supports across the district include: the implementation of Fly Five at the elementary level; expansion of the RULER social-emotional learning framework to students at the secondary level after completing staff training during the past year; continued implementation and expansion of the Effective School Solutions (ESS) program, extending services from McAlister Intermediate School to Suffield Middle School to increase in-district mental health supports; continued collaboration with the Connect IV behavior health initiative; and continued refinement of the district's MTSS processes for social-emotional and behavioral interventions.

Board members discussed the increase in disciplinary incidents, the concentration of incidents among a small number of students, the impact of students enrolling mid-year, and the effectiveness of current interventions. Board members questioned how long the SEL programs have been in district and if discipline was broken out by tiers.

C. Gifted and Talented Review

Dr. Norbut presented an overview of Gifted and Talented. She explained that Connecticut General Statutes require school districts to identify students who demonstrate exceptional intellectual ability or outstanding academic talent. While the state mandates identification procedures, it does not require districts to provide a separate gifted education program. Instead, districts have flexibility in

determining how to meet the educational needs of identified students. Suffield Public Schools addresses students' advanced learning needs through differentiated classroom instruction.

In a change over last year, the district has formalized a multi-measure identification process using the OLSAT, SBAC scores, universal screening assessments, and PSAT/SAT data, rather than relying solely on the third grade OLSAT. Following this process, the district successfully identified 24 gifted students as of June 2026. Communication is sent in the fall to families of students who are designated as gifted.

Board members discussed the district's identification process and questioned if gifted status carries through year after year. They discussed the percentage of districts in the state that offer gifted programs.

D. Suffield High School/Bruce Park Bridge

Superintendent Dunbar reported that the bridge connecting the Suffield High School Agriscience Center and Bruce Park has been closed for some time. The town is working with engineers to have the bridge evaluated. Estimated repair costs are at approximately \$180,000-\$200,000 for pedestrian use only and an additional \$75,000-\$80,000 to restore the bridge for agricultural vehicle access. The total project costs are expected to exceed \$250,000. Agriscience grant funds cannot be used for these repairs. Superintendent Dunbar indicated that the final written cost estimates are forthcoming. The project will require town funding, prompting upcoming discussions with the PBC and Board of Selectmen.

Board members questioned who would be responsible for paying for the repairs.

Subcommittee Reports

A. June 17, 2026 – Policy Subcommittee Special Meeting – Subcommittee Chair Fry reported that three policies were discussed and the following policies will be placed on First Read: Policy #6146 Graduation Requirements (U.S. History); Policy #5112 Ages of Attendance

Board Liaison Reports

A. Capital Region Education Council (CREC) – no report
B. Agriscience – no report

Future Business

Board member Finnigan would like a district review of Social Emotional Learning programs.

Public Comment

None

Board Member Comment

- Board member Dudack expressed support for the district using Building Thinking Classrooms and requested to attend the Curriculum and Instruction meeting when it is discussed.
- Board member Rossi thanked the administration for their detailed reports.
- Board member Finnigan thanked Dr. Norbut for the district's Declaration of Independence exhibit held at the Hatheway Barn and commended the student artwork. Dr. Norbut noted that the exhibit can now be viewed at Academy Hall through August on specific Saturdays.

Adjournment

Fry moved, Rose seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:37 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: [13JUL2026 Board of Education Regular Meeting](#)

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of September 8, 2026.

Respectfully submitted,

Gianna Rossi
Secretary