

Board of Education Meeting
February 3, 2015

Call to Order

Board Chair Gee called the meeting to order at 6:39 p.m. in the A. Ward Spaulding Auditorium. Present: Board members Lori D'Ostuni, Natalie Semyanko, George Beiter (via telephone at 7:15 p.m.), Jeanne Gee, Michael Sepko, Susi Keane, John Richter, Matt Service, Michelle Zawawi (arrived 7:10 p.m.), Interim Superintendent Mel Chafetz, Assistant Superintendent, Jim Collin and Business Manager, Bill Hoff

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment

Jen Bombard, 6 Whitfield Way, thanked Dr. Chafetz for quickly recognizing the need for mathematics resources at the elementary level. She hoped the Board will support the initiative because it will make a positive impact on daily instruction. She said Dr. Chafetz spoke to 6th grade math teachers who said math coursework is needed. Teachers are using the standards based report cards, but there are few resources to support the goals. The instructors should be part of choosing the program and have a say if they would like to participate. She noted that was just her observation, but has not spoken to the 6th grade math teachers. She wanted what is best for students.

Peter Das, Marbern Drive, said he has been a substitute teacher for 15 years. In that time, the pay for substitute teachers was \$70/day. No raise in pay occurred until 2007 when the pay increased to \$85/day. A few years ago, the district started using Kelly Services to recruit substitutes. He said surrounding towns pay between \$85-\$95/day. He also noted that paraprofessionals' pay changed from \$85/day, to \$10/hr., resulting in a decrease of pay - almost minimum wage. He said these substitutes work very hard. He noticed the signs advertising for substitute teachers around Town and wondered how successful that has been. He said the \$85/day rate is probably a reason why it is difficult to get substitutes. Mr. Das asked the Board to increase the pay for substitute teachers and substitute paraprofessionals.

Sue Davis, 42 Wisteria Lane, said the Board has stated they would hold an open forum and give an update on the recent events that have occurred in the district, yet to date, no meeting has been scheduled. There has been much talk about communication and transparency at the Board level, and now the Board has a new seating configuration with their backs to the public. She reminded the Board that they represent those who elected them and should not have their backs to the public. She noted at the last meeting the Board said public comments would no longer be printed in detail, yet Board members' comments are printed in detail and the Board has the opportunity to amend the minutes. Ms. Davis said at the last meeting a Board member gave a presentation on the leadership structure in the district. She questioned the expertise of the Board member in this area. She said it is her understanding that the administration has the expertise to explain and determine the leadership structure of the school district. Ms. Davis advised the Board to look at their responsibilities as Board members, and she believed the Board is taking liberty with their roles. She also had concerns around special education in the district. She said the population of students on the autism spectrum is increasing. The district is lacking the capacity to provide special needs students with an inclusive education, as required by law. She stated Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), is the only approach that has been scientifically validated in this

population. She is concerned because the BCBA staff member has resigned. She is concerned that students in all schools and grades are not being serviced appropriately. The district was starting to make gains in paraprofessional training and with the PBIS program, but there is a lack of understanding in both general education and special education relative to the inclusion of students on the autism spectrum.

Jonathan Metcalf, 49 Cedar Crest Lane, said he was concerned that the only behavior analyst in the district has resigned. He noted that it is an opportunity to look for a new person and build the capacity of that position. He said administration should look at someone who can perform services and design services for students and training of staff. He said he was uncertain that the current 32 hour position met the specific measures on students' IEPs that involve time of the BCBA. He would like the district to increase this role beyond one full time person. This program should be a priority for the district. With autism being a common diagnosis, the district needs to develop an autism program that is inclusive and develops protocols for staff understanding so the program is supported by all.

Jeff Kew, 46 Cedar Crest Lane, said there is a public hearing scheduled by the Charter Revision Commission this Thursday at 7:00 p.m. He said the town charter is the constitution of the Town and sets the rules of town government. One of the changes to the charter proposed is that the Board of Selectmen would fill vacancies on the Board of Education. Another change proposed is to reduce the number of Board of Education members from nine to seven. He said community concerns should be brought to the public hearing.

Communications

Board Chair Gee said Windsor Marketing Group (WMG) is donating \$10,000 for social work services to be provided to Suffield High School students through June 30, 2015. Board Chair Gee expressed appreciation to Kevin Armata, CEO of WMG, for the extraordinary donation.

MOTION #15-10: Semyanko moved to accept the \$10,000 donation from WMG, D'Ostuni seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried.

Dr. Chafetz said he has served on the Juvenile Review Board for many years and has had several conversations with Mr. Armata, who also serves as a member of the Suffield Police Commission, on reaching at risk youths. Dr. Chafetz approached Mr. Armata to ask him, through his company, WMG, to support a program for social work services for at-risk high school students. Dr. Chafetz said this program would allow the district to hire Mr. Peter Black, retired Suffield Youth Services Director, to work with identified high school students and also provide some extracurricular activities. Dr. Chafetz said he met with the high school guidance department and they indicated several students who would benefit from the program. Dr. Chafetz said Mr. Armata is very excited about the opportunity and Dr. Chafetz said it was a very generous gift. Board Chair Gee asked Dr. Chafetz to update the Board in the near future when the plan was in place.

Approval of Minutes

Service moved to approve the minutes of the January 20, 2015 Board of Education meeting, Sepko seconded and all members voted in favor.

Discussion/Action Items

- PBIS Status Update
Mr. Dunn, Ms. Pryce, Ms. DeMichele, Ms. Blais, and Ms. McGinn gave an update on the PBIS program at Spaulding. Ms. McGinn, reviewed Phase I and Phase II of the program.

Ms. Pryce gave an overview of year one/Phase I, which developed school-wide and classroom expectations, developed lesson plans to teach expected behaviors, and trained all staff on the implementation of PBIS. Phase II includes creating a school-wide reinforcement system, a school-wide system to discourage inappropriate behaviors, and a school-wide PBIS brochure. Mr. Dunn said PBIS emanates from the district's theory of action coherence framework. Using data as a vehicle for examining school, classroom, and individual student progress fits into the school climate survey. The areas of focus are safety - rules and norms, safety - sense of social emotional security, and teaching and learning - social and civic learning. Ms. McGinn explained the baseline data on student behaviors, specifically how many Spaulding stars students have received in different settings and baseline data of office incident referrals. She said the team will be collecting data at the classroom level and major behaviors at the office level in the future. The team is looking at ways to provide extra support to reduce incident referrals. Teachers have been trained on individual classroom expectations. Those expectations have also been taught to students. Playground and cafeteria duty clerks have been trained, and a high frequency reinforcement system in the cafeteria has been created and established. Bus drivers have been trained in PBIS. School-wide lessons have taken place on busses, and since those lessons incident referrals have decreased dramatically. They will continue to conduct school-wide lessons three times a year. Ms. McGinn highlighted the reinforcement data during lunch, which showed the frequency of reinforcements given. High frequency reinforcements resulted in positive effects on behaviors. Ms. DeMichele explained the universal Tier I behavior screening tool. They have begun gathering baseline data. Ms. Blais highlighted the plans for year 2 and year 3 of the program. Year 2 includes full implementation of Tier I strategies, and designing and implementing Tier II strategies. Year 3 includes full implementation of Tier I and Tier II strategies, and designing and implementing Tier III strategies. Ms. McGinn, shared quotes from staff members at Spaulding sharing their observations of the positive impact the PBIS program is having on children at Spaulding. Board member D'Ostuni said she was pleased to see the information included baseline data. Board Chair Gee asked how long it took to gather the data. Ms. McGinn said the same teacher took the data for consistency purposes and the data was collected over a four week period. Board member Sepko asked for clarification on the term exclusion. Mr. Dunn stated that is part of the school climate goal, and refers to peers excluding one another in social creative play situations. The Board thanked the team for their presentation.

- Appointment of Superintendent Search Firm

MOTION #15-11: Semyanko moved to appoint Cooperative Educational Services (CES) as the superintendent search firm to help in the selection of the next Suffield Public Schools superintendent. D'Ostuni seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried.

Board member Semyanko said CES has been very responsive and is eager to work with us.

- Discussion of Math (K-5) Curriculum

Dr. Chafetz thanked Mr. Dunn for the PBIS presentation and the Board's tour of Spaulding. He said in reviewing the K-5 math curriculum under the leadership of Dr. Collin, Ms. Loveland, Mr. Dunn and Ms. Carpenter, the team developed a process to review some math programs. At the end of February, teachers from each school will be chosen to review up to eight or nine math programs from publishers. That group will

develop criteria for them to look at different curriculums and a way to evaluate them. The goal would be to narrow the choices to two or three publishers. Teachers, principals and Dr. Collin will work with staff to pilot the program in mid-March in grades K-5. At end of time period, the team will evaluate and make a recommendation. Dr. Chafetz said a task force will be created made up of teachers, administrators and parents. He would like to come to the Board with a recommendation in mid-May so the district can purchase the materials for use next September and develop professional development over the summer for teachers. Dr. Chafetz said depending on the cost, it may be a two-year purchase program. The cost of the materials is estimated between \$160,000-180,000. Board member D'Ostuni asked if there was a cost to pilot the program. Dr. Collin responded there is no cost to piloting the program. Board member Semyanko asked what other districts are using. Dr. Chafetz said the eight to nine choices the district will be reviewing are widely used throughout the State. Board member Gee asked if there has been any effort to talk to other districts for their input and experience with the materials. Dr. Chafetz said that was a good idea. Board member Zawawi asked if Suffield has a math curriculum already, and if this discussion was just about getting resources to support the curriculum, or is there not a math curriculum in place. Dr. Chafetz said teachers have expressed concerns that there is not consistency from one grade to the next. Board member Zawawi said parents also need resources to support their children. Dr. Chafetz said most of the programs that will be reviewed have a home support component to it. Board Chair Gee asked Dr. Chafetz to explain the acceleration of the pilot that was originally planned for the fall of 2015. Dr. Chafetz said teachers have made it clear to him that they have been looking for resources for a long time. Conducting the pilot now will allow a new program to be implemented in the fall. Board Chair Gee asked when do parents get involved in the process. Dr. Chafetz said the intent is to get parents involved after the programs are narrowed down by staff since staff are the experts and the ones who will be teaching it. Board member Service asked if the approximately \$160,000 to \$180,000 cost is for all of K-5. Dr. Chafetz said yes.

- Suffield Public Schools Leadership Structure

MOTION #15-12: D'Ostuni moved to eliminate the administrative structure, specifically the K-12 Curriculum Positions of English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science in the 2015-2016 Suffield Schools' budget, and that these budget funds will be reallocated for curriculum and supervisory and evaluation support and resources in the coming school year while a new superintendent assesses a more permanent administrative and curricular structure for Suffield Public Schools. Service seconded the motion. Dr. Chafetz stated the administrators are working to identify the needs and ways to address them. Board Chair Gee read a prepared statement from Board member Beiter:

I am sorry to miss the meeting this evening. I wanted to share a brief statement in the event I am not able to free my schedule and be able call into the meeting.

Our Board is considering a difficult decision this evening. I would first like to extend my sincere gratitude to the principals, teachers and entire faculty for what they do to educate and shape our kids. I have three kids in our schools. I watch my kids grow every day. I see the tireless and creative work that our teachers do and the life-changing impact they make on our kids. I see the leadership and guidance of our principals. I am grateful to have Scott, Karen, Damon and Steve for what they do, and I'm insanely confident in their leadership for our kids, our teachers and our district. Our kids have incredible opportunities to grow and be successful.

The discussion and ensuing vote on academic supervisor positions is not easy. Like any good business or organization, we need to continually plan, execute, and evaluate. Over the past year we have been evaluating the new structure. I had some trepidation before we moved to this structure. Other board members shared that concern, which is why votes were not unanimous as we transitioned to this model. We have some challenges in front of us that, in my opinion, require leadership on the part of our Board to act now.

We have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in new positions, consultants, and additional teacher pay to address curriculum. It has been two and a half years since we implemented a new structure. There has been lack of curriculum development that is not consistent with this level of investment. As leaders and stewards of our taxpayer dollars, we need to act to address.

I do not make this decision in a vacuum. I have had many conversations with faculty, staff, administrators and numerous stakeholders in town. The feedback was clear. We need to modify what we are doing.

There was a recent comment made to the Board asking us to focus directly on student outcomes and results. This was an insightful comment, and to this end, we have had no demonstrative data indicating that the substantial increase in budget to create these positions has led to improved student outcomes. Furthermore, learning of the desperate need for a K-5 math curriculum sends a clear signal that we need to modify the structure to better deliver curriculum and materials to our kids.

There were many other comments to our Board asking us not to significantly change the leadership structure and allowing a new superintendent to help shape a new structure. I wholeheartedly agree. My vote would be to eliminate the three academic supervisors and redeploy budget items tied to those positions in a way that could better meet curriculum, supervisory and evaluation needs of our district, using a collaborative process involving teachers, principals and, most importantly, our new superintendent.

I realize this is a difficult decision for our Board, our district, our community, and most importantly, our kids. I have served on our board for over three years. Our Board has led the district through powerful changes that have significantly improved our district and experience for our kids. The success of our Full Day Kindergarten and the 1:1 Chromebook initiative are just a couple of examples of our Board's leadership and ability to strategically guide the district for the best learning experience for our kids. By evaluating and modifying this structure with the academic supervisor positions, we can continue to provide a vision and strategic direction to deliver the best possible education to our children with the least financial impact to the Suffield tax payers.

*Sincerely,
George Beiter*

Board member D'Ostuni stated the current structure has not served the purpose the Board thought it would serve and a change was needed to better serve the district. She stated when Dr. Baldwin came to the district the Board had allocated dollars for the new superintendent to create a structure to get the work done and the Board should afford the next superintendent the same opportunity. Board member D'Ostuni said she believes in a structure that is adaptable, which pulls from expertise already in the organization. She continued that expertise should not be limited to a small group of people but should exist in every classroom, every building and every position in the district with someone knowing who has what expertise and spending dollars for any resources needed when

someone doesn't have an expertise needed in the district. It will be up to the new superintendent to determine what would be best. Board member Semyanko said she wants to focus on the future and put students first. What is in place now is not serving our children. Dr. Chafetz said eliminating those positions will not eliminate the need to oversee curriculum and the district will still allocate funds to provide support for staff in this area. This work does not go away. Board member Service said the motion does not remove funding and will allow the new superintendent to deploy those resources as he/she sees best. Board member Gee said the Board recognizes the importance of the work. What the Board wants has not changed. The structure will remain until July 1, 2015. This situation is similar to the situation when Dr. Baldwin came into the district. The Board has no interest in designing a structure but is interested in supporting one. D'Ostuni stated she supports building-based leadership. All members voted in favor. The motion carried.

- 2015-2016 Budget Development Process

Mr. Hoff stated the budget subcommittee has met twice since the last Board meeting. The meetings will be moved to 6:30 a.m. The budget timeline is to have a budget ready mid-February and present it to the Board in early March. The budget must be submitted to the Town by March 30, 2015, so the last regularly scheduled Board meeting before then is March 17th for the Board to vote on the budget. The Board is meeting with ACCE this Thursday, February 5th, and will present its budget to the Board of Finance on April 6, 2015.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report

- Dr. Chafetz noted there have been four snow days and the district will have to look at potentially taking away some days from April vacation after five snow days. Board member D'Ostuni said the calendar is for 183 student days so the Board could vote to forgive up to three of those snow days and have school in session up to graduation day as an option as well [Clarification: allowing for six total snow days before taking days from April vacation or extending into the next week of June].

- Chair's Report

- Board Chair Gee congratulated Ms. Carpenter-Snow in her involvement in the Open Choice promotional video and her willingness to represent the district.
- Board Chair Gee said the Board changed its seating arrangement at the last Board meeting and she has received feedback from some Board members and outside participants. She said the new configuration allows for Board members to look and talk to one another. She said Board meetings are held in public but are not public meetings. She asked Board members for their input on the new seating arrangement. Board member Richter said he would like the seating better if the U shape was "flipped" so the table is facing the audience not with their backs to them. Board member D'Ostuni said she would like there to be a table for those presenting so they could join the Board. The Board agreed to the new configuration.

Subcommittees Reports

Budget Subcommittee

Board member D'Ostuni said the committee met on January 26th and discussed several topics including the high school media course, the PBIS position being paid out of the Choice grant, K-5 math curriculum support and the pilot program, convening a curriculum cabinet, adding one FTE custodian and expanding the data specialist position. Board member Beiter suggested creating budget goals. At the February 2nd meeting, the committee reviewed electricity, transportation, grants and Special Education outplacement costs. The next meeting's agenda will include utilities, Special Education costs, purchased services and Open Choice/Magnet School tuition accounts. The committee discussed the need for K-5 math curriculum and a suggestion was made to add this to the ACCE request. Dr. Chafetz said no district in the state uses ACCE for materials. He cautioned the Board on doing this since it is not a capital expenditure. Dr. Collin said he wanted to clarify the discussion around the agenda item labeled as K-5 math curriculum; that is a misnomer. The discussion this evening around K-5 math is for textbook materials. He wanted to be clear that there is a math curriculum already in place. Lesson plans have been written and assessments created. Board members have been using the term curriculum tonight, but the program discussed is not piloting a curriculum but textbooks and teaching materials to support the curriculum that is in place. He also noted the 6th grade math teachers are using the standards-based platform with curriculum in place. The program has units, templates and assessments in place and these have been reviewed and revised. Those teachers are not interested in math textbooks. Board member Zawawi asked where parents can view the curriculum. Dr. Collin said the curriculum is available if parents would like to come into the office. Board member Zawawi asked if the curriculum was online. Dr. Collin said curriculum is not online. Board member Zawawi said putting the curriculum on the website will help clear up confusion.

Board member D'Ostuni stated the Budget subcommittee also mentioned academic support has voted to join the Teamsters union. Mr. Hoff said the unionization is currently being certified by the State, and this group unionizing will impact the budget. Board member D'Ostuni said the next subcommittee meetings are scheduled for February 9, 13, 23, and March 2.

Superintendent Search Committee

Board member Semyanko said CES has been very responsive and has indicated potential candidates have contacted them. A presentation to the community is scheduled for Thursday, February 12, 2015 at 6:30 p.m. in the high school media center. The consultant will explain the process which will include focus groups.

Future Business

The following items were added to future business:

- K-5 Math Pilot Program Update
- Reconstitution of a Curriculum Cabinet
- Report on Kelly Services – pay scale for substitute services
- Presentation on What is Curriculum

Public Comment

Melissa Finnegan, 50 Cedar Crest Lane, said she understands the decision has been made relative to the supervisor positions, but she is bothered by the disservice and comments by Board members that the supervisors have not done any work on curriculum. The Board has stated that no data has been given to the Board by the administration on the work of the supervisors but that

is untrue. She referred to Dr. Baldwin's December 2, 2014 report to the Board on the district's leadership structure that clearly identified several deliverables of the work in the district by the curriculum supervisors. She also referred to the extensive curriculum audit that was conducted by the supervisors. She said the Board has done a disservice to Dr. Collin and she has not heard the Board express their appreciation for his work. She questioned what the morale would be for these supervisors who have just lost their jobs. She asked who would implement the new math pilot once the math curriculum supervisor position is eliminated.

Kendra Wiesel, 37 Willow Creek, said she is disappointed but not surprised. The Board has raised the topic of transparency often and their transparency on the subject of the curriculum supervisors has been apparent. She is really disappointed because the public voted for you, and in less than a month with an interim superintendent in place, there was not one dissenting vote. She thanked Board member Beiter for his coherent statement, but she had issues with a few of his points. She noted the structure has never been fully in place and without the support of the Board in at least a year, it made it difficult for Dr. Baldwin to fill the vacant science curriculum supervisor position. The Board has asked for data from the administration to justify these positions, but the public has not been presented data from the Board that the supervisors are not effective. There has not been a satisfactory reason why these positions are being eliminated. She said the challenge for her is that the discussions that are occurring at these meetings are just formalities.

Jeff Kew said Ms. Finnegan and Ms. Wiesel made really good points. Personally, he hoped the Board did not just vote to eliminate the supervisor positions with the notion that there is no curriculum in place since Dr. Collin just explained that there is curriculum in place.

Christine Phillips, 63 Heritage Trail, thanked Mr. Dunn for the presentation. She said the PBIS program has been instrumental and has seen the benefits in her children. She said not only are they excited about it for themselves but also for their peers. She asked the Board to continue to fund the PBIS program.

Pam Hardy, 63 Hydrangea Lane, said she hoped the Board consulted with the principals and teachers for their input on how important the curriculum supervisor roles were to them. She said she would like that information to be shared with the public so the public has a better understanding of the decision made by the Board. She noted the Board still has not scheduled an open forum meeting.

Adjournment

Service moved, Semyanko seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:22 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the next meeting on February 18, 2015.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori D'Ostuni
Secretary