

Board of Education Meeting
April 22, 2014

Call to Order

Board Chair Eccles, called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. in the Suffield Middle School Media Center. Present: Board members Lori D'Ostuni, Scott Schneider, George Beiter, Bob Eccles, Natalie Semyanko, 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

Communications

Superintendent Baldwin said the district received a donation of a desktop computer, monitor and associated accessories from Ms. Emily Lightle. The value of the donation is \$300.00. In Board members' packets are the Superintendent's letter of recognition and appreciation and the completed form as required by Policy #3280.

Approval of Minutes

D'Ostuni moved, Roy seconded to approve the minutes of the April 1, 2014 Board of Education meeting as presented. All members voted in favor except for Board Chair Eccles, who abstained. The motion carried.

Roy moved, Semyanko seconded to approve the minutes of the April 10, 2014 Board of Education meeting as presented. Board member Beiter said he assumed the comment in the minutes that a Board member lobbied Board of Finance members to reduce the Board of Education budget was referring to him. He said he has been speaking to Board of Finance members, but to increase the Board of Education budget. Board Chair Eccles stated he did not identify the member at the last meeting, but the information came directly from a Board of Finance member. Board member Beiter said he asked the Board of Finance to increase the Board of Education's budget by \$500,000. Board Chair Eccles pointed out that was effectively arguing to reduce the Board's requested budget by more than \$500,000. Board Chair Eccles called for a vote. All members voted in favor, except Board member Beiter, who abstained. The motion carried.

Consent Agenda

None

Discussion/Action Items

- March 2014 Financial Report

Superintendent Baldwin said the administration has been doing significant work to correct the budget shortfall, as evidenced in this month's budget report. Mr. Russell said gains are being realized in health benefits. He noted an increase in legal fees which is due to current contract negotiations with two unions. Food service is showing a deficit of approximately \$15,500. The district has begun an audit of the food service program. The Superintendent said she asked Ed Arum, Business Consultant, to conduct the audit, but he

has accepted a position as an interim business manager in another district and therefore is not available. Mr. Arum has met with Mr. Russell to determine what the audit should focus on and how it should be conducted. Superintendent Baldwin said Larry Plano, Director of Facilities, will be working with Mr. Russell on the audit. She also added she will be informing Sodexo of the audit and the Business Office will be reviewing all payments and charges until the audit is completed. The administration will have more information on the scope of the audit at the next Board meeting. The Superintendent said she will provide the Board with where the district is in the audit process, steps to conduct the audit (and get assistance, if needed), and report the findings. Board member Sanborn asked if it is typical that food service workers are employed by the Board of Education in other small school districts. Mr. Russell said out of the 169 Connecticut towns, 52 school districts are run by food service companies. Board member Beiter said he thought an audit was already underway. He suggested hiring a consultant to do the work since it is a burdensome and time consuming task. He said the audit should take a historical look at why the deficit has grown so much over the years. Board Chair Eccles asked if it will be a random audit. Mr. Russell said it would begin as a random audit and then will be looked at more broadly. Board Chair Eccles suggested bringing in a consultant after the smaller, random audit is conducted. Board member D'Ostuni said she thought the district was able to track food inventory through the automated system. Mr. Russell said it tracks inventory but not how much is being spent. Board Chair Eccles stated that the tracked information could be used in the verification process to pay bills. Superintendent Baldwin said it is important to note the food subsidy of \$90,000 is more reflective of the historical past. We learned through Diane Raymo's work that three out of the first four years of Sodexo's contract, Sodexo did not pay their portion of health insurance. In essence, this deficit has been a challenge since Sodexo was hired and the deficit was underreported in the past. We now have a better sense of what is driving the deficit and the RFP will also help to address this in a variety of ways. Mr. Russell said expenses and charges should be identified each year and more clearly defined. Board member Sanborn asked the results of the RFP. Superintendent Baldwin said the RFP's were opened yesterday, and ultimately there is one bid. The bid has not been reviewed in depth yet since it was just opened yesterday. The bid will be brought to the Budget subcommittee to determine next steps. Mr. Russell said he would meet with the vendor to clarify the details of their proposal.

Superintendent Baldwin said in the Facilities subcommittee meeting conducted prior to the Board meeting, the committee discussed the status of the energy conservation grant. It was revealed during the budget process, the ACCE request to fund this grant was approved in the 2012-13 budget, but it did not get carried forward in the 2013-14 budget. As a result the Town was unable to fund its portion. The Superintendent said the Board needs to re-engage ACCE to fund the grant appropriately for the 2014-15 budget. At the Town budget meeting of April 21st, the Town stated they are not paying their portion of the grant and the district has paid approximately \$12,000 a month, but has since discontinued payment because it is the Town's portion. Board member Beiter asked how many months of the Town's portion were paid by the district. Mr. Russell said two months and funds were placed in the Choice grant for reserve. Board member Beiter asked how much was put in reserves. Superintendent Baldwin said approximately \$56,000. Board member Semyanko asked if the Board will be reimbursed the \$24,000 by the Town. The Superintendent said the Board would not be reimbursed. Board Chair

Eccles said there is a process where the Board may reclaim the money by making a claim to the Town's contingency fund, but it is very difficult. Board member Roy asked if the Town was paying the grant out of Town funds for ACCE. Board Chair Eccles said ACCE gives a list of expenditures to the Board of Finance for a given year. What gets approved at a Town meeting is for one fiscal year, but this expenditure is for multiple years. The following year ACCE omitted the fact that there was still an obligation for this fiscal year. He said in the 2014-15 ACCE plan there is money for the third installment. Board member Roy asked why funds cannot be transferred by the Town. Board Chair Eccles said the injured party would have to request money be taken out of the contingency account and it is not an easy process. Superintendent Baldwin added that the Town Finance Director said the district did not formally request the funds for fiscal year 2013-14 even though it was a three year installment. Board member Beiter said it has been stated that this issue is now in litigation, but that is not the case. This needs to be clarified for the Board of Finance. Board Chair Eccles said attorneys have been asked to look into the issue. The Superintendent said she will follow up in writing with the Town Finance Director, the Board of Finance and the First Selectman stating the Board is not paying the Town's portion as of March. Mr. Russell added the bill is being sent to the Town for reimbursement.

Board member Schneider asked for a status on the plan to close the budget deficit by June 30. Mr. Russell said since August when the deficit was about \$500,000 to \$600,000, much work has been done to almost eliminate the deficit. The Superintendent said the district is working with the State to get some money back from two sources: one is applying for excess cost reimbursement, and the other is \$72,000 in the Agricultural Science and Technology Education grant. Certain maintenance expenses for Agri-Science can be moved to the ASTE grant. The Superintendent assured the Board the budget will come in on time and without a deficit.

- Student Performance Update – Addressing the Gender Gap in Writing
Superintendent Baldwin said Dr. Collin's presentation tonight is a great example of the systemic approach to improvement in the district. Dr. Collin said the gender gap in writing, as measured by the CMTs has been significant and a concern to the administration and teaching staff. The landscape has changed dramatically at the State level resulting in revisions to Suffield's curriculum, associated instructional shifts, and a revision to Suffield's assessments. The new assessments are more robust. The CMTs required students to write a narrative not aligned with source material. The new assessments are richer in content and require students to read and view information and use that information to support an argumentative writing piece. Dr. Collin showed examples of PBAs in grades 6, 7, and 8. He noted the writing assessments challenge students beyond basic writing skills to include reading and auditory comprehension. Board member Semyanko noted the writing topic in grade 8 seemed geared towards boys' interests. She asked if students have a topic choice in the assessments. She was concerned the topic was too narrowed to favor positive outcomes for boys. Dr. Collin said PBAs are designed to appeal to both girls and boys.

Dr. Collin said that this is Sophia Gintoff's work with teachers to create curriculum, lesson plans and assessments for students. The curriculum supervisors are also working with teachers to develop SLOs as well. Board member D'Ostuni asked if the standards

and curriculum are designed to give students the how-to skills, and the assessments are the end result of the how-to skills. Dr. Collin said standards are what we are aiming for to instruct students, and the curriculum is how to get there; to engage students to meet the target. Dr. Collin displayed a slide of teachers' perception of change as it relates to the gender gap in writing and the increase in material selection available to students. Board member Semyanko noted that a lot of rich literature has been written by men, and she was concerned not as many classics are being offered to students. She was also concerned the push to reduce the gender gap may go too far resulting in a gender gap with girls performing lower than boys. Board member Schneider asked how much focus for boys is interest based versus instructional based. Dr. Collin said overall achievement is high, but the task may not have resonated with boys. A more factual based task is more engaging, perhaps for all students. Board Chair Eccles asked how much of a shift is there in the day-to-day instruction. Dr. Collin said the change is comprehensive and requires reading comprehension, analysis, organization, etc. Ms. Gintoff added that the curriculum encompasses narrative, argumentative and informative forms of writing. The former model of just narrative writing was lacking because students were only using their imagination to write. They were not required to use source materials to support their writing, which is an element that is now being added to the narrative style as well. Boys tend not to elaborate as much in their writing as girls do, so requiring source material support encourages and helps with elaboration. Ms. Gintoff added there are supports in the classroom setting to develop these skills, such as conferencing with teachers to give feedback and encourage more growth in students' writing. Board Chair Eccles asked if there may be gender scaling in the classroom. Ms. Gintoff said that is not the case, but boys may need more support in the classroom and that has resulted in seeing the gap closing at the high school level.

Dr. Collin showed a slide to teacher SLO work. He said in working with the curriculum supervisors and principals, the teacher evaluation process is directly linked to student learning. This work in writing the SLOs is deliberate to ensure they are aligned with the classroom experience and student outcomes. Dr. Collin showed a summary of SLOs in grade 6, showing alignment with trend data and goals. He displayed data in grades 6, 7 and 8 showing growth for all students from the first PBA to the second PBA. Board member Sanborn asked what the difference was between the first PBA and the second. Dr. Collin said the source material is different, but the rubric is the same. Board Chair Eccles said there are no clear patterns in the data. The Superintendent said it will be interesting to look at the data next year as compared to this year. This is the first year administering PBAs, so this is the baseline. Administration will continue to monitor and strengthen the model. The change in standards, curriculum and assessments has required hard work by all involved, but would have been almost impossible and not as effective if not for the work and direction of the curriculum supervisors that are in place.

Ms. Gintoff and Ms. Loveland are in a position to analyze what is working and to collaborate with teachers in real time. Without the work of the supervisors we would not be able to collect this data and report it to the Board. It is very difficult to address areas in need of improvement without the day-to-day contact and support from the supervisors.

Board member D'Ostuni was concerned that students do not have a choice in the PBAs. She asked if students are given choices in the classroom in terms of what they can write about. She said writing about a topic students are interested in will help develop their

skills when they are learning, so that when they do not have a choice of topic, the skill will be in place; one less thing on which to focus. Ms. Gintoff said students are given choices and there are more choices in materials than there has been in the past. The assessments reinforce the skills that are being taught in the class. Superintendent Baldwin gave Board members an example of choice in a grade 6 argumentative writing assignment. She read 10 to 12 essays this morning on topics such as iPhones being allowed in the classroom and delaying the start time of school, and their arguments were supported with appropriate sources. Board member D'Ostuni asked if students could pick which side of the argument to support. Ms. Gintoff said students always get to choose the side in argumentative writing.

Dr. Collin concluded by saying the next steps are to continue conversations about gender gap, continue adding informational texts to the curriculum and classroom libraries geared towards boys, continue assessments that focus on critical thinking and problem solving using textual evidence, and continue data analysis to reinforce and inform best practice. Alignment of the standard curriculum and assessments with student outcomes has showed really good work and a great accomplishment in just one year that has had positive results for students. Board member Beiter said in looking at the 10th grade data there are no consistent patterns. Ms. Gintoff said she looked at every class and a pattern was not evident, but looking at next year's data in relation to this year's will be more telling. Right now it is too short of a time period to determine any patterns. Superintendent Baldwin said this is tremendous work and is a snapshot of the scale of work that needs to be accomplished around curriculum development, engagement of students, and helping teachers to develop capacity with the instructional shifts. All of this hard work has been purposeful and systemic in building these structures in this change environment. She hoped the Board could see the direct line from the standards to the Suffield curriculum, to PBAs, and to the classroom. It is a work-in-progress that needs to happen in all content areas and the Board should be confident in the work and have a better understanding of what it looks like day-to-day. Superintendent Baldwin thanked Dr. Collin for the presentation and thanked Ms. Gintoff for leading this work, supporting teachers and creating the presentation. Board Chair Eccles also thanked Dr. Collin and Ms. Gintoff. Board member Sanborn said she would like to see examples of a PBA. Board member Semyanko said we should not focus on the Common Core, but on Suffield's curriculum. We do not want to create test takers. She added the report is excellent but a creativity component should be added. Dr. Collin said the workshop model allows for creativity in teaching and learning. He added the Common Core does not affect Suffield's curriculum and instruction. He stated that it is Suffield's curriculum to use differentiated instruction, the workshop model, etc. Board member D'Ostuni said while the standards may be okay for the higher grades, she was concerned that at the lower levels there are items that are not developmentally sound. Board member Roy said materials selection should not remove classics but new resources will challenge students so they may be able to develop skills like note taking in the younger grades.

- Non-renewal of long-term substitutes in the district

Superintendent Baldwin said the non-renewal of long-term substitutes in the district is a technicality that needs to be done each year. According to teacher tenure laws, any person in a teaching position for 40 days or more is considered a teacher, and therefore we want to do our due diligence. This is not performance based and that has been

expressed to these individuals. They have been encouraged to apply for these or other open positions next year.

MOTION #14-18: Schneider moved, Beiter seconded the motion to non-renew long-term substitutes Carolyn Liss, Tamela Neuwirth, Emily Persano, Kelly Colangelo, Courtney Randall, and Ethan Fortuna. All members voted in favor. The motion carried.

Board member Beiter stepped out.

- Adoption of Policy #5141.221 – Pediculosis

MOTION #14-19: Semyanko moved, Roy seconded the motion to adopt revisions to Policy #5141.221. All members voted in favor. The motion carried.

- Adoption of Policy #6172.3 – Home-schooling

MOTION #14-20: D'Ostuni moved, Semyanko seconded the motion to adopt Policy #6172.3. All members voted in favor. The motion carried.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report

- Partnering with Parents Workshop – Superintendent Baldwin said the workshop was held on April 9, 2014 and was better attended than the workshop held last fall. There were numerous presentations such as information on the LMS system, Standards Based Reporting system, and Naviance. These systems have been a positive addition to communication with parents and students. She and the staff received positive feedback from the workshop. She said the district will continue to provide these opportunities to engage and inform parents, and also to build relationships, provide for transparency and address concerns.

Board member Beiter returned.

- Middle School Principal Search Update – Superintendent Baldwin said five candidates were interviewed on April 4, and three are moving forward to the performance task round on April 25. The process is on pace to bring a candidate to the Board on May 6 and have a Middle School principal in place by July 1.
- Business Manager Search – Superintendent Baldwin distributed a hiring timeline for the business manager position. She said nine candidates have been selected for a screening interview which will occur on May 5. The Superintendent's cabinet members and the HR Assistant will conduct the screening interviews. As a result of the screening interviews, candidates will be selected to move to the first round committee interviews, tentatively scheduled for May 19. The committee will include a Board member and the Town Finance Director. Anyone interested in being on the committee should contact the Chair or Superintendent. Board member Sanborn said she would like to see more than one finalist candidate brought to the Board, which has been past practice. The Superintendent said that can be difficult and that is the reason there is a representative from the Board on the interview committee. Board Chair Eccles said when there is a clear stand-out it makes sense to only bring one candidate forward. Board member Sanborn said if we only have one candidate we have no

means of comparison. The Superintendent said if two candidates meet the standards she will bring both to the Board, but typically the performance task provides for a real variance in candidates. The process is designed to vet out the best candidate.

- Large Animal Facility and Fire Pump Update – The Superintendent said the large animal facility continues to have problems. There are three leaks in the roof. Ted Flanders, the Town Building Inspector, and Public Works officials are working with Haynes Construction to address the leaks. The fire pump is fully installed. Testing will continue through this week and a training session for staff to understand the mechanicals of the fire pump is scheduled for May 1. After that, it may be possible to obtain a temporary Certificate of Occupancy.

- Chair's Report

- Board Chair Eccles updated the Board on the Board of Finance meeting of April 21, where the Board of Finance adopted a Town budget for presentation to the Town. The first step the Board of Finance took was reducing the Board of Education budget by \$218,000, but that money was moved into the ACCE budget to fund the Chromebooks initiative of \$190,000 and the purchase of maintenance vehicles of approximately \$28,000. The second step the Board of Finance took was to reduce the remaining budget by \$350,000. Their rationale was there are too many administrators for the rate of student growth. Board Chair Eccles said he and Superintendent Baldwin shared a comparison chart showing no change in head count and provided administrator salaries year over year, which has been at a 2% increase. As a result of the cuts, the proposed budget is \$480,000, or about a 1.5% increase over last year. Board Chair Eccles said at this level the Board will not be able to pay some of its bills. He said the next steps are for the Budget subcommittee meeting to meet, which has been scheduled for April 29. At this meeting, members will need to identify \$218,000 in operating budget expenses to be funded by grants and plan for the remainder of the budget process. The Town Public Hearing is scheduled for April 30 at the high school, where the Board of Finance will present the budget as a whole to the Town and the public will have opportunity to speak to the results of the budget cut on the school district. Board Chair Eccles urged as many Board members as possible to attend the budget subcommittee meeting next week. He said this reduction in the school budget is devastating. Board member Sanborn suggested not offering a food service program in the schools. Board Chair Eccles said that is a possibility now with this budget cut. He added it needs to be communicated to the Board of Finance that they need to reconsider the cuts made to the school budget. Board member Sanborn asked if the Board of Finance was concerned about the Choice grant. Board Chair Eccles replied they questioned the number of Choice students in the district. He said the Board and administration should look at whether reducing the number of Choice students would lead to an expense decrease and alternatively look at whether increasing the number of Choice students would increase revenue. He added Choice students do not drive our expenses. Board member Sanborn asked for clarification to the handout showing administrators salaries and specifically why the supervisors were listed multiple times. Superintendent Baldwin explained that three curriculum supervisors work in all

four schools, so their salaries are broken out in all four buildings at 25%. The two Special Education supervisors work in two buildings each, so their salaries are broken out in two buildings at 50%. Board Chair Eccles said the Board of Finance is fully funding capital expenditures and debt service, the First Selectman received a 3% increase to his budget, and property taxes will be reduced by a 1/2%. If the Board of Finance instead raised taxes by a 1/2%, the Town could fund the full \$350,000.

Board member Semyanko asked how many Choice students were declared for next year and when will we know how many students the district is receiving. The Superintendent said 13 Choice students were declared and the selection process should begin soon and we should know where we stand in the next few weeks. Those 13 students are not guaranteed. Board member D'Ostuni asked if the Board of Finance vote was unanimous. Board Chair Eccles said it was a four to two vote, with Mr. Kost and Mr. Childs voting against the motion to cut the Board of Education budget. Board member Schneider added that Mr. Kost made a motion to keep the budget intact, but there was no second to his motion. Board member Sanborn inquired if the food service program was abandoned, what would be the effect on the free and reduced lunch program. Board Chair Eccles said he was not sure. Board member Roy asked how many of the 30% of students who participate in the food service program are on the free and reduced lunch program. Superintendent Baldwin said she would get that information.

Board member Beiter said the Board of Finance expressed concern over the increase in the head count of administrators and the growth in salaries each year. Board Chair Eccles said the administrators head count (FTE) has not increased in recent years, adjusting for the fact that three teaching positions were reclassified as administrators a year ago. The Superintendent gave an example of moving the former math curriculum supervisor to a vacancy in second grade. The overall 2013-2014 FTE is significantly less than the previous year. Board member Sanborn noted that the teachers' salary table shows fewer teachers but there is still an increase in salaries because of movement in the steps. She added it would be helpful in advance of the budget subcommittee meeting to have a list of known retirements this year and which positions are being filled and which ones are not. Board member Beiter said the Board of Finance is questioning the salary schedules which shows a relatively flat head count but includes a \$300,000 increase. He and the Board of Finance have asked for side-by-side comparisons of teachers in each grade and where they are and where they are going. Board Chair Eccles said the Board of Finance has not requested that information. Board member D'Ostuni said in the past the Board has received a document showing where teachers are moving to. Superintendent Baldwin said she is not in a position to provide that information since the budget process is still ongoing and no decision can be made until the budget is finalized. Board member D'Ostuni stated that in the past on one slide, that information has been part of the Superintendent's budget presentation to the Board. Board member Beiter said he has not seen budget versus actual versus a projected budget. Board Chair Eccles said if there was an information gap, that does not justify a Board member going to the Board of Finance and asking that the school budget request be cut.

Subcommittees Reports

- Policy Subcommittee: The policies included in Board members packets are on a 30 day read and are editorial changes to references to policies that no longer exist, and the dissolution of Policy #6141.323 because it is redundant. Also the directory information policy is proposed to be dissolved and a new one to reflect FERPA laws is added in its place.
- Facilities Subcommittee: Board member Beiter said the Facilities subcommittee met before this meeting and discussed the security grant status. He distributed a spreadsheet that categorized security upgrade items. The items in yellow are already completed, the items in green are the items the district will be completing and are funded in the ACCE budget, and the items in red will not be funded by the ACCE budget. The entryways are part of the unfunded items. He referred to the schematic drawings showing the new proposed double entryways for all four schools. He said the Board needs to decide if they would like to move forward with the upgrades to the schools entryways. He said the original \$1.3 million cost has been substantially reduced in working with the architects and the district will receive 52 cents on the dollar from the State. He suggested the importance of these initiatives to protect students and it should be expressed at the public hearing meeting. Board member Schneider said his impression at the Board of Finance meeting was that the Board of Finance did not see the value in the redesigning the schools' entryways. Superintendent Baldwin shared with the Board a letter she sent to CL&P requesting the ratchet rates be reduced.

Future Business

- Substitute Service Budget Study and Kelly Services Data – *placed on Budget Subcommittee Future Agenda*
- PALS Program – 2013/2014 student data and parent survey results – June 2014
- Learning Management System status & Report on technology integration and BYOT in the district
- Update on leveling in 6th grade
- 5th Grade Chromebook Pilot Presentation
- Presentation of LEO Club field trip

Adjournment

D'Ostuni moved, Roy seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori D'Ostuni
Secretary