

Board of Education Special Meeting
December 18, 2017

Call to Order

The special meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. in the Suffield Middle School Auditorium.

Present: Board members Kendra Wiesel, Matt Service, John Richter, Susan Mercik Davis, Michael Sepko, Maureen Sattan, Debra Dudack, Lori D'Ostuni (arrived at 6:07 p.m.), Superintendent Karen Berasi and Assistant Superintendent Brian Hendrickson and Business Manager Bill Hoff

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Recognition

Superintendent Berasi thanked the students of the Suffield Middle School Music Program and their parents for attending tonight. She also commended Corey Killian, Amy Wilson and Laura Noonan, SMS Music teachers, for their efforts in increasing student participation in the music program and their dedication. The band played a few holiday songs for the audience.

Public Comment

None

Approval of Minutes

Dudack moved to approve the December 4, 2017 meeting minutes. D'Ostuni seconded the motion. Board member Sattan asked for more detail in the minutes. Superintendent Berasi said with the taping of meetings, minutes are a business format. The Board would like to further discuss the format of the minutes during their review of Board member bylaws. All members voted in favor of the motion. The motion carried 8-0.

Richter left at 6:12 p.m., returned 6:13 p.m.

Consent Agenda

Board Chair Wiesel noted the charging policy (#3542.43) had a few typographical errors that have been corrected. She highlighted the specific errors for Board members, which included a duplicate paragraph and misspellings in the legal references section.

MOTION #18-18: Sattan moved to approve the following on the consent agenda:

- 1) Policy #3542.43 – Charging Policy
- 2) Policy/Reg. #4112.5 – Security/Credit Check
- 3) Policy #5145.4 – Non-Discrimination

Richter seconded the motion and all members voted in favor except D'Ostuni, who opposed. The motion carried 7-1.

Discussion/Action Items

- 2018-2019 Superintendent's Proposed Budget Presentation

Superintendent Berasi thanked the administrators for their hard work and collaboration on the budget all year long. The 2018-2019 budget request is a 1.67% increase over this year's budget. The budget request is directly aligned to the District Improvement Plan and focuses on the needs of all students. The Superintendent reviewed the district's many accomplishments, enrollment

projections, increases in salary and health expenses for union contracts, which is a 1.8% increase in the total budget. The Superintendent also reviewed the changes in staffing from last year's approved budget, and explained the increase to health benefits, which is approximately 15%, but is projected to result in an increase to the district of 11.7% due to employees paying more of the health premium costs and share of the HSA. She explained the driving components' increases to the budget, including contractual salary increases, adding 2.2 new paraprofessionals, and transportation costs. She explained the driving components' decreases to the budget, which include staff reductions, activity fee revenue, and reduced consulting. Ms. Berasi discussed the federal and state grants and the revenue the Town receives directly from these grants. She said the district will not be accepting new students from CHOICE next year due to the projected high number of incoming kindergarteners, which looks to be 20 additional students compared to this year. Superintendent Berasi said there is nowhere else to cut the budget without affecting employees and impacting students. Ms. Berasi concluded by saying this budget request gives the district what it needs to continue to move forward in all areas. Board members had several specific questions about the budget (see Budget Questions on the district website <http://www.suffield.org/page.cfm?p=666>). Board members discussed holding public forums and communications to engage and inform the community.

- November 2017 Financial Report

Mr. Hoff said the projected year end shows a net surplus of \$360,383, which is an increase of \$119,445 from October. The overall surplus for salaries increased primarily due to moving one psychologist to the Academic Support grant. Mr. Hoff expressed concern over the cold winter months and the effect on the utility budget. Mr. Hoff reviewed state and federal grants and noted the new Title IV federal grant. In response to a board member's question, Mr. Hoff said the pension contribution deficit was due to switching from the defined benefit plan to the defined contribution plan for new employees. The plan was not in place last year when the budget was done but it is accounted for in next year's budget.

- Discussion of Board of Education Subcommittee Structure (Bylaw #9130 - Committees)

Board Chair Wiesel asked for Board members' input on possibly restructuring the subcommittees to streamline the work resulting in a more efficient process. The Superintendent and the Board discussed the structure in other districts, possibly reducing the number of committees. The Board discussed the logistics of reducing subcommittees; specifically times to hold meetings, length of meetings, and topics that should be presented at a full board meeting versus at the subcommittee level. Board members also discussed the need to hold policy and budget subcommittees soon and could look at the structure in the coming months. Board Chair Wiesel asked Board members to let her know in which areas they would like to serve. There was Board consensus to schedule a policy subcommittee meeting and continue discussion of the subcommittee structure.

- Discussion of Bylaw #9325.3 - Order of Business

Board Chair Wiesel said this policy is on the agenda at the request of a board member to discuss adding public comment at the end of the agenda. Board member Dudack said it is a good will gesture and demonstrates the Board is interested in hearing what the community has to say. Board members Davis and Sepko were in support of adding public comment at the end of the meeting. Board member D'Ostuni would like Bylaw #9325, Meeting Conduct, to be reviewed in conjunction with this bylaw. There was Board consensus to review these bylaws at the next Policy subcommittee.

- Discussion of Policy #4117.6/4217.6 - Exit Interviews

Board Chair Wiesel said this is a new policy that was discussed and reviewed in policy meetings and is modeled after Vernon's policy. This policy was placed on a 30-day read and could have been on the consent agenda tonight, but was moved to a discussion item for the benefit of new board members. Board member D'Ostuni noted committee members were comfortable with the policy and moving it to the full board. Board members discussed the concern of not having a human resources (HR) administrator to conduct exit interviews and employees may not feel comfortable having an exit interview with their supervisor. It was asked if the Town's HR Director could conduct the exit interviews as an unbiased resource. Superintendent Berasi said that would not be appropriate. The Board discussed other options to obtain information from departing employees such as a survey. The Board further discussed evaluating whether hiring a HR director could save the district money. Administration has discussed the possibility of sharing a HR director with surrounding districts as many districts of Suffield's size do not have a HR director. There was a consensus to move this policy back to subcommittee for further discussion.

Future Business

Meeting minutes format

Scheduling a public forum

Evaluate the cost avoidance of a HR director

Implementation of recently approved revisions to Policy #6146.1, specifically class rank being reported on transcripts

Adjournment

Sepko moved, Richter seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:03 p.m.

Minutes are subject to approval at the next meeting on January 2, 2018.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack
Secretary