

Board of Education Special Meeting  
June 25, 2018

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m. in the Central Office Conference Room.

Present: Board members Kendra Wiesel, John Richter, Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, Jamie Drzyzga, Debra Dudack, and Superintendent Karen Berasi

Absent: George Beiter, Matthew Service, and Michael Sepko

Executive Session

Susan Mercik Davis moved to enter into executive session for discussion of a personnel matter: the Superintendent's evaluation. John Richter seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion carried 6-0.

The executive session concluded at 7:01 p.m.

Special Session

Board Chair Wiesel called the special meeting to order at 7:08 p.m. in the Suffield Middle School Media Center.

Present: Board members Board members Kendra Wiesel, John Richter, Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, Jamie Drzyzga, Debra Dudack, Superintendent Karen Berasi and Business Manager Bill Hoff

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Recognition

None

Public Comment

Amy Knowles, 95 Woods Hollow Road, said she was disappointed in the decisions made by prior Board members and by the current Superintendent. The district is not moving in a positive direction. School climate among staff is low due to the expectations placed on teachers and the lack of support and communication. This is evidenced by the amount of staff leaving the district. Reducing support staff has placed a large burden on teachers who now have to take on many roles which reduces instructional time. She noted that the school psychologist at McAlister left half way through the year and was not replaced. In addition many families have withdrawn their children and placed them in other schools. Ms. Knowles asked the Superintendent to invest her time in collecting actual information from teachers and to communicate with them.

Lauren O'Hara, 617 North Street, said she is one of the parents who withdrew her daughter as a result of school system. She was disappointed that the problems the Superintendent said she would solve when she came here three years ago have not been remedied. The many people leaving the district is a result of them not being listened to, and it is a reflection on the Superintendent's and Board's leadership. She noted if changes are not made, her family will be moving to Simsbury. Ms. O'Hara said the town deserves better leaders, and parents don't feel listened to by the Superintendent.

Kathy Muska, 55 Brandywine Lane, said she grew up in Suffield and the school district is very different than when she attended. There is no support system in place. Reducing the number of paraprofessionals in the district was the worst decision the Superintendent could have made. She said the Superintendent has not done her job and she should not get a raise. She said the high turnover rate is a result of her poor communication and leadership and Ms. Muska hoped Ms. Berasi's performance review reflects that.

Board Member Davis noted that the Board will be discussing the current vacancies this evening and encouraged people to stay for that discussion.

#### Minutes

Dudack moved, Richter seconded to approve the June 4, 2018 meeting minutes. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 6-0.

#### Consent Agenda

**MOTION #18-59:** Mercik Davis moved, Dudack seconded to approve revisions to the following Bylaws on the consent agenda: #9130 – Committees; #9133 – Special/Advisory Committees (dissolve); #9150 – Board Consultants; #9221 – Filling Vacancies; #9222 – Resignation/Removal from Office/Censure; and #9240 – Board Member Development

All members voted in favor. The motion carried 6-0.

#### Discussion/Action Items

- Discussion and Possible Appointment of an Assistant Superintendent

Superintendent Berasi said her recommendation is for the Board to appoint Ms. Michelle Zawawi as Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. Ms. Berasi said Ms. Zawawi was named the Connecticut Association of Schools First Year High School Principal of the Year for 2018. Ms. Berasi said Ms. Zawawi is passionate about curriculum and instruction and extremely knowledgeable about student centered learning. She has also held positions of Assistant Principal of Windsor Locks High School, taught elementary and middle school, and served as a math curriculum leader.

**MOTION #18-60:** Sattan moved to appoint Michelle Zawawi as the Assistant Superintendent of Suffield Public Schools; Richter seconded the motion. Board member Mercik Davis thanked Ms. Zawawi for her time and enjoyed getting to know her more and is looking forward to her work in the district. Board member Mercik Davis noted that she was concerned that the hiring process for Ms. Zawawi deviated from what is typically done and she recommended a focus group be formed to review and create a consistent hiring policy for administrative positions to ensure the fidelity of the process. Board member Mercik Davis added that during the interview process what stood out to her was Ms. Zawawi's openness to share the positive as well as the negative with the Board and community; and Ms. Zawawi as an authentic leader. Board Chair Wiesel said she was impressed with Ms. Zawawi's continual dedication to Suffield and she is looking forward to curriculum and instruction being taken to the next level. Board Chair Wiesel noted that in deviating from the standard process, it allowed for more time to get to know the candidate and she is comfortable with this appointment. Board member Dudack also expressed concern with not following the standard process, but has become very comfortable with Ms. Zawawi's appointment and sees her appointment as a positive step forward.

Board Chair Wiesel called for a vote. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 6-0.

Ms. Zawawi thanked the BOE and said she was honored to be chosen. She said she is passionate about education but also about Suffield as she lives here. She is looking forward to working with all stakeholders.

- Discussion of District Hiring of Current Vacancies

Board Chair Wiesel said at the request of a board member, the Board is discussing the current staffing vacancies so the Board can have an understanding of the vacancies and the hiring process. Superintendent Berasi distributed a current list of vacancies and noted a full staffing report is given to the Board in fall when hiring is completed. Board member Mercik Davis expressed concern over the retention rate. She suggested hiring a full or part time human resources (HR) director and possibly sharing this position with the town or another school district. This will ensure fidelity in the hiring process. She also suggested holding focus groups made up of administrators, parents and teachers to discuss the pros and cons in the district. She also proposed administering a survey. Board member Dudack said the Board needs to make hiring a HR director a board priority and to explore a partnership with the town. She also wanted to review the hiring policy and establish a uniform practice for the hiring of administrator positions. Board Chair Wiesel said this policy can be reviewed by the Policy subcommittee. Ms. Wiesel asked for specifics relative to the hiring of a special services director and middle school principal. Superintendent Berasi said Ms. Zawawi will facilitate the SMS principal interview process and that Berasi will facilitate the Director of Special Services process. Ms. Berasi explained the complete hiring process and who would serve on the committees. Committees will be comprised of administrators, teachers, parents, and a BOE representative. Applications will be screened by Ms. Zawawi and herself for the principal position and by Ms. Kolodziej and herself for the Special Services Director. There is a list of questions and a rubric for committee members to use with key concepts to listen for during the interview. Typically, first round interviews involve about six candidates and about four advance to the second round performance task interview. The committee discusses candidates and recommends two to three people to move forward to the board for interviews and possible appointment. In response to Board Chair Wiesel's question relative to an interim Director of Special Services, Ms. Berasi said she is hiring an interim for 3 days a week during the summer. Ms. Kolodziej is in charge of ESY and will be here all summer except for some vacation time. Board Chair Wiesel noted that the Board voted on the interim high school principal. Ms. Berasi said it did not make sense for the Board to vote on this short term position. Board members continued the discussion around their desire to hire a HR director to handle many of the personnel issues that the Superintendent and other Central Office administrators are handling. Ms. Berasi was in full support of hiring a HR director but noted the person should be experienced in education, specifically the regulations around certification and evaluation. In response to a Board member's question relative to a HR certification program for education, Ms. Berasi said typically HR administrators have an education background. Board Chair Richter said not having an HR administrator is a liability to the district. Board Chair Wiesel said a budget subcommittee meeting will be scheduled soon to discuss priorities for next year's budget and she asked the Superintendent if it would be helpful to have a HR director for this summer's hiring needs. Ms. Berasi said hiring someone for this summer would not necessarily be helpful, but would be for the start of the school year. Board member Sattan said the Communications subcommittee that will be meeting soon will be an avenue for public comment outside of meetings where the board can dialog with the public. In response to a Board member's questions relative to the proposed focus groups, Board member Mercik Davis said parent and teacher forums would be separate, but all the feedback would be compiled and presented as a whole. Superintendent Berasi noted she holds informal meetings with teachers periodically throughout the school year for teachers to come and talk about anything they want and many problems that have been brought up have been solved. Board member Richter noted the Communications committee is a long-range committee and will change and evolve over time as the Board and community learn together. In regards to the HR Director, Board Chair Richter noted that we must ensure the right profile and vetting of candidates be done. Board member Mercik Davis wanted to make sure if the Board is not satisfied with candidates for any position, that the search

would be reopened. Superintendent Berasi assured the Board that would happen. Board member Sattan asked for a staffing report twice a year.

#### Reports to the Board

- Superintendent's Report - Ms. Berasi said she is speaking to the potential Interim Special Services Director tomorrow. ESY has begun; there is both a 4 week and 6 week program.
- Board Chair's Report - Board Chair Wiesel said she attended the CAFE negotiations workshop; the topic was negotiations during strict budgeting. She found it helpful and timely as the district is going into negotiations this year. Vernon presented their successful model; a partnership between town and school resources. Subcommittee meetings will continue throughout the summer.
- Business Manager's Report - Mr. Hoff said the fiscal year ends on Saturday. July 1 will start the new health insurance with Cigna. Ms. Cybulski has done a lot of the work with changing over from Anthem to Cigna. The roof work and inside work has started at Spaulding this week. Student workers also started this week.

#### Subcommittee Report

- June 5, 2018 Policy Subcommittee Meeting – Board member Dudack said revisions to Policy #6142.101-Wellness Policy; Bylaw #9250-Remuneration & Reimbursement; Bylaw #9260-Board Member Protection; and Bylaw #9270-Conflict of Interest are being placed on a 30-day read. She said the revisions to the wellness policy are driven by changes by the state and has been worked on since February with the wellness committee. She reviewed the significant changes including no longer allowing the distribution of homemade goods for consumption in classrooms or school buildings, birthday celebrations will be food-free, and any non-homemade treats brought in for approved celebrations will have to include ingredient labels. Once approved, the policy will be posted on the website and available to parents. Board member Sattan also pointed out the policy includes recommendations pertaining to physical education and physical education, in addition to those for nutrition.

#### Future Business

HR Director Position

Review of the Wingman Program

Update on Report Cards

Guidance Report

SADD Program/other town collaborative programs

Discussion of Impacts of Reducing Support Staff (paraprofessionals)

#### Executive Session

At 8:34 p.m. Sattan moved, Richter seconded to enter into executive session for the continuation of discussing a personnel matter: the Superintendent's evaluation. All members voted in favor. The motion carried 6-0.

Board member Dudack left the executive session at 10:30 p.m.

The executive session concluded at 11:25 p.m.

#### Adjournment

John Richter moved, Susan Mercik Davis seconded to adjourn the meeting at 11:25 p.m. The motion carried 5-0.

*Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of August 6, 2018.*

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Dudack  
Secretary

DRAFT