

Board of Education Meeting
March 17, 2015

Call to Order

Board Chair Gee called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. in the Suffield High School Media Center. Present: Board members Lori D'Ostuni, Natalie Semyanko, George Beiter, Jeanne Gee, Michael Sepko, Susi Keane, Michelle Zawawi, Matt Service, John Richter, Interim Superintendent Mel Chafetz, Assistant Superintendent, Jim Collin and Business Manager, Bill Hoff, in addition to Board of Finance member Ryan Anderson.

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment

Beth D'Agata, 448 West Grand Street, thanked Board member Beiter for serving as the Board liaison to the Agriscience committee.

Recognition

Mr. Dunn, Ms. Carpenter-Snow, and Mr. Moccio introduced the parents who were recognized at the Connecticut Association of Schools Volunteers Recognition banquet for their involvement and contributions to Suffield Public Schools. Ms. Kendra Wiesel and Ms. Christine Phillips were nominated by Mr. Dunn and Ms. Carpenter-Snow for their services as co-presidents of the PTO at Spaulding and McAlister schools. Mr. Dunn said they received plaques and certificates and the plaques will be displayed in the schools' entrances. Mr. Dunn and Ms. Carpenter-Snow thanked them for their work and commitment. Mr. Moccio said the three parent groups at the high school are the Athletic Booster Club, Safe Grad and Parent Advisory. Beth D'Agata represented Safe Grad, Tracy Bedlack represented Parent Advisory, and Sue Lydon who could not be in attendance, represent the Athletic Booster Club. Mr. Moccio thanked them and all those who serve on these committees for all they do for Suffield High School. Board Chair Gee noted that these parent volunteers take on much more than parents in the past with chairing and coordinating activities in addition to their board work and thanked them for all they do for the district.

Suffield High School Student Representative

Taylor Schwab updated the Board on the events at the high school in March:

- The hockey team won the semi-finals and is moving on to the finals on Friday against Branford.
- Both the girls and boys basketball teams competed in States
- Girls lacrosse is having a fundraiser
- Boys swim team qualified for the Class S tournament
- Spring sports are starting up
- World Language department has Spain trip coming up in April
- Agriscience is packaging food for third world countries
- Best Buddies have begun the "R" word campaign this month
- Math team had their last meet last week
- The Gay Straight Alliance will be attending a True Color Conference at UConn
- The Student Senate had a badminton tournament
- Sophomores sold green carnations for St. Patrick's Day promoting school spirit
- Seniors are preparing for Mr. Suffield
- Aces High won second place and received an engineering award

- Sophomores had CAPT testing
- Safe Grad is holding a fundraiser by selling jewelry
- CT Science Fair was held at Quinnipiac University. Matt Rogers and Joseph Howarth were selected as finalists and are advancing to the International Science Fairs. Matt will be doing a summer internship to conduct research aboard a ship in the Arctic.

Communications

None

Approval of Minutes

Semyanko moved, Beiter seconded the motion to approve the March 3, 2015 minutes. All members voted.

Consent Agenda

Dr. Chafetz stated Bob Lowell, the Robotics Advisor, represents what is best about Suffield. He has served as the head custodian at Suffield High School for many years, he is deeply involved in many organizations in town and within the school and he epitomizes the consensus that came out of the superintendent's search results, which was that Suffield is a community that cares about their students and people are dedicated to this community. Mr. Lowell said he was excited about this year's Robotics team. He said the team came in second in their last competition in Springfield, which is worth a lot of points going forward in the competition. Mr. Lowell thanked the Board for their support.

MOTION #15-13: Beiter moved to approve the following Robotics field trips:

1. Field Trip Request – SHS Robotics Club – March 21-22, 2015 – Smithfield, RI
2. Field Trip Request – SHS Robotics Club – April 9-11, 2015 – Worcester, MA
3. Field Trip Request – SHS Robotics Club – April 22-26, 2015 – St. Louis, MO

Zawawi seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried.

Discussion/Action Items

- February 2015 Financial Report

Mr. Hoff said the current budget year projection shows a year-end surplus of \$110,806. He said he should have a better estimate of electricity and heating costs at the end of March. He noted a cost increase of \$39,349 for transportation for athletics. The previous budgeted amount was incorrect as it did not reflect higher hourly rates with M&J than with the previous bus company. Board Chair Gee asked if it is normal practice to negotiate that fee. Mr. Hoff said when the bid was evaluated he assumed it was taken into account. He added that relative to the overall transportation expense it is still small. Board member D'Ostuni asked from which account the actual cost would be taken. Mr. Hoff said he would know better in April which accounts will cover these costs. Mr. Hoff highlighted State and Federal grant increases in revenue for Excess Cost Reimbursement. The estimated reimbursement for in-district expenses is \$126,865. The approximately \$8,000 balance in the Open Choice Capital Grant along with approximately \$6,000 in after-school funds will be used to purchase bookcases and shelving for Spaulding's library media center project. Board member D'Ostuni asked for a one page summary of revenues and expenditures for the Spaulding library media center project. Mr. Hoff said he will provide that to Board members. He noted food service showed a loss of approximately \$3,000 for the month, but overall year to date loss is better by approximately \$15,000 than last year. Mr. Hoff said the breakfast program at Spaulding was just started this year and it takes time to grow. They

have not reached their target of 23 students consistently but with the \$3,000 grant, the program will be profitable.

Mr. Hoff discussed the Pre-K tuition rate. He said the district has charged \$1200 tuition for about 10 years, with a \$50 non-refundable application fee. His recommendation for students enrolling in the 2015-2016 school year is to keep the tuition rate at \$1200 but change the procedure of applying the \$50 application fee as a tuition deposit. He noted if the Board desires to change the tuition rate for the 2016-2017 school year, that needs to be decided by January 1, 2016.

Board Chair Gee asked how long it took for the breakfast program at McAlister to break even. Ms. Carpenter-Snow said it was rather quickly because unlike Spaulding, the program started at the beginning of the year and the administration had time to inform parents of the program over the summer. Board member Beiter asked for a list of the items that constitute the \$140,649 in spending reductions. Mr. Hoff said he could provide that and they mostly include supplies, textbooks, and field trip expenses. Board Chair Gee noted the items were chosen as things that would not cause an immediate squeeze; they were budgeted for but can be postponed. Board member Beiter questioned the \$61,749 vacation pay out. Mr. Hoff said that was due to a vacation pay out for John Warrington's year of leave. Board member Service noted the list of spending reductions was given to Board members at the January 20 Board meeting in the financial report. Board member Beiter asked what the projections for food service are next year, and asked if the \$45,000 deficit that will be paid by Aramark is in addition to the subsidy paid by the Board. Mr. Hoff said what the Board paid in July was to subsidize part of last year's deficit. Mr. Hoff said we are factoring a \$20,000-\$25,000 subsidy this year. Mr. Hoff said the district will renegotiate a new contract and put same language in next year relative to no loss to the district. Board member Beiter thought the contract with Aramark was for 3 years. Mr. Hoff said they are actually one year agreements but can be renewed each year for 5 years. Board member D'Ostuni asked if the repair on food service equipment was included in the food service line item or a separate line item. Mr. Hoff stated there is a separate line item for the repair on food service equipment. Board member D'Ostuni requested the total amount of loss in food service for last year and which years, with amounts, the Board subsidized the program.

Sabbatical Request for a SHS Faculty Member

Dr. Chafetz said the last time a sabbatical request by a teacher was granted was in 1981-1982. He said Board members received the teacher's proposal in their packets. He said it is a high school world language teacher who is working on her dissertation for her doctorate degree. She said her work includes acquiring Latin and she would teach Latin at the high school. Dr. Chafetz said according to the SEA agreement, if the Board agrees to grant the sabbatical, there are conditions: the teacher has to be employed with the district for a minimum of six years; the employee would be compensated at 80% of his/her salary plus health insurance; and the employee would have to agree to work in the district for a minimum of three years. The cost to the district is approximately \$66,000, which has not been budgeted for. Board member Beiter said he supports professional development for staff but the cost is high and may set a precedent that is unsustainable. Board member D'Ostuni said this is a bigger discussion about investing in staff, specifically the total professional development plan and the district world language plan, noting the district currently only offers two languages. She also noted this request comes later than the December deadline specified in the contract. . . Board members discussed offering other

options such as a leave of absence where there would be no salary but her position would be guaranteed upon return. There would have to be a Memorandum of Understanding to provide anything different than what is stated in the contract. Board Chair Gee noted the Board will be in negotiations with the SEA next year and this may be an opportunity to look at the sabbatical provision at that time. Board members discussed possible motions to this request. Board member Beiter suggested denying the request but looking at other options with less cost impact to the district. Board Chair Gee suggested a motion that the Board cannot grant the request at this time and authorize the superintendent to engage with the employee and union to explore other options. Board member Beiter said the parameters need to be more specific. Board member Keane asked if the employee needed an answer from the Board tonight. Dr. Chafetz said she does not need an answer tonight but this is the next step in her doctoral process. Her goal was to complete her dissertation in the next year. Board member Semyanko said the district needs to invest in its staff in order to retain good teachers. She said granting this request opens the door for offering Latin at the high school. Board member Richter noted that all members seem to be in agreement on that point but from a budget standpoint this request was submitted late and it is not in the budget. Board member Zawawi agreed with Board member Semyanko's comments. In response to a Board member's questions, Dr. Chafetz said sabbaticals are rather unique in public schools. Board member Sepko asked if the Board could consider a partial subsidy. He said the full cost is too high but he did not want to decline the request outright. Board member Zawawi noted the Board could table this item until the next meeting.

MOTION #15-14: Service moved to table the sabbatical request to the next Board meeting, Zawawi seconded the motion. Keane, Semyanko, Zawawi and Service voted in favor. Beiter, Sepko, D'Ostuni, Richter, and Gee voted against the motion. The motion failed 5 to 4.

MOTION #15-15: Beiter moved to deny the sabbatical request, Sepko seconded the motion. Board member Beiter said he supports professional development for staff, but cannot support the investment in a single teacher. Board member Keane said she would like to support this but the total cost is nearly our math program. Board Chair Gee noted that the high school lost a Latin teacher and certified Latin teachers are difficult to find. Board member Service said he voted to table this item to give the teacher an opportunity to review different options. Board member D'Ostuni said it would be better to vote on a sabbatical once there is a comprehensive professional development plan. Board Chair Gee called for a vote. Beiter, D'Ostuni, Gee, Service, Sepko and Keane voted in favor of the motion. Semyanko, Richter, Zawawi, voted against the motion. The motion carried 6 to 3.

Board Chair Gee said the Superintendent will discuss other options with the union. Board member Beiter said those options need to be specific and sustainable.

- Approval of FY 2015-2016 BOE Budget

Dr. Chafetz said he proposed a 4.9% budget increase on March 3, 2015 to the Board. Since then the Board has reviewed the proposed budget and requested administration to look for cost savings. As a result the budget has been reduced to 3.9%, or \$33,865,745. He reviewed the accounts that were reduced and the rationale for each. Mr. Hoff noted the reductions in the electricity and natural gas accounts were optimistic projections. He reviewed the changes to staffing from what was originally proposed including a reduction in the media FTEs and increase in social studies FTEs at the high school due to enrollment numbers. The \$200,000 budgeted for K-5 math textbooks and pre-calculus textbooks are currently in the Choice grant. If the expense was moved out of Choice and possibly funded

differently by the Town, the budget could further be reduced to 3.3%, or \$33,665,745. Then \$200,000 from the operating budget would be moved into the Choice grant.

Mr. Hoff distributed additional documents to Board members in response to questions from Board members. The first spreadsheet answers the question of how Choice students impact class size in the district. The spreadsheet showed a comparison on average class size with 107 projected Choice students for next year and without Choice students, which showed Choice student enrollment has very little impact on class size. He also presented the cost per Choice student, revenue per Choice student and net revenue to the district, all based on a 3% reimbursement rate. Board Chair Gee said this comparison is very clear and gives Board members a better understanding of the Choice program. Board member D'Ostuni said the Board needs to make clear to the Board of Finance the possibility of a 4% enrollment reimbursement rate but how we have yet to actually reach those numbers. Mr. Hoff said administration is meeting with Open Choice representatives in a few weeks and one of his questions is to clarify the definition of enrollment. Board member Zawawi asked if the reimbursement rate is based on seats requested or seats actually filled. Mr. Hoff said the reimbursement rate is currently based on seats filled.

The other question was relative to the cost savings of six students returning to the district from outplacements. Mr. Hoff reviewed the data he provided showing a net tuition savings of \$266,574 and a net savings to the district of \$129,716. He also included a memorandum from Dr. Collin and Dr. Davis that was presented to the Programs and Services and budget subcommittees last summer explaining the savings of bringing these students back into the district, and a memorandum from himself dated August 12, 2014 related to budget transfers needed to accommodate the programming needs for these students coming back into the district. Board member D'Ostuni thought there was one more position associated with bringing these students back. Mr. Hoff said that position was not related to these students but was associated with Pre-K.

Dr. Chafetz said the Board has been provided with two motions; one requesting the full 3.9%, or \$33,865,745, and the other requesting the 3.9% but discussing with the Board of Finance another source of funding for the \$200,000 expense for math textbooks, thereby reducing the request to 3.3%, or \$33,665,745. Board Chair Gee said requesting the 3.9% budget clearly articulates the Board's priorities. Board member D'Ostuni stated she would feel more comfortable requesting 3.3% based on past experience. Board member Beiter agreed and prefers not spending \$180,000 in textbooks. Board member D'Ostuni noted an online component comes with any textbook the district purchases. Dr. Chafetz noted the need for more hard copy at the K-5 level. He added there is a six year guarantee on the math program and workbooks, which in the past needed to be purchased annually. Mr. Anderson said the Board of Finance will ask questions either way. The Board needs to communicate specifically relative to Choice and FTEs to build understanding with the Board of Finance. There will also be questions relative to how the district found ways to fund increases to FTEs this year when they were not budgeted. Board member Zawawi added magnet school tuitions are coming out of our budget. She stated Suffield has to compete with these state-of-the-art buildings and programs, and we have to look at the high school as the flagship school and also the Agriscience program. She said the district needs to be investing in our programs to attract families to Suffield.

MOTION #15-16: Beiter moved to approve the 2015-2016 budget at the 3.3% increase, Richter seconded the motion. Board Gee said the Board would have to eliminate \$200,000 elsewhere in the budget if this motion passes. Board member Richter withdrew his second. He asked for clarification on the Board vote and what is included. Board Chair Gee explained if the Board approves the 3.9% budget increase, the math program for K-5 and pre-calculus textbooks amounting to \$200,000 is kept in grant expenditures and the budget items remain as presented. If the \$200,000 is taken out of the budget, the result would be a 3.3% budget increase. Approving the 3.9% budget gives the Board of Finance the ability to fund the math program and pre-calculus textbooks a different way, resulting in moving \$200,000 of budget items to grant expenditures, therefore reducing the education budget to a 3.3% increase. Since the district will not need that \$200,000 again next year, this is a good approach for the Board to take. Approving the 3.9% budget clearly expresses the Board's priorities. The Board of Finance can pay for the textbooks as a capital purchase. Board member Richter said he thought at the March 10 budget subcommittee meeting it was the consensus of the Board that it should submit a budget we all agreed with, which was the 3.9% budget. He added the Board needs to be prepared with supporting details in these areas to present to the Board of Finance.

Board members discussed other topics they will need to share with the Board of Finance including new initiatives and accomplishments that have occurred such as bringing several students back from outplacements. Board member Zawawi said bringing students back is not just saving money, but it is offering better programming for our students. Board member D'Ostuni said she will second Board member Beiter's motion for a 3.3% budget increase because she believes every board member's motion should be heard and discussed. Board member Service asked Board member Beiter to clarify why he wants to approve the 3.3% budget since it is a different stance than he took at the budget meeting. Board member Beiter said the Superintendent proposed a 4.9% budget and has already reduced it to 3.9%. He just wants to make sure everything that is in the budget is truly needed and will directly benefit students. Mr. Hoff said administration looked at everything and determined what was realistic. It is a budget so it is a projection. Board Chair Gee said based on the Board of Finance meeting last night, ACCE plans to fully fund the technology request at the high school. Reducing the media teacher is giving a mixed message to the Board of Finance and the Board needs to be prepared to address this issue. Dr. Chafetz recommended the Board approve the 3.9% budget increase. Board member Sepko asked about the next steps in the process. What is the timeframe for Board discussion after the Board of Finance is presented with the budget. Mr. Anderson said in accordance with the Town's charter the Board of Education must submit its budget to the Town by the last Monday in March, in this case, March 30. The Board of Finance reviews the budget and the Board of Education presents this budget to the Board of Finance on April 6. Mr. Anderson said the Board of Finance will either agree with the budget or cut the budget by a certain amount. The Town budget then moves to a Town meeting and vote by the community. Board member D'Ostuni stated if a Board of Finance cut is needed, past practice is to have the reductions in time for the town vote but last year the list of items was not created until June or July. She believed the Board should determine those items before the town vote. Board Chair Gee stated a budget strategy in the past was to have a list of the items that may be cut at the town hearing. She said it sends the message that those items are not really needed. Board Chair Gee called for a vote. Beiter voted in favor of approving the 2015-2016 budget at a 3.3% budget increase, all other members voted against the motion. The motion failed 8 to 1.

MOTION #15-17: Beiter moved to approve the 2015-2016 budget as proposed by the Interim Superintendent totaling \$33,865,745, a 3.9% increase of the 2014-2015 budget in accordance with the line items presented. If the Board of Finance should find a source other than the Open Choice Grant for funding \$200,000 for the math program and textbooks, the budget will be reduced by \$200,000 to \$33,665,745 with the reductions to the budget made as presented. Sepko seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried.

Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report
 - Dr. Chafetz said Matt Rogers and Joseph Howarth will be invited to the next Board meeting to be recognized for their accomplishments at the Science Fair.
 - The K-5 math pilot will begin after April vacation. A task force committee made up of teachers, parents and administrators has been formed and will be meeting in the near future.
 - Dr. Chafetz said the district's leadership structure will be on the Board's April agenda.
 - He attended the Board of Finance meeting last night and said ACCE is agreeable to funding most items on the Board's list with a few exceptions. There was a discussion around bonding and if the Town agrees to bonding the projects will go forward. If no, some of the Board of Education's projects will get bumped. Mr. Anderson noted that the projects that may not be funded this year are bathroom renovations and lighting at Spaulding and air conditioning units at McAlister.
 - The Teacher of the Year committee said this year's winner will receive a mini-grant funded by SFES.
- Chair's Report
 - Board Chair Gee said she will be sending an email to Board members tomorrow relative to donating something to the SFES silent auction. She encouraged as many people as possible to attend.

Subcommittees Reports

Budget Subcommittee

Nothing further to report.

Superintendent Search Committee

Board member Semyanko thanked Laura Guerrette and Becky Osleger on behalf of herself and Kaye Griffin, the superintendent search consultant, for the work they have done. Board member Semyanko said the results of the survey and focus group meetings are posted on the website. Dr. Griffin has reported that she has spoken with several potential candidates and they have showed great interest in Suffield.

Future Business

None

Board member Sepko said he was a former Suffield High School hockey player and is thrilled about how the hockey program has grown over the years in Suffield. He thanked the community for their support of the program.

Public Comment

Kendra Wiesel, 37 Willow Creek, thanked Mr. Anderson for helping out with the budget process as well as all those who have worked on the budget. She also thanked Board member Zawawi for her comment about bringing students back into district. She noted the fantastic work by Dr. Collin in making it possible for these students to return to the district and how important it is to those families. She thanked the principals for nominating her and Ms. Phillips for the CAS recognition award and it was their pleasure to help in the schools. She asked where the \$247,496 is reflected in the budget for the reduction in administrative salaries due to the elimination of the curriculum supervisors. Mr. Hoff said 100 % of that money is in the teacher salaries account.

Sue Davis, 42 Wisteria Lane, said she wanted to make sure the supervisors' salaries are preserved because it could get lost. She suggested creating a separate line item. The math textbooks and supplies were mentioned in the Superintendent's message but it is not noted in detail in the line item budget. It should be separated so we have a reference for the future because it is a large amount of money. She noted there has not been much discussion about licensing of eBooks, but the district is spending a lot of money on textbooks. Other institutions are doing this instead of spending money of textbooks. Ms. Davis was also glad to hear Board member Zawawi's comments relative to bringing students back into district was not just about saving money but providing better programming for our students. She felt that the vision of supporting and educating children has been lost and it was good to hear. She believed there have been a lot of improvements in the district around special educations and that should be celebrated, but there is still a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done. More efforts need to be made relative to inclusion and that will cost money.

Pamela Hardy, 63 Hydrangea Lane, said Dr. Griffin did a great job with facilitating the superintendent search focus groups. She encouraged everyone to read the results including the Board of Finance. The consensus is that everyone wants to move forward. She questioned how the district can move forward when the majority of the budget increase is attributed to salaries and health insurance. She hoped the new superintendent will move forward in that direction.

Adjournment

Beiter moved, Service seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the next meeting on April 7, 2015.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori D'Ostuni
Secretary