

Board of Education Regular Meeting
April 3, 2018

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:40 p.m. in the Central Office Conference Room.

Present: Board members Kendra Wiesel, John Richter, Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, Matt Service, and Superintendent Karen Berasi

Executive Session

Susan Davis moved to go into executive session at 5:40 p.m. for the purpose of discussing a personnel matter: non-renewal of staff. Matt Service seconded the motion.

Matt Service moved to come out of executive session 5:55 p.m., Susan Davis seconded the motion. All members voted in favor.

Board Chair Wiesel called the regular meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. in the Suffield Middle School Auditorium.

Present: Board members Kendra Wiesel, George Beiter, Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, Matt Service, Debra Dudack (attended via telephone), Michael Sepko (arrived 6:14pm), John Richter, Superintendent Karen Berasi, Assistant Superintendent Brian Hendrickson and Business Manager Bill Hoff

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Recognition

Cris Cossman, World Language Teacher, showed a video of the trip to Costa Rica. She thanked the Board for approving this trip and shared some of the incredible experience the students had. Zachariah Service and Madison Gadomski, SHS students, shared their experiences and the activities in which they took part.

Suffield High School Student Representative

Zachariah Service updated the Board on happenings at Suffield High School which included, Volleyball Marathon, SHS drama production Mary Poppins, student awards and the start of spring sports. There will also be a Unified doubles tennis tournament on May 5. The prom will be on May 11 and the Academic Quiz Team has two upcoming matches.

Public Comment

Brian Carroll, 185 North Main Street, said he is in support of keeping the 7th grade ELA accelerated classes as the data does not show eliminating these classes will be beneficial to students. He believes placing students all in the same class will make it more difficult for teachers to differentiate instruction. He added there needs to be clear benchmarks and assessments.

Jen Bombard, 6 Whitfield Way, prefaced her comments by stating that she respects Mr. Pearce, Ms. Eichorn and believes the teachers and staff at the middle school are special. She is concerned for the mixed messages that are being given to parents. Pushing off accelerated

classes until the 8th grade and then expecting students to take advanced placement classes in 10th grade is not preparing students well. She asked the Board to review Board policy on how accelerated classes are structured and whether parental overrides are the right choice. Ms. Bombard asked that if the 7th grade accelerated ELA classes are eliminated, could something else be put in place for high performing students.

Suzanne Richardson-White, 824 Newgate Road, is also concerned about the elimination of accelerated classes. She asked if the classes are eliminated, how will instruction be changed to address the law relative to providing services to gifted and talented students and how will differentiation be addressed for the students who were in those classes.

Swati Patkar, 6 LaFountain Road, would like her elementary children to be challenged more. The offering of challenging programs should start in the lower grades. She said teachers need extra support to challenge students and increase student engagement.

Danel Eitel, 75 Wren Drive, said there are higher expectations for students in accelerated classes and grouping them together reduces those higher expectations. She added that conferencing is a great idea but higher performing students do not get as much time conferencing with their teachers as students who are struggling.

Amanda Tini, 1220 Blossom Street, said the proposed elimination of the 7th grade accelerated ELA classes is another example of the continual stripping down of advanced classes for students in Suffield. She presented a petition, signed by 88 parents, who are against eliminating the 7th grade accelerated ELA classes and the eliminating of advanced classes throughout all grades. She read the letter aloud and submitted it to the Board.

Mildred Guzman-Young, 19 Stoney Brook Drive, said she would like the 7th grade accelerated ELA classes to remain so that her daughter is challenged and prepared for taking honors classes in high school.

Brian Fry, 43 Wisteria Lane, said he chose to live in Suffield to take advantage of the good public school system; however, he is frustrated that his children are not being challenged in school. Many parents are experiencing the same thing and feel like he does. Students are being slowed down instead of challenged. He would like to see school system move forward and challenge students who show aptitude.

MOTION #18-34: Service moved to add an item to the Discussion/Action items relative to a Board member's resignation. Richter seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

MOTION #18-35: Service moved to hold an executive session at end of the regular meeting for the purpose of discussing a personnel issue. Mercik Davis seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

Approval of Minutes

Beiter moved, Mercik Davis seconded to approve the March 5, 2018 meeting minutes. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #18-36: By consensus the Board voted to approve the following:

- A. SHS Field Trip Request – National FFA Convention – Indianapolis, IN, Oct. 23-27, 2018
- B. SHS Field Trip Request – France/Switzerland/Germany – June 27-July 5, 2019
- C. Approval of Revisions to the following bylaws: #9000 – Role of Board and Member; #9005 – Statement of Integrity; #9010 – Limits of Authority; #9012 – Legal Responsibilities of the BOE; #9020 – Public Statements; #9040 – Board-Related Responsibilities; #9050 – Board-Superintendent Relationship

Discussion/Action Items

- Approval of Agriscience Consulting Committee Members

Laura LaFlamme, Agriscience Director, was in attendance to request that the Board appoint two new members to serve on the Suffield Regional Agriscience Consulting Committee: Angelina Minnocci and Mathew Lefcheck, both graduates of the Agriscience program. She spoke about the growth of the program over the years and the success of the program due to the staff, students, administration and the work of the consulting committee. Board member Beiter added that the success of the program is also due to the work and dedication of Ms. LaFlamme.

MOTION #18-37: Sattan moved, Beiter seconded to appoint Angelina Minnocci and Mathew Lefcheck to the Suffield Regional Agriscience Center Consulting Committee for a three year term. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

- Naming of a Facility - Proposal to Name the SHS Auditorium

SHS Students, Kristin Hansen, Nick Peroulakis, Jessica Dery, Joe Gleason and Jeff Skinner were present to request that the high school auditorium be named after a SHS teacher. They submitted over 70 letters from students, alumni, colleagues and Representative Zawistowski in support of this proposal. Board members and the Superintendent thanked the students and congratulated them on a great presentation. Ms. Berasi added that she has met with these students prior to tonight and they are always articulate, respectful, professional and considerate of the process. The Board will voted on this proposal at their May 7 meeting.

- Suffield Middle School Report on ELA Changes

Mr. Pearce provided information to the board relative to the proposal to eliminate the 7th grade accelerated ELA classes. He acknowledged the concerns of the parents who were present tonight and others with whom he has met or with whom he has spoken. One area of concern is the class is the same as the non-accelerated class; both classes use the same curricula, pacing and standards. The only difference is in the screening of students which is broad and has been impacted by overrides resulting in 36-50% of students in accelerated classes, consequently resulting in a wide range of learners in both classes. Another area of concern is in testing results. SBAC scores in 7th grade have declined over the last three years. He noted the highest level of achievement is in 6th grade where there are no accelerated classes. The last area of concern is the school climate and perception in the building. Students are most excited and positive in 6th grade and a steady decline through 8th grade. Some of that is natural; however, according to the student data from the Panorama survey, student perception of the middle school experience declines starting in 7th grade. There is a direct correlation to dividing the school into two separate schools and the decline in school climate. He also said he sees a lot of conflict among students socially. Mr. Pearce strongly believes the accelerated ELA classes are not yielding positive results and moving the non-leveled successful ELA model to 7th grade would be beneficial. He reviewed the characteristics of the instruction of 7th grade ELA classes and spoke about current research that supports this endeavor. Mr. Pearce said this is first step at looking at

the current structure and how to support and prepare students for high school. In response to Board member Service's questions relative to technology, Mr. Pearce said teachers are currently using technology to provide enrichment for students. Board members Sattan and Mercik Davis questioned the validity of using the SBAC scores as a reason that the accelerated classes are not working if the accelerated classes are in fact not accelerated. Mr. Pearce said the current course is not working regardless of the name of the course. Board member Sattan suggested fixing the accelerated classes instead of eliminating them. Mr. Pearce said those are the next steps but to continuing the current model is not beneficial and they are looking at a more formal enrichment program. He said we do not need an accelerated label to provide students with the challenge that they need. Board members asked for historical information on when the 6th and 7th grade models were instituted. Mr. Pearce said he did not know as they were in place before his tenure. Board member Mercik Davis said the survey questions were too general to pinpoint that leveling was having a negative impact on climate. She suggested more direct questions to ascertain the effects of leveling on school climate. Mr. Hendrickson said he actually noted a lot of common ground between parents and the middle school administration. He said there are two different topics being discussed: accelerated offerings and the gifted and talented program. Superintendent Berasi said tonight was important for Mr. Pearce to present the information and for parents to share why they are concerned and agrees with Mr. Hendrickson's comment that there are more commonalities among administration and parents. She agreed with parents that all students should be challenged and the district is raising expectations for not only students but for teachers by providing the professional development that they need. Board member Beiter thanked Mr. Pearce for his courage in presenting this information to the Board in light of great parental opposition, and he was confident in Mr. Pearce's ability to lead this change. Board member Sattan said having students grouped in classes where there is similar ability or interest is motivating for students and in speaking with parents she believes that is many parents' concern. Board member Mercik Davis noted this is an operational decision, not the Board's decision, but she cautioned that clear communication and better oversight in the implementation needs to occur. Mr. Pearce noted he will be holding another forum to inform parents what challenge looks like and will ask parents to hold him accountable. The Board would like to systemically hear about how this is working across the district for all students abilities.

- Establish 2018 Graduation Date

Superintendent Berasi said there have been six snow days this year, resulting in June 19 as the last day of school. She said there are 182 school days and the Board could forgive two days for seniors allowing them to graduate on Saturday, June 16. However, she was not recommending forgiving days for the entire district.

MOTION #18-38: Beiter moved to forgive two school days for Suffield High School seniors only and establish graduation for June 16, 2018. Service seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

- District Staffing Report - Non-renewals

Superintendent Berasi said this report is given yearly to the Board. Non-renewals include long-term substitutes, permanent building substitutes and one-year assignments.

MOTION #18-39: Sattan moved to approve the non-renewal of the contracts of the above mentioned staff at the close of the 2017-2018 school year and that the Superintendent is directed to advise such persons in writing of this action. Beiter seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

- Discussion and Possible Approval of Bylaw #9030 – Commitment to Democratic Principals Relating to Board Communications and Interactions

This policy was slightly revised after being placed on a 30-day read so it was not part of the consent agenda to provide board members an opportunity to discuss the bylaw if they so wished. There was no discussion.

MOTION #18-40: Dudack moved to approve the revisions to Bylaw #9030. Beiter seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 8-0.

- February 2018 Financial Report

Mr. Hoff said the projected end of year net surplus is \$169,568. Mr. Hoff said the Board of Finance (BOF) questioned whether any surplus will be given back to the town. Mr. Hoff said once the funds are appropriated to the Board of Education, it's the Board's decision on how to spend that appropriation. He noted much of the gains in food service this month were due to the timing of receiving state grants.

- Acceptance of Resignation of Board Member

Board Chair Wiesel said Lori D'Ostuni resigned from the Board by email on Tuesday, March 27 and became effective on Wednesday, March 28. The policy states a replacement must occur no less than 14 days or greater than 30 days from the resignation. The Democratic Town Committee will make a recommendation to the Board. An interview process will be forthcoming. Board Chair Wiesel said she was sorry that Ms. D'Ostuni has resigned and noted her many years of service and contribution to the Board was immeasurable. Her historical knowledge and thoughtful approach will be missed. Board member Beiter said Ms. D'Ostuni has been a phenomenal board member. Mr. Hendrickson said the historical information Ms. D'Ostuni offered to administration was invaluable and she will be missed. Ms. Berasi thanked Ms. D'Ostuni and said she took her position very seriously. Superintendent Berasi added she will miss her sense of humor and her appreciative attitude.

Reports to the Board

Superintendent's Report

- Superintendent Berasi said she has not received the NEASC report yet but is hopeful she will have some information to report by the May board meeting.
- Ms. Berasi said the BOF meeting went quite well and they too are people who are trying to do their best for Suffield. She appreciated their inquiry and they understood that we want to provide the best possible education for our students in a fiscally responsible manner.

Board Chair's Report

- Board Chair Wiesel said the BOF will meet over the next few weeks and make recommendations to town departments relative to their budgets.
- Board Chair Wiesel said an executive session with multiple town boards to discuss the roles and responsibilities of school resource officers is tentatively scheduled for April 18.
- Board Chair Wiesel said revisions to the bylaws continue and she reviewed possible changes to the current subcommittee structure.

Business Manager's Report

- The town and school district will be changing from Anthem to Cigna for employee health insurance. Mr. Hoff will be reviewing the new rates in the coming days and how the rates will impact next year's budget.

Subcommittee Report

March 19 & 21, 2018 Policy Subcommittee meetings- Policy #5123 - Promotion / Acceleration / Retention is being placed on a 30-day read. Board Chair Wiesel said Dr. Pangallo and Ms. Carpenter-Snow attended the March 19 meeting to discuss Policy #5123. The wellness committee is continuing its work on revising the district's wellness policy. Additional policy meetings are being scheduled for April and May to continue work on the bylaws and wellness policy.

Future Business

RISE program update

SADD program

Two meetings a month

Addressing Achievement/Enrichment District-wide

At 8:48 p.m. Beiter moved to go into executive session for the purpose of discussing a personnel matter. Richter seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

At 9:58 p.m. Richter moved to come out of executive session. Beiter seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

Adjournment

Beiter moved, Richter seconded to adjourn the meeting at 10:00 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of May 7, 2018.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Guerrette
Secretary Pro Tem