

Board of Education Meeting
November 18, 2013

Call to Order

Board Member Lori D'Ostuni called the meeting to order at 6:40 p.m. in the Suffield High School Media Center. Present: Board members Lori D'Ostuni, Mary Lou Sanborn, Mary Roy, Scott Schneider, George Beiter, Michelle Zawawi, Natalie Semyanko and Jeanne Gee, Superintendent of Schools, Karen Baldwin; Assistant Superintendent, Jim Collin; Interim Business Manager, Phil Russell and observers.

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment

None

Recognition

Vice Chair Sanborn welcomed newest member, Natalie Semyanko to the Board. Board member Semyanko said she is looking forward to working with the Board.

Suffield High School Student Representative

Suffield High School student, Ben Gee, updated the Board on recent events at Suffield High School:

- Fall sports has ended: The boys' soccer team won the Class M State championship for the 3rd consecutive year, the girls' soccer team played well but lost in the final game of the Class LL State championship, the field hockey team went to the State championship, the cross country girls' team placed second in the State. Patrick Begley placed 16th in the boys' cross country New England Open.
- "Names Can Really Hurt Us" assembly put on by the Anti-Defamation League was held on November 5.
- Spirit Night, an event that brings all the grades together, was well attended.
- Unified Theater has begun.
- Student Leadership Activities: Halloween dance was hosted by NHS; Toys for Tots with a possible end-of-fundraiser dance to be hosted by NHS, Field trips of Model United Nations and Spanish field trip to NYC.

Board member Roy asked Ben what has been the feedback from students after the "Names Can Really Hurt Us" assembly. Ben said students said they were surprised at the quality of the program and were emotionally touched by the stories shared by their peers.

Communications

The Superintendent received an email on Friday from the Town Finance Director, Deborah Cerrato, on behalf of Board of Finance member Justin Donnelly to schedule a tri-board meeting in January. The Superintendent provided two possible dates to meet but has not received a response.

Approval of Minutes

Gee moved, Roy seconded to approve the minutes of the November 6, 2013 Board of Education meeting amended as follows:

- On the second page under the Blum Shapiro Report, add the following sentences before the fourth to last sentence: “Board member Beiter inquired whether Mr. Ziplow will provide a written report relative to the Business Manager vacancy and the results of the shared service study. A report is to be provided by Blum Shapiro.”
- On the second page under the Blum Shapiro Report, amend the last sentence to read: “Chair Eccles stated the importance of the board taking affirmative action on maintaining the Business Manager position independent of the Town, so that all potential candidates are fully informed of the status and apply with confidence.”
- On the third page under Reading Overview K-12 amend the second sentence to read: “The Chair asked about communication with parents for those students who are receiving intervention in Tier 2 and are being monitored through the new Individual Student Success Plans.

The motion passed with two abstentions (Beiter and Zawawi).

Consent Agenda

None

Discussion/Action Items

- Status of District Implementation of 2011 Blum Shapiro Findings
The Superintendent introduced Diane Raymo, Educational Business Consultant, who summarized the 2011 Blum Shapiro findings and recommendations for the district’s business operations, technology and personnel. Ms. Raymo reviewed her observations and updated the Board on what has already been implemented by the district in response to the findings and recommendations as well as suggest next step to improve the efficiency and checks and balance already in place. Ms. Raymo explained many of the recommendations have been implemented and the next step is for the Board to write business operations policies. Board member Sanborn asked how that process would begin. Ms. Raymo said it should be led by the Business Manager working with CABE and in consultation with the Board. Ms. Raymo reviewed the features and capabilities of MUNIS. She noted the ESS software system does not meet the Connecticut Wage and Hour Regulations for non-exempt employees and therefore paper timesheets would need to be used to be in compliance. Board member D’Ostuni asked if the information for non-exempt employees required by the regulations is available from the time the ESS system was established until now. Ms. Raymo answered those documents do not exist for that time period.

Board member Schneider asked if an administrator would be hired to handle data management. The Superintendent said an administrator is not necessary but are looking at hiring a data specialist/application support specialist. This is not an addition but an open position in the technology department. Board member Schneider asked what would the job functions be for that position. The Superintendent said the district is working on developing the systemic infrastructure to use data and specific job functions not yet defined. Board member D’Ostuni, referring to page 13 and 14 of Ms. Raymo’s report, asked if the recommendation is to have the Business Manager also serve as the HR

Manager. Ms. Raymo said the recommendation is for the Business Manager to oversee the HR Manager position. Ms. Raymo concluded by reiterating that much work has already been implemented, and instituting policies and procedures will address the outstanding findings. The Superintendent stated the work is advancing and will continue and priorities will be established to drive the work. Board member Roy commended Ms. Raymo for her work. The Board thanked Ms. Raymo.

- Review of October 2013 Financial Report

The Superintendent stated good progress has been made in closing the deficit and pointed out the different format in the reporting of grants. Phil Russell, Interim Business Manager, said positive gains have been made in six areas: benefits, salaries, transportation, food service, substitute services, and electricity. The Superintendent stated there is evidence of volatility in budget work. There are unexpected expenses; for example, a workman's compensation claim has recently been filed and an expense for a nurse for a student has recently been added, which in a tighter budget environment, make these expenses more significant. Board member Gee stated that in a constricted budget environment the perception may be that needed materials for classroom instruction are not being provided. The Superintendent stated the district provides materials and professional learning to all schools as needed. Board member Beiter inquired as to why the adjusted budget in salaries is equal to the budget this month but the adjusted budget in salaries last month was lower than the budget. Mr. Russell explained that the September Financial Report included transfers (not approved by the BOE) as there was a misinterpretation of the re-aligned budget and the approval of transfers. There has been no other shifting of funds in the operating budget. Mr. Beiter asked if food service would be able to pay for the full cost of benefits this year. The Superintendent explained that the administration is monitoring the budget and that it is possible benefits may compound the existing Food Service deficit. The Superintendent said negotiations are currently being conducted with the Food Services group. There is a meeting scheduled with Sodexo next Monday.

- Presentation of Grade 6-12 National School Climate Inventory Results (Nov. 2012)

Suffield Middle School Principal, John Warrington, presented the results of the school climate survey at the middle school. From the results, a committee was formed, goals selected and action steps created to achieve those goals. Specific data points were established to evaluate the program. In the area of Student Success Plans, students will meet with their guidance counselors to go over their goals. Board member Sanborn asked if a timeline was in place for the guidance department staff to meet with students. Mr. Warrington said guidance will meet with all students by the end of the year. All students have finished their SSP goals and are in Naviance for parents to view. Board member Gee inquired as to whether parents have been made aware that their students' profiles are in Naviance and have been instructed on how to use Naviance. Mr. Warrington said a roll-out program was instituted during Open House this year, but they have not reached out to parents since then. Board member Sanborn added upcoming parent/teacher conferences would be a good opportunity to share this information with parents. Board member D'Ostuni asked how the partnering with parents was being changed. Mr. Warrington said they were improving upon what was in place and having a parent representative on the school climate committee has helped. Board member D'Ostuni suggested having students on the committee as well. Mr. Warrington added

overall the Middle School is being more responsive to parents and following up when there are issues.

Board member Gee asked if discipline records have revealed any trends. Mr. Warrington said negative behavior usually happens in large unstructured settings such as the cafeteria and tends to be more unintentional than intentional. Board member Schneider asked what the distinction was between intentional and unintentional behavior. Mr. Warrington said students do not always understand their words or behaviors are hurtful. Board member D'Ostuni asked if the advisory program uses a curriculum. Mr. Warrington answered in the affirmative. The Superintendent stated the advisory program will be reviewed as part of the Middle School Continuous Improvement program.

Suffield High School Principal, Donna Hayward, presented the process and results of evaluating the school climate at the high school. Data was reviewed by various groups in the school and a committee was formed, who developed goals specific to two data points; social and civic learning and social and emotional security. Board member Gee inquired whether there were any trends in the data. Ms. Hayward said there was a dip in 10th graders in positive responses. Board member Schneider asked how will the “silent majority” be reached. Ms. Hayward provided an example of how the Names assembly targets that population. Ms. Hayward added that guidance focus groups were formed to ensure cross-sections of student groups were represented. Action steps were established to achieve the goals. Board member Schneider asked why there was such a disparity between faculty responses to the survey and student and parent responses. Ms. Hayward said the committee is continuing to evaluate the data to inform the action steps with parents, students and staff. Board member Beiter thanked Ms. Hayward and was glad to hear a cross-section of all students was being represented to improve the school climate and to guide students. The Superintendent thanked both principals for their presentations.

- Report of Spring 2013 SHS ACT/SAT/AP Test Results

Ms. Hayward presented the results of the spring 2013 college preparatory tests. These tests are good predictors of college readiness. Kim Loveland, Supervisor of Mathematics, reviewed mathematics courses included in the Common Core, ACT, SAT and AP comparison chart. Sophia Gintoff, Supervisor of English Language Arts, reviewed English Language Arts concepts included in the Common Core, ACT, SAT and AP comparison chart. Ms. Hayward summarized the different tests and noted SAT performance has been relatively flat over the last five years. Board member Schneider asked if the shift to the Common Core will impact those scores. Ms. Hayward said the Common Core should impact everything. Board member Schneider asked if the SAT format will change due to the Common Core. The Assistant Superintendent said there is a more robust writing component on the SAT's which reflect the Common Core standards. Board member Gee asked which students are taking the ACT and SAT tests. Ms. Hayward said all juniors and seniors are encouraged to take both tests. Ms. Hayward reviewed the AP enrollment and performance data. Enrollment has increased to 388 students in 2013/2014 compared to 320 students in 2012/2013. Ninety-two percent of all tests taken resulted in a score of three or higher. Board member Roy noted global scores were significantly lower than Suffield students' scores.

Ms. Gintoff reviewed the current landscape in English Language Arts. She pointed out the gender gap results on the SAT and ACT exams with girls outscoring boys in reading and writing on the SAT's and English and reading on the ACT's. There are more girls enrolled in these classes than boys and initiatives are in place to address this issue. Ms. Gintoff highlighted that teachers are monitoring gender gap results throughout the year as part of the evaluation process, and more choices in reading material are being added to attract more students to these classes. The UConn English Honors 4 course has also been separated from the AP Literature class this year.

Ms. Loveland reviewed the current landscape in Mathematics. She noted enrollment in AP Statistics has declined since 2011 but enrollment in AP Calculus courses has increased. There has also been a steady increase in test scores. The action steps are to increase participation through promoting these courses and providing students with support systems and to strengthen teaching and learning. Secretary D'Ostuni asked if more teachers will be added if the amount of students enrolling in AP classes increases. Ms. Loveland said yes, if enrollment supports the need for more teachers.

Board member Gee asked if there is support to students in lower math levels and if the data is being evaluated to ensure it is aligned to cover content. The Assistant Superintendent said this review is underway as well as work to strengthen oversight of the course-drop process and collect data regarding the course drops by students. Board member Zawawi said the administration should be cognizant of how many students they are enrolling in these classes. Board member Sanborn asked who formulates the assessments for AP classes. Ms. Gintoff said teachers collaborate with one another in designing the assessments. Board member Gee asked if ACT data has been analyzed related to science. Suffield High School Interim Assistant Principal, Matt Wlodarczyk, said analysis has begun this year, but there is a great amount of content to review. Board member Gee asked if administrators receive SAT subject data. Administration confirmed that the subject test data is received in the district.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
 - State School Security Grant – District Award – The Superintendent said the district requested a \$1.3 million grant for security upgrades. The State awarded the Suffield School District \$642,216 and approximately \$660,000 in a local match. No written communication from the State or how to proceed has been received, it is unclear if State construction guidelines are applicable to this grant, and it is not known when the district will receive the money. The grant is effective as of January 1, 2013 so it is possible to recoup some of the expenditures from January through June 2013. The grant is effective through 2016. She said the facility subcommittee will meet once she has more details and guidance from the State. The Superintendent said she met with members of the Connecticut State Police Critical Infrastructure Protection Unit Monday morning. Every two years the State Police conduct a security assessment. The audit will take place in December. The Superintendent informed the Suffield Chief of Police of the meeting. Board member Gee asked if the Chief wanted to take part in the audit. The Superintendent said she spoke with him briefly and informed him of the opportunity. She anticipated that a Suffield Police Department representative would participate.

- Vacancy Process – School Business Manager – The Superintendent said the search for a new Business Manager will follow a more traditional hiring process. The process will begin in January and will be a very transparent and inclusive process. She suggested including the Town Finance Manager in the hiring process. The goal is to have a person in the position by July 1, 2014. Board member Gee suggested including a Selectman in the hiring process as well. The Superintendent said including the Town Finance Director would make sense but including a Selectman would be more symbolic than appropriate and may send the wrong message. Board member Gee did not understand how having a Selectman represented was inappropriate. If it is clearly stated to applicants that shared services was determined to not be feasible, she did not understand how having a representative of the Town would be a problem. The Superintendent said the Business Manager works for the Board and that should be made clear. Board member Schneider commented that Board member Eccles stated that including a Town representative may send mixed messages and may deter interested candidates. Board member Roy said there is a difference between the Business Manager and the HR manager position. It was determined a new Business Manager will work for the Board and the Board is evaluating whether an HR Manager can be shared between the district and the Town. Board member Beiter said he agreed with Board member Gee. He felt it was acceptable to have Town representatives involved in the process. Board member Sanborn echoed support for a Town representative. Board member D’Ostuni thought it was a good idea to have both the Town Finance Director and someone from the Town involved in the hiring process. It would be a good opportunity for candidates to be introduced to the Town and the Town to be involved in the Superintendent’s excellent hiring process.

- Chair’s Report

- None

Subcommittees Reports

- Policy – Policy #1330.2 “Pool Safety” was placed on the table for 30 days per Board policy.
- Policy – Policy #6172.6 “Online/Virtual Learning for Credit Recovery” was placed on the table for 30 days per Board policy. Board member Sanborn said the policy subcommittee did not review this policy but the administration wants to put the policy in place as soon as possible.

Future Business

- Common Core State Standards – Implementation of Smarter Balanced Assessment
- Substitute Service Budget Study and Kelly Services Data
- National Honor Society – November-December 2013
- Gender Gap Writing/SRBI
- PALS Program – 2013/2014 student data and parent survey results – June 2014
- Learning Management System status – December 2013
- Educator Evaluation Plan Implementation and Plan Approval
- School Goals – School Improvement Plan

Adjournment

Board member Beiter moved to adjourn. Board member Gee seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori D'Ostuni
Secretary