Suffield, Connecticut Approved by Bd. of Ed.:

Board of Education Meeting
April 10, 2014

Call to Order
Board Chair, Eccles, called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. in the Suffield Middle School Media Center. Present: Board members Jeanne Gee, Scott Schneider, Natalie Semyanko, Mary Roy, Mary Lou Sanborn (via telephone), Lori D'Ostuni (via telephone), Superintendent Karen Baldwin

Discussion/Action Items

- Discussion of Fiscal Year 2014-2015 Operation Budget and Long-Term Strategies and Objectives
  Board Chair Eccles said he wanted to hold this special meeting this evening because the Board of Finance could finalize the budget by next week, and the outcome of the budget has implications for long-term strategies and objectives for the Board. He said in the recent past the district lacked executive leadership, there was little opportunity for the Board to effect change in the district, and there was an acceptance on mediocrity. The operational effectiveness of the organization was not very good. When Superintendent Baldwin was hired there was consensus by the Board to implement and strive for a continuous, organic improvement initiative in the district. Board Chair Eccles said we knew this would be an enormous change to the organizational structure but it was critical to improving the district. This change includes mentoring other administrators and replacing others to strengthen the leadership. This change is a difficult process and takes time. The leadership structure in Suffield was not very good prior to the change initiative. Suffield has the potential to be an excellent school district.

  The purpose of tonight's meeting is to reaffirm that this is the plan the Board still wants. Board Chair Eccles said he lacked confidence that the Board was still on track of supporting the current district continuous improvement work. He used the example of the recent proposal to cut the three supervisor positions from the budget as an indication that all Board members may not be supportive of the change agenda for the district. The Board approved the plan to move those positions from teachers to administrators not even two years ago. In addition there has been lobbying of Board of Finance members by some Board members advocating for substantial cuts to the Board of Education's budget.

  Board member Roy said according to the way the Board is supposed to operate, a majority vote by the Board wins. She explained that even if Board members voted against something, they are obligated to support the vote. Board member Sanborn added it is also our policy that members must stand behind the Board's votes. Board Chair Eccles said the Superintendent is telling the Board that these three positions are critical in effecting the change in the district, and the Board should support the Superintendent. If the Board does not, the Superintendent could take that as a lack of alignment between the Board and Superintendent and question whether the Board is supportive of the improvement in the district for which she was hired. Superintendent Baldwin said that was a correct assumption. She said you can see a direct line of improvement in the district to the work of the supervisors. The Superintendent

DRAFT

provided an example of the math supervisor and the 6-12 Special Education supervisor collaborating to create a program to support the return of a student who is currently in an out-of-district placement. The K-12 ELA supervisor's work in building a reading infrastructure is also supporting the return of students to the district. Board member Eccles gave another example of how the math supervisor intervened at the high school when the practice of curving grades was occurring. Board member Schneider gave an example of supervisor intervention with his own child to improve a situation in one of her classes.

Board Chair Eccles said as an organization goes through a material change in culture it is important to understand the roles and responsibilities of those in leadership, in this case the Board and the Superintendent, but also to understand the mission which is serving this community in the best interest of the students. The Board needs to determine how to work together internally to achieve this mission. The Superintendent communicated that she was hired to lead the change of the district and if the Board does not want to continue in this direction, the Board needs to communicate that to her.

Board member Sanborn said Board member Zawawi said at that March 18 meeting her concern was that the supervisors are not directly impacting the classroom. Board member Sanborn said the Board should look at restructuring some of the things the supervisors do to make them more visible to teachers, parents and the Board. She said she is not opposed to the supervisor positions. Board Chair Eccles said the issue is the potential elimination of the positions. He said it was proposed that the department heads could do the work of the supervisors, but that is not possible since they have a full teaching load. Superintendent Baldwin said she disagrees with the point that the supervisors' work is not visible. They are leading K-5 PLC meetings, meeting with grade level teams, holding department-based meetings, and working with teachers on writing curriculum and assessments. These positions represent a significant change in the organization and it is difficult. These positions need to be supported across the district, and that is not currently happening. These supervisors are the main drivers of improvement in the district. The idea that teachers can write curriculum independent of supervisors' content expertise is not accurate. The Superintendent said she is reluctant to move forward with the Programs and Services subcommittee because there is a significant disconnect in the roles and responsibilities between the Board and Superintendent. Board member Gee asked for clarification from Board member Sanborn on the supervisors' visibility. Board member Sanborn suggested demonstrating what they are involved in daily/weekly.

Board member Gee said she thinks it is unfair to attribute the disconnect to the change agenda. She said the change in leadership at Spaulding has been terrific. There is a problem with the structure and the culture. Board member Semyanko said the Board is ignoring that the curriculum is not being catered to Suffield. The focus is on the Common Core; that is where the disconnect is occurring. Board member Gee said she understands the Superintendent's hesitation in moving forward with Programs and Services, but she said it is critical to ask questions. She feels the answers are packaged in such a way as to move the agenda forward. She does not feel it is a collaborative effort. She said people in the district are feeling it as well and she wants to resolve the issue. Board Chair Eccles said these discussions need to happen but in a respectful, civil manner. There will be instances when a

DRAFT

decision needs to be made and not everyone will be in agreement. The Superintendent said discussion need to occur at the building level to encourage teachers to express their opinions and concerns. Board member Semyanko said teachers are now being evaluated under the new model and are afraid to speak up because of those evaluations. Board member Gee said teachers do not feel part of the process, and their level of stress is not just about the change at the state and district level but with the administration.

Board member Schneider said there are two changes occurring; one being dictated externally and the other the internal restructuring of the organization. They are connected, but the administration and Board have more control over the internal change. Board member Semyanko said the district has control over how the Common Core is implemented. Each district can create their own curriculum. Superintendent Baldwin explained that the standards in ELA and math are not the curriculum. The curriculum being written is aligned to the standards and is reflective of Suffield. Board member Semyanko said there needs to be more authentic collaboration. Board Chair Eccles said a highly performing district should encourage open, honest communication with administration and discussed in a respectful, professional manner.

Board member Gee said there is not a uniform experience for teachers. Board Chair Eccles said Suffield has good teaching staff; they are just not working cohesively. Suffield has all the ingredients to be an excellent school system. Board member Gee expressed concern that the Board has no operational control. The Superintendent said there is a fundamental lack of understanding between the role of the executive leadership and the Board. She gave an example of the change and improvement in the middle school. She said tremendous infrastructure work was done to create a schedule to increase instructional time in all content areas, equalize time in ELA across grade levels, and align the Unified Arts experience. Change was made to world languages to address these issues. The goal of creating this schedule was to strengthen the middle school and having conversations with the Board over the mechanics of the task is not practical. This step was done to set the stage for the Board to work on the next level of continuous improvement at the school and district level. She said based on feedback from Board members relative to this change it appears some Board members think that the Superintendent should have sought Board input or approval prior to this work. Board member Roy said the Board hired Superintendent Baldwin to improve the district. The Board identified the priorities but the implementation is the responsibility of the Superintendent. The Board is not supposed to be involved in the day-to-day operation of the district.

Board member Gee said she understands the Superintendent has a large plan and is tentative in revealing that plan because it is overwhelming, but that has caused a lack of connectivity. She suggested having big picture goal setting sessions with the Superintendent to help clarify things and prevent miscommunication. The Superintendent said she has been focused on the work that the Board hired her to do; problems at the middle school, curriculum, leadership development, professional learning, eliminating silos, personnel management, etc. The district's strategic goals are ambitious and that is the work that is being done at the administrative level, and supported by the Board through policy and resource allocation.

DRAFT

Board member Schneider suggested having periodic meetings like tonight's meeting to make sure the Board is aligned with district's goals and objectives. Board member Gee said some districts hold one meeting a month for operational business and the other meeting for more philosophical discussions. Board member Roy said Bloomfield structure their meetings to have the operational items first on the agenda and then go into a workshop model for the second half of the meeting. She said this model allows for the public to be included on the conversations, but they need to occur in a respectful and professional manner.

Board member D'Ostuni said the Board has no mechanism for measuring the organization's culture. Board Chair Eccles asked Board members if they were still supportive of the improvement plan for the district. Board member Gee said something is askew and is not comfortable in attributing it just to change. She said a discussion needs to occur to identify the source of the disconnect. Superintendent Baldwin said she has always encouraged Board members and her staff to communicate with her. She said it not all about theory and structure but about driving improvement. She has had recent conversations with the supervisors to focus on relationships not content. The Superintendent said she takes her role in mentoring, coaching and improving decision making in the leadership very seriously. She stated her vision for the district came from the Board's vision. There is a framework in place that is built from the top down. There is a gap at the building level and it is the Superintendent's job to make that better.

Board member Gee suggested the Superintendent communicate directly to the teachers via emails or newsletters. The Superintendent said it would be more effective for her to interact with teachers in the schools and she would like to have more time to do that. The Superintendent said there is more work to be done and she is committed to the work and the district.

<u>Adjournment</u>
Gee moved, Schneider seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Guerrette
Recording Secretary

Z:\Laura\BOE\2014\04 - April 10 - special meeting\Minutes - 10 APR 2014.docx

DRAFT