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By Lisa Vivar at 2:01 pm, Oct 14, 2026

Suffield, Connecticut Approved by Bd. of Ed.

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Suffield High School Library Media Center
and via Zoom Webinar
October 5, 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, James Mol, Dustin Rose, Gianna Rossi (via Zoom), Maureen Sattan, and Greg Sparzo; and Superintendent Matt Dunbar, Assistant Superintendent Laura Norbut, Director of Special Services Diana Kelley, and Business Manager Eric Remington

Absent: Board members Brian Fry, Sam Toskin

Recognition

A. District School Family Liaison Alaina Decesare

Superintendent Dunbar and the Board of Education recognized District School Family Liaison Alaina Decesare and presented her with a plaque in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the students and families of Suffield Public Schools.

Director of Special Services Diana Kelley, Ed.D., described Alaina Decesare's work supporting school attendance, connecting Open Choice families with the district, welcoming new families, assisting English language learners and their families, coordinating translation services, and connecting students with extracurricular and community opportunities. Board members and the Superintendent thanked her for strengthening relationships among students, families, staff, and schools.

Suffield High School Student Representatives

Olivia Nicora, Class of 2028, shared the news and events at McAlister Intermediate School and A. Ward Spaulding School. Student Representative Nicora reported that Spaulding School held a welcome-back picnic, open house, and a PTO fundraiser. Fall School Connections programs began, offering activities such as pickleball, chess, and basketball. Students are making use of the new pavilion and picnic tables. The Kwame Alexander author event held on October 1 was well attended.

Lucy McCoy, Class of 2027, shared the news and events at Suffield High School and Suffield Middle School. Student Representative McCoy reported that Suffield Middle School seventh-grade students participated in a virtual presentation with scientist Dan Kinzer. Fall Spirit Week began October 5. Eighth-grade students have their annual panoramic photograph on October 20. On October 14, seventh-graders will participate in the Ecology Explorers program. A group of students

is scheduled to attend a conference at UConn and will meet female role models working in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. At Suffield High School, students enrolled in Early College Experience (ECE) classes registered with UConn. A virtual financial aid night for families was held and a College and Career Fair for all grades was held. Freshmen, sophomores, and juniors are scheduled to take the PSATs on October 19-21. A fall concert is scheduled for October 19 at 7:00 p.m. Agriscience students will attend the National FFA Convention in Indianapolis on October 20-24.

Public Comment

Victoria Copes, 233 Hickory Street, spoke about the upcoming budget cycle. She requested consideration of zero-based budgeting or a flat operating budget, limiting capital requests to essential repairs and replacements , and considering the potential tax impact of the middle school building project. She inquired about Finance and Facilities Subcommittee meetings and requested capital project reports showing actual expenditures against budget.

Superintendent Dunbar reviewed the operating and capital budgeting process, noting that the district will balance student needs with fiscal restraint, especially in light of the SMS building project.

Board Member Comment

- Board member Dudack welcomed the student representatives, expressed appreciation for the work being done on the Suffield Middle School Building Project, congratulated Alaina Decesare, and thanked the public for its input.
- Board member Mol congratulated Alaina Decesare and highlighted the importance of her engagement across the district. He wished all a meaningful Indigenous Peoples Day.

Reports to the Board

A. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Dunbar announced a $50,000 grant for high-dosage mathematics tutoring for seventh- and eighth-grade students. Assistant Superintendent Laura Norbut explained that the program would use a four-student-to-one-tutor ratio during the middle school flex period, initially serving approximately 24 students, with the potential to serve up to 48 if students meet their goals and new students enter the program. Implementation was anticipated for late October or early November. Selection will consider two years of SBAC and STAR results, and families will have an opt-out opportunity. Students already receiving mathematics intervention will not be included in this additional program. Superintendent Dunbar thanked Dr. Norbut for applying for and writing the grant.

Superintendent Dunbar thanked staff and community partners for the October 1 Kwame Alexander event. He reminded Board members of the October 15 Tri-Board (BOS, BOF, PBC) meeting at the middle school to discuss the Suffield Middle School Building Project options and costs. He also reported on a meeting of area superintendents concerning recent education legislation.

B. Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Sattan requested volunteers for the calendar committee and upcoming Teamsters contract negotiations, and noted that the current Teamsters contract runs through June 30, 2027. Board members were reminded of the November CABE/CAPSS Convention. A Board retreat is planned for October 19. Members were encouraged to attend in person and submit topics for consideration.

C. Business Manager's Report
Business Manager Eric Remington reported no substantive transportation updates. Food Services secured an ice cream vendor, allowing Friday sales to resume. All replacement bookshelves and furniture for McAlister's library have been received. The district is preparing to solicit bids for brick repointing at Spaulding School. Department heads and principals have begun budget development and ACCE project requests.

D. Board of Selectmen Liaison's Report
None

E. Board of Finance Liaison's Report
None

Approval of Minutes
MOTION #27-10: Sparzo moved, Mol seconded to approve the Board of Education regular meeting minutes of September 8 and September 21, 2026. Finnigan, Mol, Rose, Rossi, Sattan, and Sparzo voted to approve. Dudack abstained. The motion passed **6-0-1**.

Lucy McCoy and Olivia Nicora exited the meeting at 7:11 p.m.

Consent Agenda
None

Discussion/Action Items
A. Special Education Program Update
Dr. Kelley presented an update on the district's special education programming. She highlighted partnerships with local businesses that provide students with opportunities to develop independence, employment skills, and real-world work experience, beginning as early as middle school and continuing through high school.

Dr. Kelley reviewed outcomes for students with disabilities who graduated in June 2026 and discussed results from a recent parent survey. Survey results were generally positive, with home-school communication identified as an area for improvement. Families also expressed interest in workshops, particularly opportunities to learn strategies for supporting their children at home. The district will use the survey results to inform professional development, parent programming, communication, and collaboration between special and general education staff.

Superintendent Dunbar asked about the use of educational terminology during PPT meetings and ways to make the process more understandable to families. Dr. Kelley explained that staff would continue working to explain the components of an IEP, evaluation tools and results, accommodations and modifications, and other terminology in family-friendly language. The district is also working to review evaluation results with families before PPT meetings when appropriate so that meeting time can be focused more effectively on eligibility, programming, and student needs.

Dr. Kelley also reviewed special education enrollment and staffing trends. The district continues to experience challenges recruiting paraeducators, particularly experienced candidates, and discussed the limitations of the current contractual salary-step structure. Superintendent Dunbar indicated that this might be an area for consideration during upcoming negotiations.

Board members discussed the number of Open Choice and out-of-district Agriscience students who qualify for special education.

B. Effective School Solutions (ESS) Program Update
Dr. Kelley reviewed the district's partnership with Effective School Solutions (ESS). The program provides clinicians who work collaboratively with district special education teachers and staff to support students with significant social-emotional and behavioral needs. Services include direct student support, family therapy, caregiver groups, professional development, data analysis progress monitoring, PPT participation, and supervision through ESS.

Dr. Kelley explained that the program is designed both to return students from costly out-of-district placements when appropriate and to prevent additional placements by providing a more intensive level of support within Suffield Public Schools. Two students were able to return to the district through the ESS program, resulting in approximately $300,000 in gross savings. Mr. Remington noted that some out-of-district costs are reimbursed through the state's excess cost program and that anticipated savings were already incorporated into the district budget.

Early results have been encouraging, and the district is considering opportunities to expand the program, including potentially serving additional students and accepting tuition students from other districts. Dr. Kelley stressed the importance of building the program carefully and evaluating a full year of results before significant expansion. A more comprehensive presentation with program data is anticipated in the spring.

Board members expressed strong support for the program, noting both its financial benefits and its ability to provide appropriate services to students within their home district whenever possible.

C. August Financial Report
Mr. Remington reported that the August financial report was still being finalized due to the complexity of reconciling approximately 350 salary positions to start the year. Salaries generally appear to be tracking favorably, although substitute costs are being closely monitored and administrators are exploring ways to reduce those expenses.

Special education outplacements remain an area requiring close monitoring because a single placement can significantly affect the budget. Natural gas and health insurance costs are also being monitored. The district is in a favorable position regarding diesel fuel for FY27 because fuel was locked in at approximately $2.50 per gallon before recent market increases.

Dr. Kelley exited the meeting at 7:39 p.m.

D. Authorized Signers of ED-099 Agreement for Child Nutrition Programs
MOTION #27-11: Mol moved, Rose seconded to approve the authorized signers of the ED-099 Agreement for Child Nutrition Programs. All members voted in favor. The motion passed **7-0-0**.

E. Adoption of Proposed 2027 Regular Board of Education Meeting Dates
Board Chair Sattan provided an overview of the proposed 2027 Regular Board of Education Meeting Dates.
MOTION #27-12: Dudack moved, Mol seconded to approve the 2027 Regular Board of Education Meeting Dates with the July 12, 2027 meeting date removed. Board members discussed taking a

break during the month of July verus keeping the meeting on the calendar as a placeholder that could be cancelled if unnecessary. Dudack, Mol, Rose, and Rossi voted in favor. Finnigan, Sattan, and Sparzo voted against. The motion passed **4-3-0**.

Subcommittee Reports

A. September 11, 2026 – Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee Meeting – Subcommittee Chair Finnigan reported the subcommittee discussed the use of Building Thinking Classrooms and clarified that it is one instructional tool used for appropriate portions of units rather than an exclusive instructional methodology. The subcommittee also reviewed 2026 summer curriculum writing. Approximately $26,000 was spent. Additional information will will help determine needs for next summer.
B. October 1, 2026 – Finance and Facilities Subcommittee Meeting – Board Chair Sattan reported that the Finance and Facilities Subcommittee's work had been substantially covered during the Business Manager's report.

Board Liaison Reports

A. Capital Region Education Council (CREC) – No report.
B. Agriscience – Board member Mol reported on Agriscience enrollment in Suffield Public Schools, FFA activities, and student accomplishments at The Big E. Approximately 175 students attended over two days with four chaperones. Students will participate in the National FFA Convention October 20-24, 2026 in Indianapolis, IN.

Future Business

Board member Finnigan would like a Legislative Update after the CABE/CAPSS Convention for budgeting purposes.

Public Comment

Victoria Copes, 233 Hickory Street, raised concerns regarding the meeting room microphones and the difficulty hearing portions of the meeting through Zoom.

Board Member Comment

- Board member Dudack thanked Ms. Copes for identifying the audio problem. She expressed appreciation for the mathematics-tutoring grant and the special education update.
- Board member Finnigan expressed thanks for the mathematics-tutoring grant. She encouraged people to watch Joanna Lohman on the Amazing Race
- Board member Mol appreciated the journalist from *The Patch* who picked up the Board's article about the middle school from the *Suffield Observer*.

Adjournment

Mol moved, Sparzo seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:02 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: October 5, 2026 BOE Regular Meeting

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of November 2, 2026.

Respectfully submitted,

Gianna Rossi
Board of Education Secretary