

Board of Education Special Meeting
April 22, 2019

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:08 p.m. in the Suffield Middle School Auditorium. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, John Richter, Debra Dudack, Matt Service (via phone), Michael Sepko, Jamie Drzyzga, James Mol, and Brian Fry (arrived 6:26 p.m.), Interim Superintendent Mark Winzler, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Bill Hoff

Absent: SHS Student Representatives Hannah Stack and Sarah Dubocq

Presentation

Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) representatives, Heather Levitt-Doucette and Nicole Natale presented the Special Education Stakeholder Feedback and Analysis Report to the Board. Ms. Levitt-Doucette reviewed the data collection process which included an online survey of parents of special education students and stakeholder focus groups consisting of parents, general and special education teachers and paraeducators, and administrators. There was a very high response rate to the survey; 169 respondents. Focus groups occurred simultaneously with the survey which provided context to information what was being shared through the survey. Themes from the survey that emerged were issues around PPT and IEP development, program and service provision, resources and communication. Overall, parents are satisfied with the provisions of services and programs that their child receives. However, parents are dissatisfied with lack of transparency around the IEP implementation, the limited communication around their child's progress, general education teachers are challenged to support IEP implementation, and staff are not certified or trained in specific programs or instructional approaches for specific disabilities or special needs. Ms. Natale reviewed the focus group process and the findings. She noted parent attendance was very low; only 21 parents attended. Four focus group themes included the PPT and IEP development, program and service provisions, resources and communication. Concerns of these four themes included most parents not feeling included in the PPT process, inconsistencies relative to communication of IEP goals and objectives among professionals and parents and how PPT meetings are conducted, and parents feeling undervalued. Other concerns were parents' lack of confidence that services are delivered in accordance with IEP requirements, the capacity of the district to support their child, lack of continuum of service delivery and no inclusion services, and no description or exit/entry criteria given for the ACHIEVE program. Educators noted there is ample assessment data to use in IEP development; however, there is a history of "top-down" decision making. They also expressed the need for more access to and training in Assistive Technology, and concerns over paraeducator staffing. Both special education and general education teachers stated collaboration time among them is inconsistent. All focus groups indicated that resources were lacking. Board members asked questions around the role of paraeducators and general education teachers relative to access to student IEP goals and objectives and accommodations and modifications and the inconsistencies in practice. The representatives reviewed their recommendations which included providing staff training to engage parents as team members within the PPT process, analyze paraeducators and

BCBA support, create a consistent method to communicate and document services provided to students according to their IEP, implement action plans for new programs or service delivery models in collaboration with general and special educators and administration, integrate special education staff into district-wide plans for professional learning, and establish a mission and vision for special education services and programs throughout the district to withstand changes in administration. In response to a Board member's question relative to if a full audit should be done, Ms. Natale said there is much information provided in this report for the district and Board to focus its efforts to develop action steps to improve programs and services. Board Chair Mercik Davis thanked teachers and paraeducators for participating and for giving their honest feedback.

Zawawi left at 7:32 p.m., returned 7:40 p.m.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #19-48 Sattan moved, Richter seconded to approve the following consent agenda item:

1. SHS Field Trip Request – National Robotics Competition – Detroit, MI – April 23-27, 2019

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

Discussion/Action Item

- Approval of the final design plans and project manual for the McAlister Roof Project; state project number 139-0061 RR.

Mr. Hoff said the Board previously approved the plan and education specifications and now the state requires to Board to approve the final design plans. He noted the plans go before the Permanent Building Committee next week and the project will go out to bid in May.

MOTION #19-49: Dudack moved, Mol seconded to approve the final design plans and project manual for the McAlister Roof Project; state project number 139-0061 RR. All members voted in favor except Fry, who abstained. The motion carried 8-0-1.

- Discussion of the Board of Finance's Reduction to the Board of Education's 2019-2020 Budget

Superintendent Elect Van Tassel joined the Board for this discussion. Board Chair Mercik Davis thanked the administration and Board members for their involvement in the process. She reviewed that the Board of Finance (BOF) reduced the BOE budget by approximately \$500,000. Mr. Winzler said from the Education Cost Sharing grant (ECS) and other grants the town is anticipated to receive \$900,000 in additional revenue, yet the increase from the BOF is approximately \$700,000. Mr. Winzler added as a result of the reduction Central Office administration has reviewed and identified possible areas to reduce the budget. He and Mr. Hoff reviewed the list of possible budget cuts. Mr. Hoff said the state recently released the Excess Cost Reimbursement (ECR) rate for this year, which is 75%. The district budgeted a 70% reimbursement rate. With the higher reimbursement rate and the addition of a few students placed in foster care in Suffield by DCF, the result is an additional \$175,044 in this year's budget, which can be rolled into the Open Choice fund for next year. In addition, if the district budgets ECR at a 75% reimbursement rate for next year, the district realizes another \$46,709. Therefore the \$478,119 cut to the budget by the BOF has now been reduced to \$256,366. Mr. Van Tassel noted that the state is looking at changing special education funding and the implications to districts are unknown at this time. The Board discussed the recommended reductions, which include increasing the turnover/vacancy

factor, eliminating funds for K-5 field trips, eliminating the addition of glycol for the high school heating system, reducing maintenance projects, implementing pay-to-play and parking fees, and reducing teaching positions. Mr. Winzler and Ms. Zawawi spoke about the rationale for the teaching positions recommended to be eliminated due to budget reductions.

Drzyzga left the meeting at 8:12 p.m., returned 8:16 p.m.

The Board discussed at length the various options to reduce the budget. While no Board member fully supported the implementation of pay-to-play, the alternative would be to eliminate teaching positions which would have a greater negative impact on students. Many Board members expressed frustration at having to be in the position to make these difficult decisions. Board member Dudack said that while CCSN was not on the reduction list, she felt the program should have been phased out by now and the program supported internally. Board Chair Mercik Davis agreed and said the program has not been well presented to the Board and there has been very little data given to demonstrate the program's effectiveness. The Board was in consensus that due to the dire situation the district is in, they reluctantly supported instituting pay-to-play in order to preserve teaching positions. Ultimately, the Board decided to increase the turnover/vacancy factor, eliminate funds for K-5 field trips, eliminate the addition of glycol to the high school heating system, reduce maintenance projects and implement pay-to-play (the fee structure to be determined). With these reductions coupled with the additional funds from ECR and budgeting a 75% reimbursement rate for next year, the total reductions equal approximately \$476,000. The Board and administration further discussed the impact of pay to play, the structure and possible charges. The town public hearing on the budget is Wednesday, April 24 at 7:00 p.m.

Adjournment

Dudack moved, Sepko seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:28 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of May 6, 2019.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary