

**Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, January 26, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. in the lecture hall at Newtown High School.

Present:	L. Bittman, Chair	J. Robinson
	K. Fetchick, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
	D. Leidlein, Secretary	Approx. 140 Staff & Public
	D. Nanavaty	2 Press
	R. Gaines	
	W. Hart	
	C. Lagana	

Mrs. Bittman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Item 1 – Introduction of Superintendent’s Recommended Budget for 2010-2011

Dr. Robinson began her budget presentation by stating the objectives which include that within five years student performance on all standardized tests will be consistently among the top three districts in our reference group, that all students will develop and consistently demonstrate 21st century skills, and that all students will develop and consistently demonstrate the character attributes necessary for personal well-being and to be contributing members of the community.

We are implementing our strategic plan strategies and following the district mission that was developed from the work of that committee. We must balance the reality of a recession economy and quality education. The key budget drivers for 2010-2011 include student needs, shifting of enrollment to the upper grades, contractual obligations, energy costs, our transportation costs which are among the highest in the state, health insurance costs with a 23.9% increase, and decreased state funding.

Total certified staff reductions include 4.5 teaching positions in the elementary schools, 3.36 teaching positions in Reed Intermediate School and 2.3 teaching positions in the middle school. Non-certified staff reductions include 5 regular educational assistants in the elementary schools, 1 Project Adventure assistant at the middle school, 2 library clerk positions with 1 at Reed and 1 at the middle school, and 1 management level position at central office. There are no reductions at the high school because there is a need for increases in the number of courses required for graduation and increased population.

The approved budget for curriculum and instruction for 2009-2010 was 15.65% less than the previous year. Presently, our budget is frozen with 57% of the 2009-2010 curriculum and instruction budget not spent. The proposal for next year is 6.32% less amounting to \$27,935 less than this year's budget.

Dr. Robinson said that the principals' budgets reflected a 7.53% increase over last year. Her reductions reflect a 4.94% increase for a total of \$1,712,736.

Item 2 – Public Participation

Kinga Walsh, 21 Horseshoe Ridge, said she had four children in our schools and spoke about the importance of the after school programs at Reed Intermediate School.

Dr. Robinson said our core business is educating children. If there is a choice between cutting a teacher and after school programs it has to be the programs.

Kathryn Michaud, P.O. Box 332, Newtown, said that last year the teachers and administrators took a pay freeze. Last year the Board of Education offered a package to several in the administrators which included stipends and mileage. Where did the money come from for those packages and can we expect that again this year?

Dr. Robinson said those administrators were the first to volunteer freezes. At the end because of retirement issues the Board switched the freeze to a furlough. Those people made less money this year than last year.

Rose Ann Beck, 22 Bentagrass Lane, teaches Family and Consumer Science at the middle school. She implored the Board not to cut this course. It focuses on 21st century skills with real world application to everyday life. It teaches cooking and sewing but also nutrition and issues such as obesity.

Stacy Ohlin, Beacon Drive, asked what were the policy reasons to drop the program. Mrs. Bittman said that Dr. Robinson's request to drop a program is a policy decision. Ms. Ohlin asked why the program was being removed.

Dr. Robinson said the desire was not to remove the program but we looked at the rotation time. If we remove it from middle school the students still have the opportunity to take culinary and other courses at the high school. She is looking to see what she can do to preserve the classroom teachers. It is eliminating a program.

Debbie Isabella, 48 Great Quarter Road, has four children in the system and asked what after school activities from Reed and the middle school were being removed. Also, more students take home economics than culinary at the high school. Her children benefited from taking the course in the middle school.

Dr. Robinson did not know what activities were being removed. She told the principals that any activities that were not self-supporting would have to be eliminated.

Mark Mahoney, 18 Aunt Patty's Lane in Bethel, was a Newtown teacher and paid tuition for his daughter to attend schools here. His students were upset to find out that there would be no jazz band after school at Reed or the middle school.

Lisa Wallace, 43 Mile Hill South, asked about a possible full day kindergarten program. Freeing up \$200,000 would keep some teaching positions.

Dr. Robinson said that the cost of the mid-day bus runs is about \$288,000. Dr. Gejda has been researching the viability of a full day kindergarten program and that a parent survey would be in the *Bee*.

Heather Hilton, 2 Sealand Drive, commented on what Mark Mahoney said regarding having students exposed to the afterschool activities and what they go on to do in the high school. Regarding the insurance costs she felt we should look at other companies to compare costs.

Dr. Robinson said we are exploring a number of options including self-insurance and going out to bid.

Mary Ann Jacob, 65 Mohawk Trail, said she was a member of the Legislative Council but was speaking as a private citizen. She was impressed at the number of people at the meeting. The bottom line is the budget must pass the first time so everyone has to get out and vote.

Chris House, 8 Cherry Street, is a high school student. After school activities at Reed and the middle school are very important. Chorus and drama numbers are going down at the high school and if the after school activities are cut there will be less students involved.

Brian White, 69 Charter Ridge Drive, has been through the band program at Reed and the middle school and spoke about the marching band fund raisers. He asked the Board to consider the option of raising money instead of making these cuts.

George Primavera, 10 Galilee Way, is a junior at the high school and in the wind ensemble, chamber choir and drama. Cutting the drama programs at Reed and the middle school is a big mistake. It is important to get involved at an early age.

Sara Walton 36 Jeremiah Road, is in the winterguard at the high school and was concerned about not being able to practice after school in the middle school.

Dr. Robinson said that will not be affected because it is a high school activity.

Terry Scolora, Mountain View Drive, is a parent involved in the winterguard. She said it was a self-sufficient program. We need the Reed and middle schools to practice. Marching band had to practice in the band room at Reed and the Governor's Horse Guard area. Does cutting the afterschool programs mean they will have no place to practice?

Dr. Robinson said we are not closing these schools so the practices can take place. The issue is the cost of the afterschool programs.

Sue Bloom, 20 Rock Ridge Road, said she works in another school district and has been told that we have a drug problem here. Her children have been involved in the programs being eliminated and she is concerned about what students will do after 2:30 if there are no after school programs. The difficult economy makes it hard for families to pay for outside activities like dance and karate.

Christine Pfeiffer, The Boulevard, appreciates having the after school activities. Her son is in the middle school computer club. Consider the option of letting parents contribute. Think about other options.

Sarito Chandler, teaches Spanish at the middle school and she is concerned she will have classes with 28 and 29 students next year.

Martha Decker, 46 Cobblers Mill Road, supported the after school activities. She has two children in the middle school and they love these programs. We should look at the insurance costs to save money that can be put back to support the afterschool programs.

Tina Welsh, 4 King Street, is concerned about the rationale in cutting family and consumer science in the middle school. Her two children went through the high school and each year tried to get into the culinary program but were not able to. It's not the old home ec. program anymore. It addresses issues in our society.

Matt Jensen, 5 Mile Lane, is a high school student on the staff of the Hawkeye newspaper. He got his inspiration when he was in Reed and middle school. It is beneficial to be in the newspaper program. Leadership positions are available being involved in afterschool activities.

Chris Laroque, 42 Riverside Road, is on the Legislative Council but was speaking as a private citizen. He complimented the students on speaking to the Board. Regarding the afterschool program we should get creative in looking at different ways to make reductions.

Michelle Hankin, 16 Greenleaf Farms Road, asked why we had to make cuts today. Let the people decide. We were a blue ribbon high school and we used to have orchestra in third and fourth grade. How can we offer our kids a competitive school if we keep cutting? The clubs help students connect with others like themselves. We are being premature on cutting the budget. Let the taxpayers do that.

Carl Kraushaar, 8 Silver City Road, said if you want things back we need to send a message to the Legislative Council and Board of Selectmen. We need to tell them what we want and not to cut the budget.

Justin Vileneuve, Antler Pine, is on the Hawkeye staff. He asked how much we would be saving by cutting the afterschool programs.

Dr. Robinson said we would save \$102,000.

Leslie Bucino, 5 Diamond Drive, said she came from a town with no extracurricular activities. These children need something to do after school. She asked if we were contracting with the town to help with fuel costs.

Dr. Robinson said we belong to a consortium.

Ron Dufner, 21 Diamond Drive, asked if there were any cuts to the athletic program. He was sure that more of our students are entering the world with a scholastic or artistic swing to their life rather than athletics.

Peter Davenport, a high school freshman, asked if positions that are being cut would affect the courses he wants to take at the high school.

Nick Bucimo, 5 Diamond Drive, said he moved here from Vermont where they had no after school activities. He wishes he was in jazz band in the middle school. Now he is focusing on school and wants to have a career in music.

Phil Lyon, 4 North Branch Road, spoke on behalf of the family consumer science course which helps him in Boy Scouts. He was grateful for that course and hoped the Board would reconsider.

Amy Kung, 2 Lafayette Trail, asked if the Board was considering cutting athletics. Dr. Robinson said the stipends for afterschool activities encompass those.

Mark Mahoney asked why there were no cuts at the high school. Dr. Robinson said the high school has been short on teachers for some time. We have a need for more especially because of the increasing course load requirements. Students can't take courses they need because there aren't enough teachers. The high school has a higher enrollment. There is no change in class size in the elementary grades with the declining enrollment.

Sue Primavera, 2 Galilee Way, has four children. One son had difficulty with academics but had joy in the home ec. course and the middle school play last year.

BJ Liberty, teacher in the middle school, asked the time frame for getting the insurance amount and for putting items back in the budget. Regarding the assistant in the middle school library she feels it cannot be run with only one person.

Dr. Robinson said we put health insurance in the budget at 15% and believe it will go down from 23.9%. Our open enrollment is May so we will have a better idea then.

Mike Cummings, 98 Glen Road, asked if the teachers paid into the medical plan. Dr. Robinson said they paid 18% for their insurance.

Mr. Cummings said his company changed plans many times to try to get better benefits and asked if the school system felt the same frustration. Dr. Robinson said we absolutely did.

Item 3 – Plant Operations and Maintenance

Mrs. Fetchick asked if projects would be added if we got the grants we expected.

Dr. Robinson said they would not.

Dr. Robinson spoke about having a cafeteria for Hawley School. A lot of repairs have been done to the room downstairs. Mr. Faiella spoke to the Fire Marshal and there is a possibility of putting in a cafeteria for 100 students. She wants to talk to Bob Tait to see if the Hawley Fund would pay for it.

Mr. Nanavaty noted discrepancies on page 78 of the budget book which did not match the handout given the Board.

Mr. Faiella noted the incorrect information.

Mr. Gaines asked about handicapped accessibility in the lower level of Hawley.

Mr. Faiella said the building is not ADA compliant but we should be able to use that space.

Mr. Gaines said we should expect students to be able to go to the cafeteria.

Dr. Robinson said there is an area above it that can be a small eating area. When special needs students reach the upper grades they would have to go to another school. Head O'Meadow and Sandy Hook Schools are ADA compliant.

Mr. Faiella said it was too expensive to put in an elevator in Hawley.

Mr. Nanavaty asked if anyone has done a survey to see if Hawley is happy with the current situation. We are looking at \$70,000 if not paid by the Hawley Fund. That money could put back for after school activities.

Dr. Robinson said Chartwells wants to have a meeting regarding a cafeteria at Hawley.

Mr. Nanavaty asked if Chartwells would be willing to donate some equipment.

Mrs. Bittman asked if there was a cap from the Hawley Fund.

Mr. Nanavaty said he didn't think there was a cap but it was created for specific purposes. We have to find out what they will provide funds for.

Mrs. Bittman asked Dr. Robinson to get that information.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if we could get an estimate from Chartwells.

Mrs. Bittman asked for the number of lightning hits we have had in the buildings.

Item 4 – Special CIP Discussion and Possible Vote

Mrs. Bittman said they spoke to the Board of Finance at their meeting Monday night about the air quality re-testing for the carbon dioxide levels. The test conducted on January 15 at the middle school was slightly higher than the test in 2001. Mr. Faiella is working on having computers tie into the fan system to circulate the air from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. and arrange for the middle school to be re-tested. Monday morning we met with Mark Granville and when he learned that we wanted to test the whole building we would have to bring in another company to help. We have \$350,000 in year one for the Hawley design project for new boilers. The Board of Finance did not vote last night and will wait to hear from us after we get the air quality report. This is not a health issue. It means the students could get tired in class. She would like the Board to agree to that tonight. Also, we should do the same kind of spot test in each school.

Mrs. Fetchick said we should test the other schools to get a baseline. She was interested in having Dr. Granville talk to the Board and maybe hear from Donna Culbert on any health effects for the children. She read that the performance of children in the classrooms can be affected by the amount of carbon dioxide.

Mr. Hart said increased carbon dioxide indicates poor ventilation. He would like a definitive statement regarding the legal and code requirements for air quality.

Dr. Robinson said there are none. OSHA affects the teachers, not the students. There needs to be a safety committee in the schools. They look at air quality and other safety issues.

Mr. Nanavaty asked the cost for the testing.
Mr. Faiella said it was \$800.

Mr. Nanavaty asked what the Board's plan was when we received the results. What if the Head O'Meadow levels are high? Until we get to 5000 parts per million that will get us to look seriously at air quality. We haven't spoken to teachers in these classrooms regarding the attitude or behavior of the students. Do we intend to look at this situation seriously or are we only trying to appease another board to get our CIP approved? He is more concerned about the air quality study at Hawley School where the students sit in one room all day and also eat their lunch there. The middle school students change rooms every 45 minutes. We have a duty to protect their health. We need to know our final objective. If there are not issues at the middle school then we should move forward with the CIP we passed. We have to have a plan on what to do if we have problems in any of the schools.

Mr. Hart said we should focus on re-testing at the middle school and then make a decision.

Mr. Gaines said middle school testing will give us a baseline which is also what we should do in the other schools.

Mr. Nanavaty said we have to be prepared to act on the baselines we get from all of the schools.

Mrs. Bittman said the facilities subcommittee will also look at this.

Mr. Nanavaty said he looked at the previous CIPs and minutes of the Board of Finance and Legislative Council. Originally Hawley and the middle school were scheduled to have design costs in the CIP at the same time. When the middle school expansion was brought up the Board of Finance wanted to look at the middle school roof project and expansion to achieve a cost savings. The Board of Finance acted and put everything out a year. We put the middle school project out two years and we went ahead with Hawley which didn't go though. Then we had the high school project. All the boards in town worked toward delaying what is now a concern for the Board of Finance.

Mrs. Bittman asked for a motion to temporarily have one CIP line item on hold until the air quality test is complete.

MOTION: Mr. Hart moved to re-evaluate the Hawley School project in the Board of Education CIP after we get the middle school test data on or before the February 4, 2010 meeting. Mr. Gaines seconded.

Mr. Faiella said we will have the test data this coming Monday.
Mrs. Bittman said it will be discussed at the meeting on Tuesday.

Mrs. Fetchick asked the status of the Hawley fans.
Mr. Faiella said they run on a time schedule from 5:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Mrs. Fetchick said she doesn't want to rush the process to make the February 8 Board of Finance meeting when they said they were willing to hold off on that item. If we get to February 4 and don't have all the information in place she suggests we wait and vote when we have all the data.

Mr. Nanavaty said we aren't rushing the process. Another board criticized our decision based on erroneous information. We were asked to re-look at our decision. We could probably do this by February 2.

Mr. Hart said the reason Hawley was put on high priority was because of the boilers, not the HVAC.

MOTION: Mr. Hart moved to amend his motion to change it to the February 2, 2010 meeting. Mr. Gaines seconded his amendment. Vote: 7 ayes

MOTON: Mrs. Fetchick moved to adjourn. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 5 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 p.m.

Questions raised:

- Eligibility of Hawley Funds
- Estimate from Charwells on Hawley cafeteria
- Number of lightning hits at each school

Respectfully submitted:

Debbie Leidlein
Secretary