

REGULAR MEETING OF THE SOUTH BURLINGTON SCHOOL BOARD

Wednesday, September 16 , 2026

Regular Session at 6:00 pm

South Burlington School District Administrative Office

577 Dorset Street, South Burlington, VT

REGULAR MEETING

PRESENT

Seamus Abshire, Dan Boyer, Emilee Hoffman, Thomas Chittenden, Michelle Boyer (*via Zoom*), Oliver Kunz, Charu Magar

ADMINISTRATION/STAFF

Dr. Joe Clark, Jean-Marie Clark, Nicole Carter, Daisy Brayton, Kat Yun, Lissa McDonald, Suzanne Gruending, Matt Currier, Beth Adreon, Scott Carlson, Alison Treston, Gary Russell, Sarah Pineda

GUESTS

Elizabeth Fitzgerald, Meaghan Emery, Gerry Silverstein (*online*), Aaron Warner (*online*)

Call Regular meeting to order

Seamus Abshire called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Executive Session was proposed as an agenda item but was determined by the Board to not be needed.

REGULAR MEETING

PRESENT

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Elizabeth Fitzgerald, Meaghan Emery, Gerry Silverstein (*online*), Aaron Warner (*online*)

Call Regular Meeting to Order

Chair Seamus Abshire called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was said.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA**Announcements**

There were no announcements.

Comments and Questions

Seamus Abshire explained how there were three opportunities for the public to comment and at this time during the meeting, it could be on any topic. Second, the Board could also take public comments and questions when the Board takes action on an action item but only as it would pertain to the topic being actioned. He said the third opportunity would be in a specially warranted community forum and only on the topic specifically warranted for that community forum. Seamus Abshire stated how the current Board meeting did not have a community forum but there would be an action item for public comments, however, the Board would not respond to public comments except in the context of a community forum and on the topic on that agenda. He restated how the current Board meeting did not have a community forum and asked to please not violate anyone's privacy. He further stated that official complaints and grievances could not be filed during public comment.

There were no public comments.

Focus on Student Learning

Frederick H. Tuttle Middle School Student Presentation

Principal Suzanne Gruendling introduced the student presentation and explained there would be two groups from the after-school athletics and activities program presenting before the Board. She introduced the two presenting groups as QSA (Queer Straight Alliance) and SOAR (Students Organized Against Racism). Suzanne Gruendling explained how these two programs act as a third space for students; first space being student homes and second space being a student's regular school day. She described student expectations, which were student-created, as **Rise, Responsible, Inclusive, Safe, and Engaged** and how they were the heart of the inclusive part of the schools. Suzanne Gruendling introduced Scott Carlson and Alison Treston, the student advisors from QSA, as there were no student presenters available to present.

Scott Carlson began by explaining how he was hired by the school district in 2017 and felt a program like QSA would be essential, so he helped start the program in 2017-2018 and it has been an active group ever since. He provided an overview of the program and why it was important, and how they are a group of students and educators who gather in support and solidarity of the LGBTQ community. He explained how, as a group, they play games, have snacks, plan activities and fundraisers and have discussions on ways to better inform their school community on how to support LGBTQ students and staff. He mentioned how the group had the opportunity this past weekend to march in the Burlington-Vermont Pride Parade, something

they have done for the past few years, and presented pictures of the group from the event. Scott Carlson said the group meets every Thursday after school from 3:30pm - 4:30pm in Ms. Treston's art classroom and sometimes in his science classroom.

Alison Treston continued the presentation and explained how QSA also does a lot of partnering with groups in the community, such as Outright. She mentioned how Outright had provided many leadership activities for students and professional training for the group advisors. They also provide additional support and resources for students to learn about different resources that are available in the community outside of the school setting. She shared some student quotes about the program with the Board. Scott Carlson ended the presentation by saying that all were welcome, to gather, to have fun, to learn and to share a safe space for students.

Suzanne Gruendling introduced Gary Russell, the faculty advisor of SOAR, and provided a brief overview of the program. She explained how SOAR was one of the most presented groups; presenting to educators across the state and to and with youth in the area at conferences. Gary Russell said how fortunate they were to have a group of kids that were so civic-minded and driven in keeping with the school's mission as an anti-racism school.

The SOAR student representatives introduced themselves as Lena, Coco, Adut, Brodie, Thomas, Camila, and Liam and all shared in presenting to the Board. The students explained how SOAR (Students Organized Against Racism) gives students the understanding of the impact of history, government, law, and the economy on self and society in order to contribute to the community and to participate in local, state, and federal government in an informed manner by supporting, participating, and/or initiating socially responsible actions to benefit the local community. The students thanked sponsors for their generous support and then explained how they meet weekly, after school, and how at each meeting they circle up, review agreements, engage in an activity and/or have a discussion about special topics or current events. Some of the meetings have included special guest speakers and working committees. One of the students read aloud to the Board a few student quotes that SOAR had received. There was some discussion on the group's objectives to fight racism, some of their activities and how they communicate with peers. Each student representative shared what kept them going back to SOAR meetings and what the program meant to them and then each student provided something responsive people could do, some examples were to create a position statement, form a club, write collaboratively to make a resolution, volunteer, invite a guest speaker, or conduct a public survey. SOAR asked for assistance in refurbishing their Black Lives Matter sign, as it had been recently vandalized, and thanked the Board for inviting them.

Seamus Abshire asked if he could ask a question, as he found one of the most interesting things in SOAR's agreements was "accept and expect non-closure." He wondered when the students

were with friends, if they also had conversations about hard things that never got resolved. A student representative explained how he felt SOAR gave him the confidence to have those talks with friends, which helped make it easier for him to talk to peers and people he knows outside of the community.

Joe Clark expressed how proud of all the work the students had done and for their speaking in front of the Board and also for the work they were doing to make their schools a better place for all to come.

There were no comments.

Student Representative Report

Charu Magar mentioned how the high school held the activity fair earlier in the day and clubs were able to set up tables in the gymnasium for students to explore. Oliver Kunz explained that four high school seniors were named National Merit Semifinalists based on their PSAT scores administered from last year: Grady Bergeron, Amos Foster, Austin Kellogg-Masket, and Evan Xia. They now have the opportunity to compete for about \$67,000 in national merit scholarships, approximately altogether worth \$24 million dollars. Charu Magar stated there was a K-5 open house at Chamberlin that evening and that parents were invited to stop by to visit student classrooms and take family photos.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Monthly 2.4 Financial Condition and Activities Review

Seamus Abshire began with a brief overview of how this was previously a monitoring report that was monitored and reported to the Board every quarter. It was suggested by the superintendent that the monitoring be done once a year but for the Board to receive monthly reports that do not formally get monitored every month.

Jean-Marie Clark shared how the district was in really good shape and how the numbers were where she thought they should be. Her team was wrapping up FY26 and preparing for the auditors onsite visit in early October. She discussed salaries and stated that to-date the district had encumbered \$35 million of the \$40 million and how there was \$2.5 million in pre-encumbered salaries for positions that had been posted but not yet filled. She mentioned the approximated \$300,000 in the kitty; money without a hold or money not yet spent. Jean-Marie Clark discussed setting up some staff deadlines and guidelines, to even out the flow of work over the summer months. She provided the example of school year hires and how the majority of benefits paperwork was submitted the day before classes began, putting a strain on her team. She also mentioned improving the multiple-stepped process when approving accounts payable items. She discussed why some balances looked high; some due to

grants and how purchase orders were submitted. There was some discussion on blanket PO's and multiple PO's and how that process worked. She noted it was still early in the fiscal year so not much had been received for revenue yet. Thomas Chittenden asked what SERP meant and she explained that it was an acronym for the software the school district uses called School ERP System (SERP), which was also known as Tyler. Seamus Abshire questioned how the need to transfer some funds to the nutrition program worked out and Jean-Marie Clark said she did not have an answer. There was some discussion on how Federal funding worked with school nutrition programs.

There were no comments.

Monitoring Report 2.3 Treatment of Community

Seamus Abshire clarified that this would be a discussion of the Monitoring Report and not the actual Monitor Report. This had been assigned to both him and Thomas Chittenden to look at whether the report should be prepared by the superintendent or prepared by the Board. They felt the question of Treatment of Community was really an understanding of what the community thought of how the Board was doing within the current executive limitations and in the current and future Ends Policy; the conclusion was made that the superintendent should write the 2.3 Monitoring Report.

There were no comments.

ACTION ITEMS

Ends Policy Update (*Third Reading*)

Seamus Abshire provided a brief overview of the Ends Policy and its purpose, explaining how the superintendent was the one link to the organization. He stated that a revision had not been done for some time so beginning January of this year, the Board started talking about an update and formed a subcommittee, hired a consultant, ran focus groups, had done around 7 different community forums, had run at least one community survey, and had done informational videos and informational display ads across a wide variety of media; all for the purpose of collecting community feedback. He stated how this would be the third reading.

Seamus Abshire proposed, due to missing a few Board members, that the Board push the actual action on the Ends Policy to the next School Board meeting. Emilee Hoffman agreed and mentioned that she had received an email with some feedback that she wanted to review. Seamus Abshire stated that since this was warned as an action item, he wanted to open the floor to take any public comments. Sarah Pineda questioned where she could find the comparison of the old version of the Ends Policy with the proposed revisions. Seamus Abshire stated there was a link called **Ends Policy Update 2026** that could be found under the video on the website. Sarah Pineda explained how she was a parent of children in the district, a South Burlington resident and was also employed as the district nurse. She felt that some of the old language had more specific information about what wellness and health meant and so she

expressed concern over losing some of that language. There was some discussion about students achieving academic greatness and what that might look like. Sarah Pineda also asked for clarification on what “maintain wellness” meant and how that would be measured. She also mentioned inclusion and some gaps in school sports, leading to her question about what are some of the real things being done to meet expected outcomes. She commented that there were some things in the old policy that she agreed needed to change and felt that the Board did some great work but she really did not want to lose some of the other pieces, like “maintain wellness” because what if someone is not already well and how do those types of things get measured.

Joe Clark explained that his thoughts continued to be that the Ends Policy was broad, and the details Sarah Pineda mentioned would be superintendent responsibilities. He mentioned that there should not be all of these details in the Ends Policy, because then it becomes operational and stated how his superintendent evaluation was based on interpretations. There was some discussion on wordsmithing. Michelle Boyer mentioned Sarah Pineda’s email and one recommendation that stood out was the emphasis on literacy. She wondered if there could be a way to integrate the literacy component as suggested in the email. Oliver Kunz questioned the “maintain wellness” and wondered if that was done through Panorama surveys. Joe Clark explained a few surveys and other avenues that could be used to measure. Seamus Abshire mentioned there was a new health policy which he thought was good. There was discussion about students making healthy choices.

Elizabeth Fitzgerald introduced herself as a past Board member. She discussed needing a metric to monitor this, as the word “maintaining” sort of implies a baseline. She mentioned how the notion of using any services or accommodations to which someone was entitled to by law sort of implied that students would demonstrate age-appropriate understanding of how. She thought the focus of this was on outcomes and not so much just understanding the services and accommodations that were available, or that someone’s entitled to. She believed the Board was in the right spot with these conversations and felt the next stage would be how they get monitored and how Dr. Clark’s performance would be assessed. There was some discussion on language revisions and potentially looking to Joe Clark for guidance. Joe Clark referenced a part of the discussion about looking at kids when they come to the end of their time in South Burlington and how [the district] would provide the services required because they want them to be able to advocate for themselves when they leave. Michelle Boyer commented that she felt it was written as an outcome and to add to the Ends Policy that the district would follow the law, which the law says students should know and families should know the resources to which they are entitled, the accommodations, the things that go into IEPs and 504s would be a bit redundant with the law and it was not actually expressed as an outcome. Her personal recommendation would be to not go that way but rather make room for changing or wordsmithing that particular bullet point to make it more clear, with the outcome that students would have the ability, knowledge, understanding, skills to be able to not only see on a piece of paper the accommodations they are entitled to but to actually know how to use those to show their teachers what they know and can do. Seamus Abshire explained that many of the things that are in this document are legally required, so he did agree with Michelle Boyer’s point about the way it was being written as an outcome but he did not necessarily get there the same way.

He thought it would be okay for the Board to highlight the parts of the law that were most important to them as a community and that it would be worth it to the Board to have Joe Clark provide his assessment at the next meeting.

There were no comments.

Revised Executive Limitation 2.4 Financial Condition and Activities (*Third Reading*)

Joe Clark appreciated the feedback as they worked through the process. He recommended the Board approve. There were no comments. Seamus Abshire motioned to approve the revisions to Executive Limitation 2.4 Financial Condition and Activities using the text provided in the Board materials. Emilee Hoffman moved. Dan Boyer seconded. No discussion. All in favor. Motion passed.

Designate Board Member to vote at VSBIT Annual Meeting

Seamus Abshire explained that VSBIT was the district insurance company. He asked if it was possible to send a superintendent to vote and Joe Clark stated that he would not be allowed to be a voter for the Board. Seamus Abshire asked if any member of the Board would want to volunteer to vote at the VSBIT Annual Meeting; which could be by Proxy. Seamus Abshire volunteered to vote on the assumption that it could be done by filling out the paperwork in advance, as Proxy. Emilee Hoffman moved to designate Seamus Abshire to vote, as their Board member, at the annual meeting. Dan Boyer seconded. No discussion. All in favor. Motion passed.

AGENDA DEVIATION - Revised Executive Limitation 2.4 Financial Condition and Activities (*Third Reading*)

Meaghan Emery shared a discussion that she had with two high school teachers while she was at an event outside of the state. The teachers she spoke with taught science and math and they all had a lengthy discussion about proficiency-based learning. She mentioned to the teachers how the Board was putting forward different language for the Ends Policy. The three of them talked about meritocracy and the teachers said it needed to be both. She explained the different types of learners and suggested that the Board think about that; to leave room for faculty in the schools to approach learners and to meet where they are at. She commented how we all need to be working, including the families, to support young people and to work towards rites of passage, which can be challenging. She felt the culture in schools should be supporting the full human being, as students grow at their own pace. She told the Board that she appreciated the emphasis being put back on rigor because she felt it was really important, but also supported the different paths that young people take, because everyone is different.

There were no comments.

Designate Board Member to vote at VSBA Annual Meeting

Seamus Abshire remembered that Elissa Galvez was interested in being designated as the Board member to vote at the VSBA Annual Meeting but was not currently in attendance. Seamus Abshire said he would entertain a motion to designate Elissa Galvez as the Board member to vote at the VSBA Annual Meeting. There was some discussion about designating someone when they are not present. A few Board members recalled how Elissa Galvez showed interest in being designated. Thomas Chittenden motioned that Elissa Galvez be designated as the Board member to vote at the VSBA Annual Meeting. Emilee Hoffman seconded the motion, contingent on the fact that Elissa Galvez would want to be designated. No discussion. All in favor. Motion passed.

Designate 3rd Board Member for Act 170 Merger Committee

Seamus Abshire provided a brief overview of Act 170, explaining how it basically tells certain school districts to work together and talk about merging, and to talk about whether it would be a good idea. The grouping that was assigned to South Burlington was with Burlington and Winooski. He continued to say that each school district was required to talk about merging as a committee, which would be facilitated by a group of facilitators at the state level. He explained how the composition of the Act 170 Merger Committee, by law, would be proportional to the weighted students in the district and said that since Burlington was the biggest district, they would get the most representatives with 5 members. South Burlington would need to have 3 members and Winooski would need to send either 1 or 2 members. Seamus Abshire stated that he had been in touch with the state coordinator and they asked the boards to nominate 1 primary member for the first set of committee meetings, which would not be a full committee yet since there would only be 1 member. The Board had already nominated him [Seamus Abshire] for the first role and a second member was nominated at a previous Board meeting. Seamus Abshire felt that it would be best to be prepared with this action item so the Board would not need to schedule it in the future should a third member be needed. Joe Clark mentioned that there had been some talk at some of the merger committees about how it would not be about having an equitable number of people but rather an equitable weight of vote. He said so when the committees have their first meetings, that might be what the discussions could be; the percentage of voting weight. Thomas Chittenden asked who the Board nominated as the second person and Dan Boyer raised his hand. Dan Boyer suggested waiting to nominate a third member until Joe Clark had more information about the voting piece. Joe Clark explained how the state folks know who has been nominated and how they would make sure a meeting happens by October 15 and at that meeting, Seamus Abshire and somebody from Winooski and somebody from Burlington would figure out what to do next. Dan Boyer suggested waiting to nominate a third member until after that first committee meeting so the Board would have all the information in order to make the right decision.

A resident from the audience asked if the Board would accept public comment on the topic and Seamus Abshire replied yes, since the meeting was warned with the action item but no action would be taking place. She introduced herself as Meaghan Emery and stated that she was a South Burlington resident, with a child in high school and two high school grads. She expressed her opinion, as she also did in an email to the Board, that Act 170 was a poorly crafted bill that would not save money and would actually jeopardize many programs in the school district. She explained how she was just trying to see the timeline. She was aware how the Board was waiting until the legislature came back together in January, to address the financial questions the bill raised. Her concerns were with the financial questions that the bill raised and how it would require this year's budgeting process to be crafted with those provisions in mind. Meaghan Emery asked the Board to provide the public with some notion of a timeline that they would be operating under and how the Board foresees this moving forward. Seamus Abshire said no comment. He explained how the Board only responded to comments during community forums but they could follow up after.

There were no comments.

Seamus Abshire stated that he would follow up with Joe Clark to make sure the Board would be on top of the timeline, since it was all new, in terms of letting the public know about how the Board would approach the matter.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Joe Clark presented a brief update on how implementation of the new cell phone expectations were going across the district. He explained how at the elementary level the transition had been very smooth, with both students and adults responding well to the policy. It was reported by staff that it remained fairly uncommon to see students using cell phones during the school day and when phones were brought to school, they were most often used on the bus before and after school, rather than during instructional time. Smartwatches occasionally required some attention, but families had been very responsive to requests that those devices be placed on school mode. He mentioned that overall, the elementary schools were reporting very few concerns related to implementation. Joe Clark continued to say that at the high school, they had the benefit of data that allowed them to compare this year with last year. During the 25-26 school year, the high school recorded 520 cell phone related office referrals involving 346 different students, with 102 of those violations occurring during the first 15 instructional days of school. This year, during the same first 15 instructional days, the high school recorded just 26 cell phone violations, representing approximately a 75% reduction. He felt that it was an encouraging start and also reflected the fact that the high school began the work before the state requirement went into effect. He noted how expectations had become increasingly consistent with teachers reinforcing those expectations. School leaders had reported that

students generally recognized the benefit of having fewer phone-related distractions during the school day. Joe Clark explained how the district was getting better at studying the data and how an important baseline was created last year by tracking through Google Forms. This year the district would be using Educlimber which would allow the district to look more closely at patterns by grade level, location, type of incident, repeat referrals and administrative responses. Joe Clark felt the overall message was positive and that they would continue monitoring the numbers throughout the year, keeping the Board informed as enough data became available to identify longer-term trends.

Charu Magar asked if staff were using their phones and Joe Clark replied that staff were not supposed to be using their phones during the school day either. There was some discussion on the use of walkie-talkies and students being better learners without phone distractions.

Thomas Chittenden asked if the school was taking phones from the kids to put them away. Joe Clark did not believe they were doing that anywhere in the district and that they really opted for the student to turn it off and to put it in the backpack or locker. There was a discussion about violations and how those would be treated and what the consequences would be. Emilee Hoffman mentioned how last year it was discussed that incidents were more of the older students than the younger students because the middle school had already adopted a new policy. She was hopeful that as the students moved up into high school that it would become more of a non-issue since those students were already accustomed to not having cell phones in school. There was a brief discussion of students using phones while on school buses and the overall bus environment.

There were no comments.

CONSENT AGENDA & PLANNING (Policy 4.3.3)

Seamus Abshire questioned why there was little on the consent agenda. Joe Clark explained, based on past meetings, that it appeared to be a timing matter.

Seamus Abshire asked if there were any objections to the consent agenda. Hearing no objections, the agenda passed by consent.

AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING

The Board set the agenda for the October 7, 2026, regular meeting and added the following items to the agenda:

- Monthly 2.4 Financial Condition and Activities Review (*Discussion Item*)
- Policy F4 - The Prevention of Harassment, Hazing, and Bullying of Students (*First Reading*)

- Ends Policy Update (*Third Reading*) (*Action Item*)
- Superintendent's Report:
 - SouthPoint Move
 - Strategic Plan
 - Budget Progress
- 2.3 Treatment of Community
- Policy D9 - Electronic Communications Between Employees and Students (*First Reading*)

Dan Boyer suggested adding Act 170 to the October 7 agenda. Thomas Chittenden thought it would be a good idea to bring it back to the Board in late October or early November; once more information from the state becomes available.

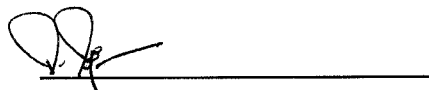
Joe Clark mentioned how he received feedback from the legislature related to CCCESA. Seamus Abshire stated he would like to hear more about it in a Superintendent's Report and Joe Clark said he could provide a report at the second meeting in October.

Seamus Abshire mentioned he just received an email from the statewide facilitator about Act 170 and merger committees were required to occur by October 15. He felt it would make sense to put a discussion item on the agenda for the second meeting in October to further discuss the timeline and any other outcomes from that meeting.

Emilee Hoffman questioned if the Board should start talking about the budget. Joe Clark explained how the central office leadership team had already had their first meeting and he would be involved with the Budgetpalooza tomorrow, where the principals and central office leadership team would tell him about the budget.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Seamus Abshire called for a motion to adjourn. Thomas Chittenden moved and Dan Boyer seconded. Motion carried unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 7:41 p.m.


Seamus Abshire, Chair
Dan Boyer, Acting Clerk