

**Suffield Board of Education  
Special Meeting Minutes  
July 26, 2018 at 8:00 pm  
Suffield Middle School Media Center**

Attendees: Board members Kendra Wiesel, George Beiter, Michael Sepko, Jamie Drzyzga, Debra Dudack, John Richter, Maureen Sattan (via phone) and Susan Mercik Davis (via phone). Superintendent Karen Berasi

Absent: Matthew Service

**I. Call to Order:** Board Chair Wiesel called the meeting to order at 8:07 p.m.

**II. Discussion/Action Item**

• Discussion and Possible Appointment of a Principal for Suffield Middle School

Superintendent Berasi noted the screening and interview process was thorough and thanked everyone who participated. There were a total of 40 applicants. Seven of those applicants were chosen for interviews before the hiring committee and the committee narrowed the pool down to four candidates to return for a second interview and performance task. The committee recommended two finalists to appear before the Board for another interview. The Board interviewed the two candidates tonight. Ms. Berasi stated that both candidates were very strong and that all involved in the process should be very proud of themselves.

**MOTION #19-01:** Beiter moved, Sepko seconded to hire Mr. Kenneth M. Smith as the principal of Suffield Middle School. Board member Beiter stated that he appreciated the work of the hiring committee. He was pleased to interview two outstanding, quality candidates. Board Chair Wiesel stated she felt lucky to have two highly qualified candidates come before the Board for interviews. She thanked the committee for its work in selecting the finalists and thanked both finalists. Board member Drzyzga noted that she participated on the hiring committee and stated she was impressed with the commitment and time committee members spent in making a decision.

Board Chair Wiesel called for a vote on the motion. The motion passed 8 - 0. Ms. Wiesel congratulated Mr. Smith on behalf of the Board and stated how excited the Board was to have him in Suffield as part of the middle school family. Mr. Smith thanked the Board for the opportunity and thanked the hiring committee for its work. He stated that their care and concern for the middle school was very evident. He noted that Suffield, and its middle school, is a place he wants to be. He stated that he appreciated the Board's confidence in him and that he will do his best to help the school and its students continue to grow.

***The Board took a short break to congratulate and welcome Mr. Smith. The meeting resumed at 8:19 pm.***

• Discussion and Possible Appointment of an Interim Director of Special Services

Board Chair Wiesel noted that during previous Board discussions, members requested that Superintendent Berasi ask the candidate if she would be willing to stay past the summer in the event a full-time candidate is not hired. Ms. Berasi stated the initial discussion with this candidate involved her working three days a week into early September. She stated the

candidate can work four days a week, if necessary, but that she is not able to commit to longer than the second week of September, but that could change as the timeframe draws closer. Ms. Berasi noted that interviews for the full-time position start next week.

Board member Sepko stated that his thoughts have changed from initially supporting an interim position to instead preferring to hire a consultant to work in a supporting role, due to the short time frame if a full-time candidate is hired soon. Board member Sepko noted consultants do not need Board approval. Ms. Berasi stated she would be comfortable with filling the position as a consultant instead of an interim role. She also explained the difference between the two, which includes a consultant being unable to take over mediations and negotiate, and being unable to sign documents required by the state. Berasi noted that she would participate in mediations and would review and sign all necessary paperwork prepared by the consultant. Board Chair Wiesel stated this candidate is strong and she would hate to wait on her and that she understood Board member Sepko's request to hire the position as a consultant. She also stated she felt it would be helpful for the district and Superintendent to have a consultant take on some of the existing work. Board member Dudack questioned why an interim or consultant position is needed, due to the short time frame, since we have not used one after the position opened up in the past. She also asked whether the rate of pay would be the same for a consultant and interim. Superintendent Berasi stated that in the past, not having an interim director was not in the best interests of the district, and that the district ended up paying extra for the work anyway. She explained that there is an extensive amount of work to be done to prepare for the new school year. She noted that the daily pay for a consultant would be the same as for the interim. Board member Beiter stated that if there is a lot of work to be done, that a consultant would be the best path forward, but stated it must be done in a fiscally sound way with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent monitoring hours and work performance. He also noted that he would not rush into hiring a Director because consultant work is ending, but that we must find the right candidate. Board member Mercik Davis stated that we need to find a well-qualified candidate for the full-time position that will have longevity in the district. She stated she has huge concern over being in the place of hiring the Director position again. She noted that when we are trying to be fiscally responsible and are constantly hiring, including a need for either an interim or consultant, that it gets frustrating. She stated that in the time schedule we are hoping for, the opening fits more into a consultant role. She added that candidates for the full-time position must be thoroughly vetted. She stated she is concerned the tasks needed for a consultant to perform have changed, and that duties the consultant cannot perform were previously stated to be important for this role. Ms. Berasi stated the consultant would still work on state reporting requirements, but that documents would need approval and signatures from the Superintendent, which will ensure the work is accurate. The consultant will not be able to do mediations, so Ms. Berasi will handle those, however, the consultant can read the files and provide the Superintendent with an opinion. The consultant will also handle planning for professional development and training, as well as preparation for new teacher orientation, in addition to other duties. Board member Mercik Davis stated it is hard for someone to come in for such a short period of time and do meaningful work. She stated the candidate is highly qualified, so it eases her mind. She also noted the Board should look at special education in the district and that may involve investing in an outside review, similar to how CREC conducted a review a number of years ago. She stated the district has been at a standstill with special education, so an outside review would help to move things forward. She also stated that turnover stunts growth in special education and that there are weaknesses the Board should focus more attention on. Superintendent Berasi stated that special education in

the district is not at a standstill. She noted the district has made great progress in special education in the last three years by developing programming, conducting a tremendous amount of training for teachers and paras, and implementing a survey for all special education families, which has never been done before. She noted most of the responses on those surveys have been favorable. She stated that having more presentations regarding special education to the full Board is imperative.

**MOTION #19-02:** George Beiter motioned to table the agenda item of hiring an interim Director of Special Services. Sepko seconded the motion. Board member Sepko stated that while the Superintendent does not need Board permission to hire a consultant for this role, bringing this discussion before the Board adds to the transparency surrounding the issue. Board member Dudack expressed concerns over the sudden switch, noting that the Board has gone to great lengths to ensure its input in the hiring of interim candidates, and that hiring a consultant may appear to be circumventing that process. She also stated the Board and district must take steps to hire the right full-time candidate, even if that does not happen during the initial interview process, and that having a candidate only able to stay through mid-September, as an interim or a consultant, is not ideal. Board Chair Wiesel mentioned the possibility of using a consultant was discussed that morning during a weekly call between the Board Chair, the Vice Chair and the Superintendent. It was meant to be a creative solution to what will hopefully be a short term vacancy. Board member Sattan stated she is inclined to bring someone in soon to get the work done, but expressed concerns over hiring a consultant as opposed to an interim. Board member Sepko stated that using a consultant maintains accountability for the work with the Superintendent. Board member Drzyzga stated that moving forward with a consultant appears to be the best solution to the situation we are in right now and will hopefully ensure the needed work will be done to get the school year rolling. Board Chair Wiesel stated that the Board can revisit this issue in September, depending on whether the full-time position is filled. Board member Richter stated his agreement with hiring a consultant and stated the issue can be re-addressed at any time.

Board Chair Wiesel called for a vote on the motion. Board members Wiesel, Sepko, Drzyzga, Richter, Beiter and Mercik Davis voted in favor. Board members Dudack and Sattan voted against. The motion carried 6 - 2.

Board Chair Wiesel state the Board will now hand this issue back to the Superintendent for the purpose of moving forward with a consultant and the hiring committee for the purpose of interviewing candidates for the full-time position of Director of Special Services. She also stated the work needs to get done and needs to get done well.

### **III. Adjournment**

Beiter moved, Richter seconded to adjourn the special meeting at 8:51 p.m.