

Board of Education Regular Meeting
August 19, 2019

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:10 p.m. in the Central Office Conference Room.

Present: Board members Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, John Richter, Michael Sepko, Jamie Drzyzga, Brian Fry, and Debra Dudack; Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi and Business Manager Bill Hoff

Absent: James Mol and Matt Service

Executive Session

At 6:10 p.m. Sepko moved, Richter seconded to enter into executive session for the Board of Education to discuss and review the Tentative Collective Bargaining agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the CT Health Care Associates (Nurses' Union), and the Tentative Collective Bargaining agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the UE Local 22, CILU #38 (Food Service Union). Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi and Business Manager Bill Hoff were invited to join the executive session.

The executive session ended at 6:41 p.m.

Regular Session

The regular session began in the Suffield Middle School auditorium at 6:49 p.m. and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, John Richter, Michael Sepko, Jamie Drzyzga, Brian Fry, and Debra Dudack; Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi and Business Manager Bill Hoff

Absent: James Mol and Matt Service

MOTION #20-05: Sepko moved, Fry seconded that the Board of Education amend agenda item IX. E. to become an action item with a discussion and possible action on Pay to Participate and Pay to Park as its topic. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 7-0.

Recognition

None

Public Comment

Jeff Davis, 8 Wisteria Lane, spoke against the parking fee at SHS. He said there is no cost for students to park in the high school parking lot and the parking fee was implemented to reduce the pay to participate fee. He stated the parking fee targets a small population of the students and therefore is discriminatory. There is also no reduction in the fee for students who park occasionally.

Janet Davis, 8 Wisteria Lane, said she is not the only one who is upset over the parking fee. She stated there were many residents who spoke out at the town meeting and parents feel bullied by the Board of Education's decision. She questioned the decision to increase staff while enrollment declines, yet charge students to play sports and park at the high school.

Presentations

Mr. Van Tassel said a Board workshop is scheduled in November on the Center for Children with Special Needs (CCSN), but the administration wanted to give some background information to the Board leading up to this workshop. Ms. Diana Kelley gave a historical perspective of CCSN's work in the district. The district contracted with CCSN in March 2016 to conduct a needs assessment, which consisted of program proposals and recommendations. A formal recommendation was made in June 2016 for consultative services which would develop integrated teams on programming to meet the needs of students with complex learning profiles and develop a plan to build capacity within the district. Beginning with the 2016-2017 school year, CCSN began providing staff training and consultation services through a multidisciplinary approach starting in Spaulding then moving to McAlister while building capacity in district with the goal of phasing out CCSN in the district. At the start of the 2019-2020 school year CCSN has phased out of Spaulding completely and by the end of this year will be phased out of McAlister. Next steps include Ms. Kelley attending meetings with the Central Office team and the school based teams, reviewing the criteria for students who qualify under the Achieve model, and gathering data to evaluate program effectiveness. In response to a Board member's question relative to who will be overseeing the program at Spaulding, Ms. Kelley responded the Special Education Supervisor and Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). In response to a Board member's question relative to special education staff turnover and training of new staff, Ms. Kelley said two new special education teachers have been hired at Spaulding due to resignations and they will receive training from CCSN next week. She added several paraprofessionals have been hired and received a week-long training last week. Board Chair Mercik Davis asked Board members to send specific information they would like to be shared at the November workshop. Many Board members said they are looking for key measures, criteria for measuring the effectiveness of the program, a list of accomplishments and milestones, and the original intent of the program.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
 - Mr. Van Tassel thanked Mr. Plano, the facilities department staff and the summer student workers for the work done over the summer to get the schools ready for the new school year.
 - He thanked the Town Public Works Department and Mark Cervione for their work around our district this summer, especially their oversight of the paving project at the high school.
 - Superintendent Van Tassel said he held a three-day administrative retreat last week with his leadership team. The retreat included professional development on leadership characteristic development as well as logistical planning for the upcoming school year. The team also collaborated on creating the district advancement plan which is aligned with the Board of Education goals and will also guide in developing the school advancement plans.
 - Mr. Van Tassel said all but one teaching vacancy has been filled. He noted that a school psychologist from McAlister has been moved to the middle school to fill that vacancy and the McAlister vacancy will be filled with a social worker.

- New Teacher Orientation is this Friday, August 23. All Board members are welcome to attend the breakfast at 8:00am.
- Mr. Van Tasel sent out his welcome back to school letter to families last week. The principals have sent out their welcome back letters as well.
- He updated the Board on the status of his entry plan and he is currently working on Phase II.
- Superintendent Van Tasel is looking forward to welcoming back all staff and students next week. Convocation is August 27 and all Board members are welcome to attend.
- Board Chair's Report
 - Board Chair Mercik Davis said Mr. Van Tasel is transitioning very well into district and she has heard from faculty, staff and parents that he is open, receptive and available to establish a collaborative, communicative role in a very short time. This will help in improving trust and communication in this district.
 - She said Mr. Van Tasel, Ryan Anderson, Board of Finance Chair and she will be meeting tomorrow with the goal of improving Board of Finance and Board of Education relations and information sharing.
 - Wednesday, August 28th is the Wellness Fair for employees. She encouraged Board members to attend.
- Business Manager's Report
 - Mr. Hoff added the Wellness Fair is in collaboration with the Town, and we are expecting a great turnout.
 - He said bus routes have been posted on the district website and he is currently working on bus change requests.
 - Mr. Hoff said the McAlister roof is being replaced and the major work will be done by the start of school. Some minor work will be completed after school begins.
 - Mr. Hoff said food service personnel will be back next week.

Consent Agenda

MOTION #20-06: Dudack moved, Drzyzga seconded that the Suffield Board of Education approve the consent agenda item: approval of the special meeting minutes of July 8, 2019. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 7-0.

Discussion/Action Item

- End of Year Fiscal Status and Budget Transfers

Mr. Hoff said the end of year net surplus was \$10.00. Expenses that were projected to be paid through Open Choice funds were instead paid out of the general fund. As a result, there is an additional \$212,203 in Open Choice than was projected. He reviewed the grants report and food service report. He credited Ben Gashi, Food Service Director, for his work in managing costs. Mr. Hoff noted that the food service deficit is the lowest it has been in 10 years. Mr. Hoff reviewed the budget transfers that the Board needs to approve this evening. Mr. Van Tasel noted that Mr. Hoff will be submitting the district's budget to the state by September 1.

MOTION #20-07: Sepko moved, Richter seconded to approve the budget transfers as presented by the Administration. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 7-0.
- Discussion and Possible Approval of the Proposed Suffield Education Association (SEA) Stipends

MOTION #20-08: Dudack moved to approve the SEA Stipends as presented by the Administration. Further, she moved that the Board of Education authorize that the

Superintendent and Board legal counsel to finalize a Memorandum of Understanding regarding such stipends. Drzyzga seconded the motion.

Mr. Van Tassel thanked the Board members who served on the negotiations committee as well as the administration. He explained the stipends were an outstanding item in the SEA collective bargaining agreement. The discussion and proposal tonight is relative to only the team leader stipends. The coaching and extra-curricular salary stipends cannot change until the 2020-2021 school year and a proposal will be presented to the Board in January 2020. Board member Sattan said she had strong concerns and felt it was problematic to negotiate only one third of the stipends with no contractual language that requires a decision at this time. In response to a Board member's question relative to the changes in the proposal and the expected savings, Mr. Van Tassel said discussions on this topic began last January between the administration and the union about the department chair and team leader positions. The thought was to change the stipend structure to be a more equitable distribution of stipends across the district and to have one job description; currently there are two job descriptions. In terms of savings, if approved in this current year, this proposal would save \$27,000. Board member Sattan said even with current savings, there will be financial ramifications for future years. Board member Dudack said the savings are substantial for this year and it would be responsible for the Board to approve this plan. All members voted in favor except Sattan, who voted against. The motion carried 6-1.

- Approval of the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the CT Health Care Associates (Nurses' Union)

MOTION #20-09: Dudack moved, Sepko seconded to approve the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the CT Health Care Associates as presented by the Administration. Board Chair Mercik Davis said the agreement is very fair and she commended Mr. Hoff and the subcommittee. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 7-0.

- Approval of the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Suffield Board of Education and the UE Local 22, CILU #38 (Food Service Union)

Mr. Van Tassel said in order for the Board to approve the agreement, the Union needs to ratify the agreement, which they have not had an opportunity to do so. It is anticipated the Union will ratify the agreement next week. The Board can take action on this item at its September 3 Board meeting.

MOTION #20-10: Dudack moved, Richter seconded the motion to table this item until the Union ratifies the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 7-0.

- Discussion and Possible Action on Pay to Participate and Pay to Park

Mr. Van Tassel said the Board has taken full action to implement these two initiatives, but he is bringing it back to the Board for consideration due to unanticipated savings in the budget. He reviewed the budget timeline last year and the decision process by the Board to make up the shortfall in the budget. At the time of approving the budget last spring, the Board was very conflicted and made the difficult decision to institute pay to participate and pay to park based on the projected budget at that time. Several teachers have resigned this summer and others have transferred to other positions within the district. Some of those vacancies have been filled with individuals at lower salaries, resulting in a turnover vacancy savings of \$225,000, which does not include the high school reading interventionist vacancy, which the district has been unable to fill. The \$225,000 plus the \$98,000 budgeted salary for the

reading interventionist was unanticipated and not known in April when the Board made the decision to approve the budget with instituting pay to participate and pay to park. However, with these current savings, the Board could now consider eliminating the pay to participate option. Superintendent Van Tassel noted the district has yet to collect any funds on pay to participate. Mr. Hoff added that the \$225,000 is not in addition to the \$185,000 projected in turnover savings. The savings is \$40,000 and not filling the reading interventionist position is an additional \$98,000 savings. In response to a Board members question relative to how many of the recent vacancies were due to retirements, Mr. Hoff said none; all were resignations. The Board discussed the feasibility of not only eliminating the pay to participate fees, but also the pay to park fees. In response to a Board member's question, Mr. Hoff said both fees were projected to generate just under \$60,000 and with the current savings, he was comfortable with the Board eliminating both pay to participate and pay to park. The Board also discussed the reading specialist position at the high school. The district is currently assessing the intervention model district-wide and alternate plans if the reading interventionist position is not filled. Board member Sattan said she was frustrated that other feasible options were not presented earlier. Mr. Hoff said these options were not feasible at the end of June as the turnover vacancy savings were not realized until the beginning of August.

MOTION #20-11: Sepko said that as a result of recent and unanticipated savings in certified staff and stipend positions, he moved that the Board of Education eliminate pay to participate and pay to park for the 2019-2020 school year. Dudack seconded the motion. Many Board members stated that at the time of voting for the budget last spring, the Board acted in good faith and now that there are these unanticipated savings, a decision to reverse the decision on pay to participate and pay to park would also be acting in good faith. Board Chair Mercik Davis said there is a financial crisis at the state level; costs are increasing and grant funding is decreasing. She also noted that while the unanticipated savings is good news, the fact that a big part of those savings is due to people leaving is not always good. It's important to ensure stability in the district. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 7-0.

Zawawi left at 8:15 p.m., returned at 8:17 p.m.

- Review of the 2019-2020 Board of Education Workshops
Board Chair Mercik Davis said the workshop schedule was developed with input from Board members and specifically scheduled by Mr. Van Tassel and Board Chair Mercik Davis to schedule those with budget implications earlier in the year. Board member Richter said it's important for the Board to hear not only what is going well, but also where things are not going well and how the Board can help. Board members discussed the order of the workshop topics. Board member Richter said it will be important for the Board to have a state of the State to help inform them during the budget process. Mr. Van Tassel said he will ensure the Board is apprised of the status of the State. He said it will also be helpful for the Board to hear his proposed budget in December. This will give the Board time to vet concerns and issues. By early March, we will know the State status and the Board should be more comfortable in approving a budget at that time. Superintendent Van Tassel said he will present the budget calendar to the Board at its September 3 Board meeting.
- Review of the 2018-2019 School Climate Survey Results
Ms. Zawawi said the Panorama survey was given in the spring to students, families and teachers. She reviewed the participation rates for each category of respondents and by

school. She reviewed the overall results in climate, teaching and learning and technology. She then reviewed overall results for each category by each school. She shared next steps including analyzing results and addressing issues in the school advancement plans, each school will conduct focus groups to better understand survey results, school-based survey questions will be developed and aligned to the 2019-20 district goals. Ms. Zawawi said these results will be posted on our district website.

Subcommittee Reports

- August 5, 2019 Policy Subcommittee Meeting - The following bylaws are being placed on a 30-day read: #9271 – Code of Ethics; #9325 – Meeting Conduct; and #9325.2 – Order of Business. Board member Dudack said the Code of Ethics bylaw revisions are being proposed based on the CABE bylaw. The proposed changes to the Meeting Conduct and Order of Business bylaws include adding a second public comment to the end of the agenda, adding more specific language around public comment, adding a meeting end time of 10:00 p.m., and adding a Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance Liaison reports. Board member Dudack also noted the change in procedure of administrative regulations. In the past, the Board approved administrative regulations but that is not necessary. The new procedure will be the Superintendent will present any new regulations or revisions to current regulations to the Policy subcommittee but those will not need to go to the Board for approval. She said upcoming subcommittee meetings will address policy revisions due to legislative changes and results of the CABE audit.
- August 8 & 16, 2019 Finance/Facilities & Negotiations Subcommittee Meetings – Board member Sepko thanked the subcommittee members and Mr. Hoff and Mr. Van Tassel for their hard work in the collective bargaining with the food service and nurses’ unions. A subcommittee meeting schedule has been set for the school year and agenda topics will be set in advance so committee members can feel more prepared for meetings.

Future Business

None

Adjournment

Dudack moved, Richter seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:03p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of September 3, 2019.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary