

Board of Education Meeting  
July 15, 2014

Call to Order

Board Chair Eccles, called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. in the Suffield High School Media Center. Present: Board members Lori D'Ostuni, Mary Lou Sanborn, Michelle Zawawi, George Beiter, Mary Roy, Natalie Semyanko, Bob Eccles, and Jeanne Gee; and Superintendent, Karen Baldwin, Assistant Superintendent Jim Collin, Interim Business Manager, Phil Russell, and Business Manager, Bill Hoff

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment

Mr. Joe Doering, who is running for State Representative said he was attending area board and commission meetings to better understand the issues Boards of Education and Towns are experiencing. He added that he is also a member of the East Granby Board of Education.

Communications

Superintendent Baldwin said the Board received a thank you letter from the FFA Alumni Association thanking the Board for their contribution. Dr. Baldwin said the letter was available for any member who wished to read it.

Approval of Minutes

Sanborn moved, Semyanko seconded to approve the June 9, 2014 Board of Education minutes as presented. All members voted in favor. The motion carried.

Roy moved, Semyanko seconded to approve the June 16, 2014 Board of Education minutes as presented. All members voted in favor. The motion carried.

D'Ostuni moved, Beiter seconded to approve the June 17, 2014 Board of Education minutes. Board member Gee said on page 5, the word "untypical" should be "atypical". She said that in the paragraph at the top of page 3 it should read, "Board Member Gee was concerned the BOE minutes did not fully reflect the remarks made by various speakers at board meetings, specifically Board members. There has been a notable disconnect between minutes taken by various recorders at the meetings evidenced by an increase in board members requesting revisions to minutes before approval." Board Chair Eccles called for a vote on the amendments to the minutes. All members voted in favor except for Sanborn, who abstained. The motion carried. Board Chair Eccles called for a vote to approve the June 17, 2014 Board of Education minutes as amended. All members voted in favor of the amended June 17, 2014 minutes except for Sanborn, who abstained. The motion carried.

Discussion/Action Items

- 2013-2014 SFES Grants  
The Superintendent introduced Maria Andrade, Co-chair of the Suffield Foundation for Excellent Schools (SFES), and thanked her for presenting the 2013-2014 grant awards. Dr. Baldwin said SFES is a strong and powerful advocate of Suffield Public Schools. The grant awards align well with the work going on in the district.

Ms. Andrade said the recipients have already been notified. SFES received 6 proposals, and while they could not fully fund all of them, all the proposals received some funding. Two mini grants were awarded as well. These grants represent initiatives that are outside of the normal curriculum. She said over \$30,000 was granted this past school year. Board member Gee asked about not conducting the auction last year and their future fundraising plans. Ms. Andrade said SFES chose not to conduct the auction last year because the response has been lower. They held a raffle this year and raised over \$10,000. The plan is to alternate between a raffle and an auction fundraising event every year. Board member D'Ostuni asked what are the criteria to qualify for a grant. Ms. Andrade said the proposal process is on the SFES website and is sent to all teachers each year. She said the large grants should be broad to benefit as many students as possible. The SFES is not in favor of funding the same thing year after year. Anyone within the school system can submit a grant. Dr. Baldwin added that principals reviewed the grants process with their staff as a reminder in late winter. Board Chair Eccles said these grant awards are wonderful opportunities and he appreciated SFES's support. Ms. Andrade said since SFES began over 10 years ago, they have awarded over \$500,000. The Superintendent and the Board thanked Ms. Andrade for coming to the meeting.

- PALS Grant Approval – FY 2014-2015

Superintendent Baldwin said this is a primary mental health program grant. Mr. Ferraro presented the program results in June to the Board. The total request is \$20,000 and the request is aligned with the previous year's grant request. The Board's approval is needed in order to be documented at the State by July 28, 2014.

**MOTION #14-31:** Roy moved to accept the 2014-2015 PALS Grant, D'Ostuni seconded the motion. Board member Sanborn asked if the \$20,000 was budgeted. Dr. Baldwin said the Board's contribution is \$5,444 and it is in the 2014-2015 budget. Board member Sanborn asked about a parent survey on the program. Mr. Ferraro said a parent survey was conducted, which was very positive and he presented the results to the Board at the last meeting. Board member Gee said Mr. Ferraro's presentation, in tandem with Spaulding's presentation that same night, were the best presentations she's heard since she has been on the Board. She said the information helped her to understand the program in a deep and meaningful way. Board member D'Ostuni agreed. Board member Beiter asked if the Board is voting on the grant application but not the dollar figure. Dr. Baldwin said they are one in the same, and includes appropriating \$5,444 from the budget. Board member Beiter asked when does the district get notified if the grant has been awarded. Superintendent Baldwin said the State reviews the application and gets back to us after July 28<sup>th</sup>. Board member Beiter was concerned that a Town meeting would have to be held and this would have to be discussed all over again. Board Chair Eccles said there is no need for a Town meeting for educational grants. Board Chair Eccles called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

- June 30, 2014 FY Close-out and Budget Transfers

Superintendent Baldwin introduced Bill Hoff, the new Business Manager, and welcomed him to the district. Dr. Baldwin thanked Phil Russell for all his hard work this past year in balancing the budget after beginning the year with a nearly \$600,000 deficit. She said the work necessary to achieve this was a result of teamwork and thoughtful decision making. Mr. Russell agreed with the Superintendent that it took a lot of hard work on the

administration's part to balance the budget. He said the district realized gains by instituting a hiring freeze which also positively impacted the fringe benefit account. In addition, the district saved money in transportation and received a higher excess cost reimbursement rate from the State than anticipated. He said the Board needs to make a motion to authorize the transfers so the budget matches the appropriations.

**MOTION #14-32:** Sanborn moved to approve the necessary 2013-2014 budget transfers, D'Ostuni seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Board members discussed the issue of year end spending on equipment and repairs, and misconceptions by the Town about this issue. The Superintendent and Mr. Russell explained these were expenses that were deferred until the administration was confident they could be done this year. The repairs and purchases that were made, which included snow-related equipment totaling approximately \$5,000, the repair of rooftop air conditioning unit and condenser at the high school, iPads for the preschool and Chromebooks for paraprofessionals at the high school, were items that were postponed because of the budget deficit. The snow related equipment was not related to the truck purchases and were well below the \$10,000 ACCE cap. Board members discussed improving communication during the budget process with the Town and how best to accomplish that. Board member Gee suggested a document reconciling the town approved budget with actual year-end figures received after the budget has been approved at the Town meeting. This would help account year end school district purchases with real time actual financials. Board member Beiter commended Mr. Russell on a great job and wished him well.

Board members asked about the year-end subsidy to Sodexo. Mr. Russell said the Board has budgeted \$48,000 but he anticipates it will be slightly more due to the results of the food service audit. He added that Aramark has officially started and he met with the new food service manager and regional manager last week. Bill Hoff will be meeting with them this week as well. Board member Gee asked about the money in students' accounts under Sodexo. Superintendent Baldwin said that will be the same account which is managed by NutriKids. There was discussion among Board members to improve communication with parents about lunch money accounts. The Superintendent said that issue could be discussed with the new food service company.

- **Suffield Middle School Roof Project – D Wing Approval**  
Superintendent Baldwin said the Board has approved these projects on two other occasions, but because of mislabeling of the Middle School wing where the roof project was occurring, the State requires the Board to approve the correct wing, labeled as “D” on their schematics. Dr. Baldwin explained that the district refers to the wing as the “E-Wing”, but the Town, which submitted the schematic, had it labeled as the “D-Wing”.
- 1) To reapprove the Educational Specifications for the partial roof replacement at Suffield Middle School.

**MOTION #14-33:** Beiter moved, D'Ostuni seconded - **RESOLVED, that the Suffield Board of Education reapproves the Educational Specifications for the proposed partial roof replacement project at Suffield Middle School D-**

**Wing that were originally approved by the Board on October 4, 2011, and again on October 2013.** The motion passed unanimously.

- 2) To reapprove submission of a state Building Grant to the State Department of Education for the partial roof replacement project at Suffield Middle School.

**MOTION #14-34:** Beiter moved, D'Ostuni seconded -**RESOLVED**, that the Suffield Board of Education reauthorizes the application to the Commissioner of Education for a Grant for the proposed partial roof replacement project at Suffield Middle School D-Wing that was originally approved by the Board on October 4, 2011, and again on October 2013. The motion passed unanimously.

- 3) To reappoint the existing Permanent Building Committee as the Building Committee for this project.

**MOTION #14-35:** Beiter moved, D'Ostuni seconded -**RESOLVED**, that the Suffield Board of Education requests that he existing Permanent Building Committee be reappointed as the Building Committee with regard to the proposed partial roof replacement project at Suffield Middle School D-Wing that was originally approved by the Board on October 4, 2011, and again on October 2013. The motion passed unanimously.

- 4) To request that the Suffield Board of Selectmen reauthorize the Board of Education to apply to the Commissioner of Education for a Grant and to reauthorize preparation of schematic drawings and outline specifications for the proposed partial roof replacement project at Suffield Middle School.

**MOTION #14-36:** Beiter moved, D'Ostuni seconded -**RESOLVED**, that the Suffield Board of Education requests that the Suffield Board of Selectmen reauthorize the Board of Education to apply to the Commissioner of Education and to accept or reject a grant for the partial roof replacement project at Suffield Middle School D-Wing, and that the Board of Selectmen also reauthorize at least the preparation of schematic drawings and outline specifications for said project that was originally approved by the Board on October 4, 2011, and again on October 2013. The motion passed unanimously.

- Discussion of the 2014-2015 Professional Climate Improvement Plan  
Superintendent Baldwin updated the Board on her plan to improve the professional climate in the district. In response to her meeting with the SEA climate survey committee, she issued a letter to all faculty outlining her improvement plan. The letter and outline were included in Board member's packets. She explained her plan to Board members, and she will administer a survey in the spring to gauge the effectiveness of the plan. Providing professional development that helps to unite staff members is one of the goals and that effort will begin on August 19<sup>th</sup> with a day-long professional development session at Hartford Recapture, which is a program that promotes teamwork, collaboration and problem-solving. The day will end with a debriefing on the experience, and the

experience will play a key role at convocation to send a message to all faculty and staff around change, optimism, a collective purpose, and a shared understanding of our work. She reviewed who was attending this event. Some Board members suggested asking team leaders and high school department heads to join the group as well. Dr. Baldwin said she would invite them. She added the August 19<sup>th</sup> event was the beginning of leading this effort and modeling cooperation, teamwork, and valuing different perspectives for all of our employees. Outcomes will be shared at convocation and will filter down at the building level. This will be an ongoing effort for the entire district.

Board member Gee expressed concern over the discussion the Board had over academic support and the role of supervisors during the budget process. At the meeting where the budget was approved, there was a motion to eliminate those positions, and even though the motion did not pass, there was significant interest among Board members in discussing the role of the supervisors. There were assurances made to board members these discussions would take place after the budget process concluded. After the budget was approved, parents expressed concerns that filtered out into the community, and there has been a large exodus of staff this year. Board members have received letters from parents, exiting faculty and community members expressing their concerns. She said the Board had a meeting on June 9 where there were many concerns shared on this issue with no resolution. Subsequently, the SEA's climate survey results were revealed and teachers came to the June 17 Board meeting to express their concerns. Board member Gee said the Board just discusses these issues, but no action is taken; there is no traction. Several attempts to address these issues have occurred, but it does not happen. As a Board member she feels irresponsible not coming to a resolution on these matters. Superintendent Baldwin said she has discussed with the Chair about arranging as many meetings as it takes to resolve these issues. Board Chair Eccles said he would like to set up a meeting with the Board and a facilitator to help.

Many Board members said they would like to see the Superintendent's outline for improving the professional climate have measurable data and a timeline. It was also suggested to have clearer language for better understanding. Board member Sanborn suggested periodic updates to the Board by the Superintendent. Some members also expressed an interest in meeting with the SEA school climate committee since they reached out to the Board. Board members were not in agreement on meeting with or reaching out to this group as it could impact collective bargaining. Board Chair Eccles noted that there is new leadership at the building level and the Board needs to give the administrative team time to work on the professional climate. Board member Gee said these issues need to be addressed at the Board level as well; the Board also has a responsibility in this. Superintendent Baldwin expressed her desire to resolve these issues as well since it is impacting her ability to move forward with the district's work.

#### Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
  - Suffield High School Assistant Principal Vacancies Update – Superintendent Baldwin said the process to hire two assistant principals at the high school is underway. She distributed a hiring timeline to Board members. Dr. Baldwin said an orientation for the hiring committee is taking place on Thursday afternoon.

Mr. Moccio requested that the committee be comprised of those people who served on the committee who hired him. The first round interviews will take place over two days the following week. Dr. Baldwin said the district has a very rich pool with 56 candidates applying, four of which are internal candidates. Thirteen candidates are being interviewed including the four internal candidates. The second round interviews will be Friday, August 1. She and Mr. Moccio will meet with the finalists, and she anticipates the Board interviews with finalists will take place at the August 19 meeting. Depending on the finalists' employment status the start date will be on or around September 2, 2014. She said Board member Gee and Board Chair Eccles will serve on the interview committee. Board member Zawawi said she has concerns with the same committee serving on the Assistant Principal committee. Dr. Baldwin said the committee is largely comprised of the same people but there is a change in parent representation and some teachers due to vacation schedules are unable to participate, so there will be different teachers on the committee. Board member D'Ostuni said having different teachers would have allowed new teachers to build a relationship with Mr. Moccio. Dr. Baldwin assured Board members that teachers will have that opportunity.

- Board Chair Report

Board Chair Eccles said he had a meeting with two Board of Finance members. Board member Schneider, Board member Beiter and the First Selectman were also in attendance. The meeting was a result of a conversation that took place towards the end of the budget process where the Board of Finance expressed concern over evaluating the Board of Education's budget. They wanted to better understand the drivers of expenses. The Board of Finance receives the information, but they do not have a good sense of where the budget is going. Board Chair Eccles said the Board should fully understand enrollment changes and cost drivers, and when the Board presents the budget that information should be clearly illustrated to the Town and public.

Board Chair Eccles said at the last Board meeting there was a discussion about meeting minutes. He has asked Board members Gee, D'Ostuni and Beiter to serve on an ad-hoc committee to look at minutes and recordings, and to make recommendations to the Board. Board member D'Ostuni said CASBO's listserv should be utilized to find out the format of other districts' minutes. Superintendent Baldwin said Central Office can support that work as well.

Board Chair Eccles said there was a Town meeting in late June, which included a resolution to approve certain educational grants. He said this was only the second time this type of meeting was held, the first one being last year. At that time the Board's attorney was contacted to confirm whether a town meeting is required to separately approve Board of Education grants. The Board's attorney said it is most likely not a requirement, but if it is, it would be included in the Town charter. He was surprised by the meeting this year. He said the acceptance of grants is done by Boards of Education according to State statutes. He said he will look into this further with the Board's attorney and the Superintendent.

He said relative to the portables at McAlister being used as the Town library, many parents and community members have voiced concerns about safety. He is not aware of the First Selectman's plan, but since it is school property, it would be appropriate for the Town to come to the Board for approval. Board member Gee said this issue was on the June Board of Selectman agenda, and many people were not aware of that. Board member Beiter said the portables were discussed at the Facilities subcommittee meeting prior to this meeting and it was recommended that the Board take a vote on this issue. He said there needs to be an official stance of the Board. Board Chair Eccles questioned whether the Board had enough information to take a vote at this time. The Superintendent said she has asked the Town for plans but to date has not received anything. She added Mr. Plano met with the DPW to see if there was a plan in order to make an informed decision, but was told no such plan exists. Board member Sanborn suggested moving the portables to Town property. Board member Gee questioned whether one person has the authority to move a library out of its zoned place and into another. Board Chair Eccles said he will relay this information to the First Selectman.

### Subcommittee Reports

Policy: Board member Sanborn said three policies are being placed on a 30 day read. Several Board members had concerns over terminology and the structure of the organization chart, and whether the organization chart should be a part of the policy or just a working document. It was decided that the organizational chart will go back to the Policy subcommittee for further review and revision.

HR & Personnel: Board member Roy said the PBIS job description is being placed on a 30 day read.

Facilities: Board member Beiter said the committee met before the Board meeting and discussed the CL&P status. He said the Board needs to create a heightened sense of urgency to address this issue. The committee said a letter should be written to the Public Utility Commission as well as seek support from our State senator and State representative. He also suggested consulting with the Board's attorney. Board member Gee asked if other districts are having the same experience with CL&P. Board member Beiter said he was unsure, but reaching out for assistance could help other districts if they are having a similar experience.

### Future Business

- Substitute Service Budget Study and Kelly Services Data – placed on Budget Subcommittee future agenda
- Material Selection and Curriculum Audit
- Agri-science update – courses, number of students, etc.
- School Climate and Culture
- Curriculum Audit
- Curriculum Writing Process and Engagement of Teachers
- Scope and Budget for Unit Development
- Policy Process – Curriculum Review and Adoption
- Appeals Process for Material Selection in Classrooms

Public Comment

Marie Richter, 60 Rosewood Drive, thanked the Board and administration for their work in creating a new middle school schedule. She also thanked Dr. Collin for establishing and facilitating the middle school improvement committee which included many parents. She said her concern is world language is now mandatory, resulting in a reduction in unified arts for students. She said that could result in behavior problems. She suggested asking the Unified Arts staff for input on how to remedy this situation.

Lisa Bonner, 37 Wainscott Lane, thanked Superintendent Baldwin for creating an action plan. She asked if it is public. Dr. Baldwin said she shared her plan with staff but not parents. She will post the plan on the district's website after she has received feedback from staff. She said she is concerned with teacher morale. Ms. Bonner is hoping the action plan helps and that curriculum issues should be addressed sooner than later. She suggested the district look at how many staff the district is losing as compared to other districts.

Adjournment

D'Ostuni moved, Roy seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:58 p.m.

*Minutes are subject to approval at the next meeting on August 19, 2014*

Respectfully submitted,

Lori D'Ostuni  
Secretary