

Board of Education Meeting
September 8, 2014

Call to Order

Acting Board Chair Sanborn, called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m. in the Suffield Middle School Media Center. Present: Board members Lori D'Ostuni, Scott Schneider, Natalie Semyanko, Mary Roy, Jeanne Gee, Mary Lou Sanborn, George Beiter, Michelle Zawawi, Superintendent, Karen Baldwin, and Assistant Superintendent, Jim Collin.

Public Comment

None

Discussion/Action Items

- Discussion of District Leadership Structure to Support Teaching and Learning
Superintendent Baldwin said the purpose of this meeting was to discuss the framework of the district leadership, specifically the roles of the K-12 curriculum supervisors. She reminded Board members this structure was developed during the 2011-2012 school year as part of budget development for and implementation in the 2012-2013 school year. The new structure has yet to be fully staffed. This restructure was in response to the 2011 CREC report's findings that leadership in the district needed improvement, supervision and evaluation was lacking, and a focus on teaching and learning was necessary. The change from teacher coordinators to supervisors was purposeful to address the concerns in the CREC report. Dr. Baldwin said she is proud of the work of all the supervisors and principals in supporting continuous improvement, as well as the teachers who are working hard during a time of challenges with the implementation of SEED and the Common Core. This new leadership structure has helped improve learning for all children.

Dr. Collin said one of the significant changes in the leadership structure was combining the director of curriculum and the director of special education to his position. This was also in response to the findings in the CREC report. In addition to that change was the creation of the three K-12 curriculum supervisors. The role of the supervisors creates (1) a foundation infrastructure around reading to include training for teachers, data collection, and analysis of the data, (2) an infrastructure in math to give teachers the tools they need for instruction and communication with parents; this work has resulted in out-of-district students to return to Suffield, and (3) provides for curriculum expertise and leadership across all grades. They have positional authority to make decisions.

Superintendent Baldwin added that she, the supervisors, and the Assistant Superintendent are the only people in the district whose work has the opportunity to see the K-12 articulation in the district.

Ms. Gintoff highlighted her work in the district. She facilitates discussions with teachers across grade levels and also across content areas. In having knowledge about how standards are taught in all grade levels helps to guide teachers in their decision making for curriculum and instruction.

Ms. Loveland highlighted her work in the district. She is looking at where concepts and lessons are overlapping across all grades. She facilitates conversations with teachers to address these overlaps and it has given teachers the freedom to make decisions for the betterment of their students. In curriculum writing she can give teachers a deeper understanding of what is being taught in the lower and higher grades to better align their curriculum.

Dr. Collin asked the supervisors to give examples of how they provided support in the instructional process. Ms. Loveland said that work happens in the professional learning committee work with teachers. She has conversations with what teachers are doing in class, what their needs are, and she observes their teaching practices. This gives her the ability to have authentic dialog with teachers in real time. Ms. Gintoff said the same work is being done with the reading specialists in each building. They review reading and writing workshop models, and teams of teachers set up observation cycles to observe each other.

Dr. Collin asked Ms. Carpenter-Snow and Mr. Dunn to speak to how the supervisors help with students who are struggling in their buildings. Ms. Carpenter-Snow said the supervisors have the ability to shape interventions with a K-12 lens that she does not have and that has been very valuable in helping students. They observe in classrooms to see how students are learning, and interacting with their teachers and peers. They are also building the knowledge base for teachers. Mr. Dunn agreed with Ms. Carpenter-Snow. He said they have improved teacher practice by identifying best practice and also practice in need of improvement. Ms. Gintoff created a professional development to train teachers in best practice in reader and writer workshop models. There is a sharp difference in teacher practice as a result of that professional development session. This would not have happened without the efforts of Ms. Gintoff.

Dr. Collin asked Dr. Davis, 6-12 Special Education Supervisor, to share how the curriculum supervisors have supported her work in special education. Dr. Davis said the supervisors have had a powerful impact on her work. They are full collaborative partners in PPT meetings. The supervisors input helps to meld general education with special education and makes a big difference for students and families. Their input gives a greater understanding to parents on what instruction will look like for their child. Their work also empowers general education and special education educators to work together to improve teaching and learning.

Dr. Collin asked the K-12 supervisors to discuss their professional development work. Ms. Gintoff said professional development is important in framing instruction. One example is she provided a joint professional development with general education and special education teachers to help articulate students' abilities to parents. Teachers collaborating and sharing ideas during these sessions are very powerful. Ms. Loveland has worked with providing differentiated instruction to teachers so they can improve learning for all their students. She said teachers did not know they could do things differently for different students. These professional development sessions have provided teachers the tools and strategies to do so, giving them more flexibility.

Dr. Collin said the CREC report addressed all these areas noting a lack of infrastructure and a fragmented system. The administration has been working very hard to address those concerns.

He was concerned in March when it was proposed at a Board meeting to eliminate the K-12 supervisor positions. He was excited to give this information to Board tonight on all the good work that has been accomplished in a short period of time. He is not hearing the concerns that the Board has heard. He acknowledged that he thought people would come to him but didn't so he needs to get out in buildings more and make connections so people are comfortable talking with him about their concerns. He said the administrative team is a highly skilled group working well together to help students succeed.

Acting Board Chair Sanborn asked board members for their feedback and questions on the material presented.

Board member Zawawi appreciated the culture and work that goes into a school system. She appreciates the principals and teachers. Most of the information presented tonight is similar to what she heard three years ago when the new structure was presented, but she has not seen tangible, positive results. There is now turmoil in the district. She believes teachers are writing the curriculum, and with the right leadership teachers could do the work of the K-12 supervisors.

Board member Semyanko would like to see more data to prove the work of the supervisors. Board members are elected officials and have a responsibility to the children and community and how the money is expended. This discussion had been promised for months, and she was disappointed that no data was provided. Superintendent Baldwin said the administration provided data at an April Board meeting on the gender gap that clearly illustrates student success, as well as a Board meeting presentation related to full day kindergarten. Board member Semyanko said Board members have received information from teachers on the turmoil that is going on related to the supervisors, and she does not believe it will go away, and it is being handled by the Superintendent as if it never happened.

Dr. Collin said the CREC report cited the number of out-of-district placements. There were 27 outplaced students and now there are 14 outplaced students. That is a result of the hard work of all the district supervisors and the ability to provide strong programming in-district for those students. Dr. Baldwin added that Dr. Collin is responsible for the supervision of the supervisors, and he has had conversations with these supervisors on focusing on relationships and slowing certain elements of their work down. The focus is on the importance of relationships and building trust and collaboration. Board member Zawawi said she has heard all this for years, and the deliverables promised have not occurred. Teachers are frustrated. The deliverables discussed tonight are not enough to warrant the amount the district is spending on these positions.

Board member Gee said she believes that the Superintendent believes this is a best practice model. She noted that if the current structure were working perfectly there would be no reason for the review tonight and was disappointed administration did not present data supporting their advocacy for the structure. She was also disappointed the presentation did not address the data we do have articulating the challenges to the structure including: an SEA Survey of teachers presented in the spring, letters, phone calls and emails to BOE members, and the presence of staff, parents and community members at BOE meetings, all expressing concerns

around the structure. The Board should be discussing all the data surrounding the structure. It is the Board's responsibility to respond to all community members and in not doing so this does not feel like an honest discussion.

Dr. Collin said students would not be coming back into the district without the curriculum supervisors. With this new leadership structure the district has been able to save \$20,000. It also allows for principals more time to work with teachers. This is a change initiative and change does not always go smoothly.

Board member Schneider said according to Mr. Eccles' analysis of the budget impact of hiring the three supervisors, there was a \$10,000 increase over the curriculum coordinator positions, which is not a big driver in the budget. Mr. Schneider said there are many external factors at play, and it is difficult to know where cause and effect is occurring. There is a lot of information in the community and it is difficult to know what is true. He is having difficulty making the connection that the supervisor positions are what is wrong in the district. He stated he believed there is a silent group of people that feel the opposite of those who have come to the Board meetings. The Superintendent has said she has not received any complaints from principals, teachers, or parents. Dr. Baldwin acknowledged there has been a lack of relationship building with teachers and she is working on strengthening that as laid out in the district's professional climate improvement plan.

Board member Roy said it has been noted that there is tremendous turnover in the district, but in fact the data is fairly typical. We have not given the structure enough time to mature. The administration knows what needs to be done to improve; they need the supervisors to carry out the work. The curriculum coordinators were not working. Curriculum work was the same for 20 years, and the district had silos and teachers in classrooms working by themselves. This structure has required change and some are resistant to change because it is difficult. More time is needed to build relationships and focus on collaboration. Teachers came when we made change in evaluations which is not unusual. It is a national problem. She cited a national poll on education, and the issues were the same as to what Suffield is experiencing. The survey mirrored the SEA survey. There is a plan to solve problems in place and the Board needs to support it.

Board member D'Ostuni asked what is the downside of the current leadership structure. The Superintendent said the challenges of the structure are collaborating across all levels and across all schools, maintaining a focus on priorities when there is so much going on, and how to address the content areas not represented by supervisors, such as social studies, world language, and fine arts. Another challenge is making sure we are aligned with the vision, mission, and goals of the district. Board member D'Ostuni asked what other districts have Suffield's structure, and why did the administration choose this structure. Dr. Baldwin said the three content area coordinators existed in the old structure, but the work was not getting accomplished. The positions needed to have content expertise which was not present and the ability for people to make decisions in those positions. Southington and Bristol have a similar leadership structure. Dr. Baldwin added that Wethersfield had the structure but eliminated it due to budget restrictions, but they are now looking to put the leadership structure back in place. Dr. Baldwin added that this structure was put in place to address the concerns of the CREC report and of Board members. There have been challenges, but the climate

improvement plan is addressing those challenges. The administration will put out a pulse survey later this month to assess how we are doing.

Board member D'Ostuni read an excerpt from a 2009 community stakeholder report facilitated by CREC that listed three themes of an excellent schoolsystem 1) open communication between and among all stakeholder groups, 2) true shared decision-making, and 3) addresses and respects the individuality of each and every student...looking beyond the group, relating to the whole child as an individual. She said the focus on building relationships has been brought up before. Shared decision making is not occurring, and the Board and the administration appear to have different definitions on what shared governance is. She said she looked at all school districts in DRG A, B and C and noted that Suffield is administratively top heavy compared to other districts both in ratio to students and teachers. She said that is alright if it is the right direction for Suffield to meet students' needs. The Board agreed to the new leadership structure because the culture needed to be changed to one of mutual respect, collaboration, but she does not feel that has happened. She would like a structure to be in place for curriculum and instruction. In three years, curriculum has not come to the Board for approval. She said the policy is very cumbersome but it should still be followed until a new policy is approved. A discussion on Common Core also needs to happen. The Board needs to establish goals to provide direction. What she has heard tonight does not align with what she is hearing in the community. She does not believe the administration has had a pulse on what is going on in the community. However, she did acknowledge the new principals in place are helping in knowing the pulse of the community.

Board member Beiter thanked everyone for attending the meeting and said it is a tough conversation. He was struggling to see any change from where the district was a couple years. He also disagrees with budget numbers, and it is the Board's responsibility to the community and students and their families to look at the budget impacts carefully. These positions have a significant impact on budget. He said there was a lot of curriculum development being done before the creation of the supervisor positions, and he sees no tangible evidence of how it has changed. He said the administration and teachers need to meet to resolve their issues.

Acting Board Chair Sanborn said she was in agreement with board member D'Ostuni stating she had also surveyed the curriculum structure in other districts and was unable to find a structure like the one put we had in place in Suffield. She continued that structure has been in place long enough to have data to substantiate the deliverables. She agreed with Board member Roy that there are growing pains during change. The Board needs to begin by conducting a self-evaluation which is scheduled for September 15th to determine the Board's goals and objectives, and what monitoring reports they want to aid in appropriate decision making.

Board member Gee asked what are the next steps and what are the expectations as a result of tonight's meeting. Acting Board Chair Sanborn said work needs to begin at the subcommittee level, specifically Budget, Policy, and Programs and Services. The Board needs to start with the self-evaluation and identify goals and objectives. Board member D'Ostuni would like the administration to provide different structures for the Boards' review. Board member Zawawi asked about recording of Board meetings. The ad-hoc committee has not yet met to discuss that issue. Board member Semyanko said she felt the posting of the science supervisor

position was premature. Board member Gee said posting of a position before the Board approves the job description is against policy. Dr. Baldwin said the position was already approved. Board member D'Ostuni said the policy (she thought it was #2151) states the Board has to approve any administrative job description each time there is a vacancy. The policy only applies to administrator positions. She stated that the rationale for the policy was to review the responsibilities when someone leaves to see if there is a better way to meet the needs of the students and district. She suggested revisiting that policy. Acting Board Chair Sanborn said that policy will be put on Policy's future agenda, but the policy should be followed for administrative positions.

Adjournment

Roy moved, Beiter seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:12 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the next meeting on September 16, 2014

Respectfully submitted,

Lori D'Ostuni
Secretary

Z:\Laura\BOE\2014\09 - September 8 - Special Meeting\Minutes -08 SEP 2014.docx