

Board of Education Meeting
March 18, 2014

Call to Order

Board Chair, Robert Eccles, called the meeting to order at 6:28 p.m. in the Suffield Middle School Auditorium. Present: Board members Robert Eccles, Lori D'Ostuni, Jeanne Gee, Scott Schneider, George Beiter, Natalie Semyanko, Michelle Zawawi, Mary Roy, Mary Lou Sanborn; Superintendent, Karen Baldwin, Assistant Superintendent, Jim Collin, and Interim Business Manager, Phil Russell.

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment

None

Recognition

The Board of Education recognized the 2013 Suffield High School Boys Varsity Soccer Team for their undefeated season and winning the Class M Soccer Championship. Superintendent Baldwin said on behalf of the Board and the community she was thrilled to acknowledge the team's great accomplishments. Since the 2010 State tournament, the Suffield High School's boys soccer team has a record of 57 and 2; won three consecutive State championships, which has not been done in Class M in Connecticut since 1987; and the team was undefeated this season with a record of 20 and 0, which has not been done since 2003. She acknowledged Mark Beigel, head coach, noting he was a finalist last year for the National Coach of the Year award. She also acknowledged the assistant coaches, Mike Johnson and Mark Cervione, who were not present. The Superintendent presented a plaque to Coach Beigel in recognition of his accomplishments. The Superintendent and Coach Beigel presented the players present with a certificate: Thomas Bartley, Colin McFarlane, Jonathan Stryjek, Nick Santaniello, Ben Woodhouse, Derek Zarzycki, David Biederman, Brent Baskin, James Busch, Robert Della Penna, Andrew Flanagan, Colton Grob, Matt Guminiak, Jack Lydon, Julian Price, Kyle Salters, Shawn Andrade, Peter Connolly, Julian Frare, and Austin Mankouski.

Coach Beigel thanked the Superintendent and the Board for recognizing the team. He said the commitment of the coaches and players, the support of the community, the Booster Club, the soccer club in Town, and the school district itself are all an integral part of the team's success. He was grateful for the opportunity to thank the community at large for their commitment to the soccer program.

Suffield High School Student Representative

Suffield High School student, Ben Gee, updated the Board on upcoming events at the high school:

- Volleyball marathon taking place March 21-22
- The Drama Club will be performing the musical, Legally Blonde, this spring
- A safe party semi-formal is planned in the near future

- Winter sports has ended: the boys basketball team went to the semi-finals and the girls basketball team made it to the playoffs
- Spring sports will begin in the next week or two
- The Impact Club has been formed as a result of the Names assembly held last fall
- Achievements: Robotics team finished 2nd in competitions in New Hampshire, participants placed 1st, 2nd and 3rd at the science fair; and the Academic Quiz team competed in the Connecticut History Bee and qualified for the National History Bee in Washington, D.C.

Communications

Superintendent Baldwin informed Board members earlier this week of Diane Raymo's husband's death. Board member D'Ostuni had a sympathy card for members to sign after the meeting.

Approval of Minutes

Beiter moved, Gee seconded to approve the amended minutes of the March 4, 2014 Board of Education meeting as presented. All members voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #14-08: D'Ostuni moved, Gee seconded to approve the following items on the Consent Agenda:

1. Policy #1330 – for revisions based on legislative changes
2. Field Trip Request – SHS Robotics Team – Boston, MA – April 9-12, 2014

All members voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion/Action Items

- Adoption of SEED in Flexibility Options
Superintendent Baldwin said the System of Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED) is the protocol in the district and are a result of legislative changes that took place in 2012. There are two components to the approval process: (1) to acknowledge that SEED is the current educator evaluation plan the district will be using, and (2) the adoption of the flexibilities to the system. The State Board of Education (SBE) approved the flexibilities on February 6, 2014. The Superintendent said she met with the Professional Learning Committee on February 24 and the Leadership Team on March 5 and reviewed the options which provide for the reduction to one Student Learning Objective (SLO) from two SLOs, reduces the number of observations teachers receive, and excludes the use of student testing data in the educator rating. The Superintendent said supporting these options would be for the 2013-2014 school year. The State should provide further guidance for implementation in the 2014-2015 school year. A year-end report will be provided to the Board around what the district learned in implementing SEED and the flexibility options which will help guide the district's continuous improvement initiative. Board Chair Eccles said he understood the implementation of SEED is a work-in-progress. Board member Sanborn said the Policy subcommittee reported at the last meeting that this model is a baseline and will be a continuous effort to improve upon the model. Board member Zawawi asked what the model will look like for next year if these options are only being supported for the remainder of this year.

Superintendent Baldwin said the district will likely continue with the flexibility options discussed, but the Board needs to inform the State by March 30 of its intentions in regards to the adoption of SEED for 2013-2014. The Policy subcommittee will work at exploring other tools to strengthen the model to reflect the goals and objectives of Suffield Schools.

MOTION #14-09: Beiter moved to adopt SEED and the flexibility options as presented. Zawawi seconded the motion. Board member D'Ostuni said the work of the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC) for the state has "watered down" the evaluation making parts of it meaningless. She feels the district could make a better model and she does not agree with all the components of SEED. Board member Gee said she will not be voting in favor of SEED because she is concerned about a document that was not ready to be instituted. The State has already changed the model and may do so again. Board member Gee said she is looking forward to creating an evaluation model that is meaningful to Suffield. Board member Zawawi asked if the Board has to approve SEED. Superintendent Baldwin said the Board needs to inform the State what it intends to do around the flexibility guidelines. Over time the model can reflect Suffield's goals, and the capacity to develop something different continues to grow in the district. SEED is a mechanical plan and the Board can continue to have conversations on improving and customizing the model to align with the district's goals and objectives. The Superintendent said it is important for the Board to go on record and acknowledge the existence of an evaluation plan and that the current model is SEED. Board member Semyanko asked what the ramifications are if the Board does not notify the State of its intentions. The Superintendent said there are no sanctions in place, but having SEED in place in the district would help to build understanding internally. The Professional Learning Committee and Leadership Team believe the model is helpful and meaningful. Board member Beiter said much time, energy and resources have gone into implementing SEED, and while it is not an ideal model, the Board owes it to the teachers to provide clarity. The model can be changed over time. Board member Sanborn asked if the Board has to qualify that Suffield will alter the model. Board Chair Eccles said that Suffield altering the model has already been made clear and has been established on record.

Board Chair Eccles called for a vote on the adoption of SEED and the flexibility options. Schneider, Sanborn, Eccles, Beiter, Zawawi, and Roy voted in favor. Semyanko, Gee, and D'Ostuni voted against the motion. The motion passed 6 to 3.

- Approval of FY 2014-2015 BOE Budget

Board Chair Eccles said the budget process is lengthy. Work begins in the previous calendar year for staff and administration and the Budget subcommittee gets increasingly involved as the process moves into the new year. The Superintendent's budget proposal was presented to the Board at its March 4 meeting. The approved Board of Education budget must be submitted to the Town by the last Monday in March, which is March 31 this year. He said this is the last regular meeting to vote on the budget, which means the Board must recommend a fixed dollar amount to the Board of Finance. The Board will be able to present the budget to the Board of Finance on April 7, and the Board of Finance will continue to work on the entire Town budget. A public hearing will be held

on April 30 for the entire Town budget where the Board of Finance will consider public comments. The Town will vote on the budget at a Town meeting in May. Board Chair Eccles suggested making a motion to approve the budget the Superintendent presented at the last meeting and then allow for motions to amend the budget. There will be a discussion on the motion only, vote on the amendment and then move to the next motion. The proposed budget will be revised on the motions voted upon and passed. After all the motions, discussions can still occur and then a final vote can take place. Board Chair Eccles noted the budget process is continual even after the budget is adopted tonight and after the budget is final and voted upon at the Town level. He said the proposed budget presented was for a 4.77% increase over last year's budget, and since the last meeting work has been done to reduce that further.

MOTION 14-10: Roy moved that the Suffield Board of Education approve the proposed budget for fiscal year 2014-2015 in the aggregate amount of \$33,377,367 presented at the March 4, 2014 Board of Education meeting; and further move that the Board of Education recommend its budget to the Board of Finance for inclusion in the overall Town Budget for 2014-2015. Schneider seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

MOTION 14-11: Schneider moved that the current 2014-2015 budget proposal be amended by reducing the employee health benefits expense by \$320,000 in connection with several revisions to the projected expense for 2014-2015. Roy seconded the motion. Board Chair Eccles said the reasoning behind this reduction was a result of a meeting with the Town's health insurance representative. There was a mathematical error in the model that projects the expenses for next year in moving from the more expensive health insurance plan to the high deductible plan, which amounted to an overstatement of \$20,000. The \$300,000 in savings is due to the assumption that the Teamsters, the only union not on the high deductible plan, will move to that plan. There is some risk to this assumption because contract negotiations have not yet been conducted, but given that the other unions have transitioned it is a likely assumption and one the Board of Finance would want the Board to make. The Board of Finance can reserve funds as a contingency plan. Board Chair Eccles noted that the \$320,000 in savings would reduce the budget increase from 4.77% to 3.77% if adopted. Board Chair Eccles called for a vote. All members voted in favor of the amendment. The motion passed unanimously.

MOTION 14-12: Schneider moved that the current 2014-2015 budget proposal be amended by reducing the electricity expense by \$20,000 in connection with recently installed electricity capacitors. Roy seconded the motion. Board Chair Eccles said the district has seen enough savings from the capacitors installed at the high school to be comfortable projecting this savings amount. Board member Gee said she assumed efforts will continue to seek further clarification from CL&P and PowerPoint regarding electricity costs. Superintendent Baldwin said that is an accurate assumption. The reduction in the electricity expense will reduce the budget increase to 3.70%. Board Chair Eccles called for a vote. All members voted in favor of the amendment. The motion passed unanimously.

MOTION 14-13: Schneider moved that the current 2014-2015 budget proposal be amended by reducing the budget by \$80,000 in connection with a delay in the implementation of the proposed changes to the academic support model. The Budget subcommittee with the administration will identify the appropriate line items in the Operating Budget and the Grants Projection to reflect this reduction. Gee seconded the motion. Board Chair Eccles said this decision is reflective of the ongoing discussion the Board has had regarding any proposed changes to the district's academic support model. The \$80,000 line item in the grant will be designated as some other expense from the Operating Budget determined by the Budget subcommittee. Board member Beiter asked if the \$80,000 is being removed from the operating budget or the grant. Board Chair Eccles said the money is being removed from the operating budget. Board member Beiter asked what the implication was to the budget request with the \$80,000 reduction. Board Chair Eccles said the budget request would go from 3.7% to 3.46%. Board Chair Eccles called for a vote. All members voted in favor of the amendment. The motion passed unanimously.

MOTION 14-14: Schneider moved that the current 2014-2015 budget proposal be amended by reducing the budget by reducing the salary expense and/or benefits expense by \$50,000 in connection with a personnel realignment error in the original proposed budget. D'Ostuni seconded the motion. Superintendent Baldwin said a Board member identified an error in a high school reading teacher account, which is not needed for the 2014-2015 school year. The error happened during the realignment of the 2013-2014 budget. Board Chair Eccles said this reduction would adjust the budget request to 3.3%. Board Chair Eccles called for a vote. All members voted in favor of the amendment. The motion passed unanimously.

Board Chair Eccles said the impact of these four amendments will reduce the budget request to \$32,907,367, or an increase of 3.3%. The Chair asked if there were any other amendments to the proposed budget.

MOTION 14-15: Beiter moved to amend the proposed budget to \$32,493,007, or an additional reduction of \$414,360 to what has already been adjusted, resulting in a 2.0% increase request. The reductions would come from eliminating the salaries, annuities and benefits of the Math Supervisor, ELA Supervisor, and the Science Supervisor; in addition, the reduction of \$10,000 in the IT Director's salary; and the reduction of \$15,000 in the proposed Business Manager's salary. Zawawi seconded the motion.

Board member Beiter said this amendment comes after careful analysis and review of the budget and support for students and the community. Board member Beiter stated there are a lot of redundancies with the supervisor positions. Other positions are defined to assist with curriculum development, such as the department chairs at the high school. The budget needs to be fiscally responsible. Board member Sanborn said it is inappropriate to have this discussion at this point. It should have been discussed in subcommittee. There needs to be more discussion on the topic and the role of the supervisors can be discussed in conjunction with the academic support model. Board member Roy noted there had not been a great deal of curriculum change in the district

until the supervisors were hired. Steps are being made with the supervisors to improve the district. It is not an overnight fix, and Board member Roy believed the district will backslide if this amendment is approved. Board member Sanborn said if the supervisor positions are eliminated the district has no alternative in place. Board member Gee said there may have been a consensus on the Board that these positions were created with the purpose of curriculum development and teacher support, but the Board should look at these roles more carefully. There are timing issues and substantive issues to review. The education environment is changing rapidly at all levels; federal, state and local. Board member Gee said she would be in favor of discussions around academic support, implementing changes, what that looks like, and how the district uses its resources to implement the changes and engage our students.

Board member Zawawi said the bottom line is the Board needs to reduce the budget. The model was changed but we are not seeing the “biggest bang for our buck”. The community has expressed the district is too top heavy and teachers are frustrated because they are writing the curriculum. The work that is being done is not impacting the students and teachers are under more pressure. Board member Zawawi said neighboring districts are requesting much less of an increase than Suffield. Board member Sanborn disagreed. She said neighboring districts are requesting around 3%. Board member Zawawi inquired as to where else can the Board make significant cuts. She wants to improve the middle school model by improving the classroom structure, not by adding middle management. Board member Sanborn said that is a discussion for subcommittee, not during this meeting. Board Chair Eccles said it is not necessary to reduce the budget to 2%. The 3.3% increase request is higher than previous years, but it has been difficult to operate at that rate. For this discussion to come up in this setting does not allow for any proper defense of the current structure or analysis for improving it and the proposal is irresponsible.

Board Chair Eccles asked Board member Beiter what the total proposed reduction was for the amendment. Board member Beiter said the total reduction was \$414,360. Board member Zawawi said the Board has had issues presented to them with little time to evaluate them. Tonight was the only opportunity to address these issues. Board Chair Eccles disagreed. He said these positions have been in the district for some time, and these concerns could have been raised before now. He stated that the Town has a higher increase for next year.

Board member Beiter said it is not necessary to compare the district with the Town. The Board should propose a budget it believes is needed regardless of what the Town is doing. He said if positions are needed he will fight for them and vice versa. Curriculum chairs are being paid to write curriculum. Board member Sanborn asked if curriculum writing was only done by department chairs in the high school. Superintendent Baldwin answered the department chairs carry a full teaching load and only participate in curriculum writing in consultation with the supervisors. Board member Schneider said to eliminate these positions with no alternative in place is unwise, and may have long-term effects, especially when curriculum mandates are changing quickly. Board member Beiter said there are positions in place for those who develop curriculum and grants can

be used in collaboration with these teachers by bringing in a facilitator or consultant to develop meaningful curriculum. Funds can be used to accommodate this. Board Chair Eccles asked where that money would come from. Board member Beiter said there is a significant amount of money in the Choice grant that can be used for this purpose. There was one coaching position on hold that was in the Choice budget that can be used for curriculum development. Board Chair Eccles noted that amendment number 3 removed that money earmarked for the coaching position. Superintendent Baldwin directed the Board to Appendix A in the budget book to review the distribution of dollars projected in the Choice grant. Amendment 3 took \$80,000 out of the operating budget to be funded in the Choice grant as determined by the administration and Budget subcommittee. Board Chair Eccles added that \$80,000 was now taken out of the operating budget and put it in place of that one position. It is a mechanic of reducing the operating budget by \$80,000. Board member Gee said there are two separate conversations: (1) the necessity for curriculum work to be supported by budget dollars to support curriculum development; and (2) how do we implement that work. These conversations need to occur with the whole Board. Board member Beiter said he was confused about the Choice account. He asked if there were instructional coaches in the Choice grant. The Superintendent said one instructional coach was in the Choice grant and the others were in the operating budget. Board member Eccles reiterated that \$80,000 was reduced in the operating budget, but that money still has to be spent so it was added to the grants projection.

Board member Roy said the business manager position has been advertised and no quality applicants have emerged which could indicate the current salary posted is a deterrent. She said reducing the IT Director's salary is unwise. Suffield is paying the IT Director less than other districts and Suffield would inevitably lose a quality employee. Board member Beiter said arbitrarily raising those salaries at a disproportionate level will affect morale. Board member Roy said the salaries were not established arbitrarily. The subcommittee studied what these positions are paying in other towns; thoughtful work was done in the HR and Personnel subcommittee last June. Superintendent Baldwin said the subcommittee met and reviewed a market analysis for the HR assistant position, payroll/benefits coordinator, IT director, and facilities director, specifically looking at salaries and benefits. There were clearly gaps in these positions and there was a conservative bump to bridge the gap in 2013-2014. The final adjustment is being made in the 2014-2015 budget. Board member Zawawi asked if the subcommittee reported these findings to the Board. Board member Roy stated the subcommittee shared the increases with the whole Board. Board member D'Ostuni said all subcommittee reports and information need to come to the full Board and that practice is not being done consistently. She said long thoughtful discussions need to occur around improving student learning by looking at the evidence and determining how to proceed. This process needs to be done from the ground up. Teachers need to be fulfilled and supported. Board member Zawawi said it will take another three years to measure the impact of the changes. The high school has historically done well, but she has not seen the district invest resources into the schools that need help. Teachers feel frustrated. Board member Zawawi inquired as to whether programs are going to be cut because of this budget. Board member Schneider said he was concerned that if the IT director and

business manager were not paid at market value, the district would not retain quality people.

Board Chair Eccles called for a vote to the amendment. Beiter and Zawawi voted in favor of the amendment. Schneider, Sanborn, Eccles, D'Ostuni, Roy, Gee, and Semyanko voted against the amendment. The motion failed 2 to 7.

Board Chair Eccles asked if there were any other amendments to the proposed budget. Hearing no other amendments, he said he has had several conversations with Board members around the Middle School Improvement Plan and that it is a work-in-progress, specifically around world language. Board members would like to see observed and analyzed data to make sure it is implemented properly. The Board should continually look at what we are able to offer students on a continual basis.

Board Chair Eccles called for a vote to approve the proposed 2014-2015 budget with the amendments that were passed. Schneider, Sanborn, Eccles, D'Ostuni, Roy, Gee, and Semyanko voted in favor of the budget. Beiter and Zawawi voted against the budget. The motion passed 7 to 2.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
 - Update on Large Animal Facility and Fire Pump
The Superintendent said the fire pump is on its foundation and is anticipated to be fully connected by the end of March. The Permanent Building Committee (PBC) is in continual discussions with Haynes Construction regarding the roof construction. The PBC will meet this Thursday to discuss the status of the project and the administration is hopeful for a temporary Certificate of Occupancy late this spring.
 - Middle School Principal Search Process
Superintendent Baldwin said the principal search is underway. The search committee has been selected, which includes Board member Semyanko, two parents and numerous teachers from the Middle School. The first round of interviews will take place on Friday, April 4th and a committee orientation session on Thursday, April 3rd.
- Chair's Report
 - None

Subcommittees Reports

- Policy Subcommittee
Board member Sanborn said Policy #6172.3, Home-schooling, was reworked and is being put on a 30 day read.
- Regional School Calendar Report
Board member D'Ostuni said she attended the CREC Regional Calendar Committee meeting and needs input from the Board before the next committee meeting on April 1. She distributed the calendar information she received at the meeting and highlighted the topics discussed. She said she would like the Board's recommendation on what week to

hold spring vacation to accommodate a regional calendar. She said Hartford has changed to a March vacation to accommodate the SBAC schedule and East Hartford will follow next year. She said most districts have April vacation the second or third week in April. The Board indicated they were in favor of April vacation and were indifferent to which week in April it should occur.

Future Business

Board member Sanborn suggested having future agenda items presented as monitoring reports instead of presentations. Board Chair Eccles said they should be in subcommittee reports when possible. The Superintendent said the Programs and Services subcommittee will meet within the next couple of weeks to discuss several items that are on the Future Business list, and she would be in communication with Board member D'Ostuni to schedule and set an agenda. Board member D'Ostuni asked for subcommittee members to send her agenda items. Board chair Eccles corrected the statement to include all board members to send board member D'Ostuni any agenda items for the Programs and Services subcommittee meetings.

- Substitute Service Budget Study and Kelly Services Data – March 2014
- Gender Gap Writing/SRBI
- PALS Program – 2013/2014 student data and parent survey results – June 2014
- Learning Management System status – March/April 2014
- Report on technology integration and BYOT in the district
- Credit recovery – June 2014
- Presentation of Full Day Kindergarten
- Update on leveling in 6th grade
- 5th Grade Chromebook Pilot Presentation

Adjournment

Gee moved, Beiter seconded adjourn at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori D'Ostuni
Secretary