

Board of Education Regular Meeting
August 6, 2018

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. in the Suffield Middle School Auditorium.

Present: Board members Kendra Wiesel, John Richter, Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, Matt Service, Michael Sepko, Debra Dudack, George Beiter, Jamie Drzyzga (via phone), and Business Manager Bill Hoff

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

MOTION #19-04: Sattan moved to add item to the agenda to appoint an Interim Superintendent. Richter seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 9-0.

MOTION #19-05: Sattan moved that the Board appoint Michelle Zawawi as Interim Superintendent of Schools, effective August 6, 2018 and continuing for such time as deemed necessary by the Board, subject to the execution of a contract by the Board Chair on behalf of the Board, and subject to the approval of the Commissioner of Education in accordance with Section 10-157 of the Connecticut General Statutes. Sepko seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 9-0.

Board Chair Wiesel said the Board wants to assure Suffield residents that the safety of our children is their foremost concern and placing Ms. Berasi on leave and appointing an interim superintendent does not indicate that the Board has reached any conclusions that the superintendent has engaged in any improper conduct. In consideration of the information received to date, and to permit the police investigation to proceed most effectively and for the district to move forward productively, the Board has determined that placing Ms. Berasi on leave is appropriate and in the best interest of the district.

Recognition

None

Public Comment

David Messenger, 123 Babbs Road, thanked the Board for their service and the decision made tonight. He noted the petition that garnered more than 500 signatures wasn't just about a criminal investigation but also about the Superintendent's performance over the last couple of years. He said Suffield Schools has been sliding for the last couple of years. The number of signatures and the turnout tonight shows the community is ready to move in the right direction.

Board Chair Wiesel noted the petition was submitted to the Board.

Debbie Ouellette, 687 East Street South, said she appreciated the work of the Board. She was concerned with the reassignment of Gina Olearczyk to the middle school and Ashley Eichorn to the high school. She said she sent an email to the Superintendent about this matter but did not receive a response. She is concerned that with new principals at each of these schools that the children will not have familiar faces or the established relationships they had last year. She felt

this decision is moving the schools backward and did not see any logical reason to switch these administrators.

Jeanine Rose, 1353 North Stone Street, said she is the 6-12 ELA Curriculum Leader and has worked for Ms. Berasi for past three years. She spoke of Ms. Berasi's strong-minded and direct approach and that she did not always agree with Ms. Berasi's decisions; however, she respected them because Superintendent Berasi has a clear sense of vision, an abundant amount of experience, and a keen understanding of educational research. She trusts that decisions are made with the best interest of children in mind. She hoped that whatever decisions are made in the coming days comes from a careful examination of the evidence and not from ill-informed comments made by a few individuals posted online. Ms. Rose pointed out the need for consistency in district leadership and shared that in the 25 years working in Suffield, she has worked for eight different superintendents. This inconsistency affects the ability to attract and retain talented leaders. She thanked the Board for their work and dedication.

Kathy Muska, 55 Brandywine Lane, thanked the Board for listening and being transparent. She agreed with Ms. Ouellette's concerns relative to moving the assistant principals at SHS and SMS and said it was a poor decision. She asked that this decision be reversed. She noted the students need stability and for the administrators to know the students.

Donna Milliken, 135 Jackson Drive, is a former employee who worked for the district for 30 years, and said she has never seen anyone ruin a school system in such a short amount of time as Ms. Berasi has done. Ms. Milliken said that Ms. Berasi was rude and vindictive. She appreciated the difficult decisions the Board has made and will have to make. She wished more people would have come to the meeting to tell their stories of working here.

Board Chair Wiesel reiterated for the public that the Board has placed Superintendent Berasi on paid administrative leave based on an ongoing investigation. She understood that there were different points of view shared tonight but wanted to be clear that the Board's decision to place Ms. Berasi on leave was specific to the investigation.

Minutes

Beiter moved, Richter seconded to approve the June 25, 2018 special meeting minutes. Board member Mercik Davis noted an error in the minutes where Board member Richter was referenced as Board Chair. All members voted in favor of approving the minutes with that correction. The motion carried 9-0.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #19-06: Service moved, Dudack seconded to approve the following on the consent agenda:

- A. SMS Field Trip Request – Quebec, Canada – May 3-6, 2019
- B. Approval of Revisions to : Bylaws #9250-Remuneration & Reimbursement; #9260-Board Member Protection; and #9270-Conflict of Interest

All members voted in favor. The motion carried 9-0.

Discussion/Action Items

- Approval of Revisions to Policy #6142.101 - Wellness Policy
- Board Chair Wiesel said the Policy and Wellness Committee has worked on revising this policy over several months. Board member Dudack added that this policy was placed on a 30-day read
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on June 25, but was not included on the consent agenda this evening because a few minor changes were made to the policy since then and she wanted to highlight those changes for the Board. She also wanted to take the opportunity to raise awareness to parents of the changes that will affect the upcoming school year. Board member Dudack noted a major change in the policy is that birthday celebrations will now be food free. She encouraged parents to read through the policy as there are other notable changes, including recommendations for physical activity enhancements. She said the Wellness Committee began meeting in February and changes were made based on state mandates. The committee will continue to meet and come up with an action plan for continuous review of the policy. She thanked the Wellness Committee for their work. Board member Mercik Davis noted there was great support by all stakeholders involved and noted the extensive amount of work done in a short amount of time. Board Chair Wiesel thanked Board member Dudack for her work.

MOTION #19-07: Dudack moved, Wiesel seconded to approve revisions to Policy #6142.101. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 9-0.

- End of Year Fiscal Status and Budget Transfers

Mr. Hoff said the year-end net surplus was \$66. At year-end \$289,082 was transferred from Open Choice to the BOE budget which was in line with the projected surplus in addition to the \$80,459 added to the 2017-18 budget from the Board of Finance. The food service deficit is higher than last year due to increase in health insurance benefits and a decline in revenue due to lower enrollment. Mr. Hoff noted the Board needs to approve the budget transfers. Board member Beiter asked what the next steps are for the food service program. Mr. Hoff stated that the district just renewed the contract with Aramark for the coming school year. Board Chair Wiesel asked if there were any plans to increase revenue. Mr. Hoff said lunch prices will not increase, but prices of snack and a la carte items may increase. He noted they are also looking at how to increase efficiencies in food preparation and staffing. Board member Service asked how Suffield's food service program compares to other districts. Mr. Hoff said some districts run a profit but most districts run a deficit like Suffield.

MOTION #19-08: Service moved, Sepko seconded to approve budget transfers as presented. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 9-0.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report - None
- Board Chair's Report
 - She thanked Ms. Zawawi for her willingness to serve as interim superintendent.
 - Ms. Wiesel attended CABA's collective bargaining workshop which was very informative and will be helpful in upcoming negotiations.
 - The Board received a communication from Mr. Migliore thanking the BOE for approving the naming of the band room after him.
 - The Policy, Finance, and Curriculum & Instruction subcommittees will all be meeting this week and next.
- Business Manager's Report - Mr. Hoff said he wanted to respond to comments being made in the community that turnover in the district is very high. He noted that the administrators who left were positive as they were promoted and took on positions with more responsibility, which speaks to the good work they did in Suffield. In referencing the retention report which was moved from this meeting to the first meeting in September, Mr. Hoff noted that a quarter of the faculty that left did so at the request of administration. He said that the district was in a better place than four years ago when he started because of Karen Berasi. She has put the systems and people in place that have led to many accomplishments. He said the staff is dedicated and he is confident they will

not be distracted by the “noise” and be ready for the start of school year and continue to do what is best for students.

Subcommittee Reports

- A. July 23, 2018 Policy Subcommittee Meeting – The following policies/bylaw/regulations are being placed on a 30-day read: P#2151 – Hiring of Administrators; B#9271 – Code of Ethics; P#4111 – Recruitment and Selection; P/R#5141.4 – Mandated Reporters; P#5113 – Attendance, Excuses, Dismissal; P#5113.2 – Truancy; P#5122.3 – Assignment to Former Home-Schooled Students to Classes; P#5123 – Promotion/Acceleration/Retention; R#5123.2 – Summer School Work for Credit Recovery; P&R#5131.911 – Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy; P#5136 – Foreign Students Attending Schools; P&R#5141.4 – Child Abuse, Neglect & Sexual Assault; P&R#5141.41 – Reports of Suspected Abuse or Neglect of Mentally Retarded Adults; P&R#5144.1 – Use of Physical Restraint/Seclusion; R#5145.5 – Sex Discrimination & Sexual Harassment (Students); and P#6145.6 – Travel and Exchange Programs.
- Board member Dudack said Policy #2121 and Bylaw #9271 had substantive changes but all other policies and regulations have small changes due to legislative updates. All changes are in red for the Board’s reference. The policies and regulations will be reviewed at a later date in totality for needed revisions. The Policy subcommittee is meeting tomorrow to continue to review the bylaws. Board Chair Wiesel thanked Board member Dudack for her preparation and organization.
- B. July 24, 2018 Curriculum & Instruction Meeting - Board member Mercik Davis said many curriculum leaders and Michelle Zawawi attended this meeting and they discussed getting input from curriculum leaders, teachers and the assistant superintendent to align the work of the committee to the district improvement plan. There was a discussion about rigor and addressing rigor, which will be the district’s and committee’s goal this year.. The work will be aligned to the mission, growth mindset and how rigor intertwines with differentiation. The committee wants engagement among all stakeholders to create a better understanding for teachers, students and the community. At the next meeting the subcommittee will be setting its goals.

Future Business

Update on communication committee

Ms. Zawawi thanked the Board for this opportunity. She said it is a difficult time for this community, but we have incredible teachers, staff, parents and community members. She is looking forward to doing the work that needs to be done and is honored to be here. Board Chair Wiesel thanked Ms. Zawawi.

Adjournment

Beiter moved, Service seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:11 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of September 4, 2018.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary