

PLEASE NOTE: These minutes have not been approved by the Board of Education.

**Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, June 15, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. in the board room at 3 Primrose Street.

L. Bittman	J. Robinson
K. Fetchick, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
D. Leidlein, Secretary	D. Raymo
D. Nanavaty	30 Staff
R. Gaines	20 Public
W. Hart	3 Press
C. Lagana	

Mrs. Bittman called the meeting to order at 7:36 p.m.

Item 1 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved that the Board of Education approve the consent agenda which included the minutes of June 1 and June 8, 2010, the \$1,500 scholarship donation to Newtown High School from the Compass Group, the donation of \$500 to Sandy Hook School to be used in the special education program, the resignation of Ellen Therrien, teacher at Middle Gate School, the resignation of Mary Faith Zanghi, teacher at Reed Intermediate School, and the \$2,000 nutrition grant to the district from the Compass Group. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 2 – Public Participation

Jill Bontatabus-Beaudry, 36 Queen Street, and a teacher at the Reed School, asked to move the budget to the first item under old business in terms of jobs and cuts for the teachers attending the meeting.

Robin Fitzgerald, 24 Old Farm Hill Road, offered congratulations on passage of the budget. The public came together and gained a measure of respect because Newtown sent a message that education is important. She requested that all education funds be kept within the classrooms. After school activities are very important to children. Taxpayer money should be used in the classrooms. Parents can help pay for the sports. Regarding administration and non-union salaries, if everyone is taking a pay cut they should also.

Michele Hankin, 16 Greenleaf Farms Road, said that five years ago the high school was put on warning and she was worried about the long term future of our schools. The current seventh grade class is the second largest class. She is worried about students not being able to get the classes they need. There could be a savings in transportation with private schools riding the same buses. Continuing Education is \$130,000 and asked if it could partially be self-funding. She asked if we could save money on interscholastic sports at the high school and if there was a way to have pay to play stay in the Board of Education budget and use the money that would go to the Town. She spoke about Susan Ruddock, an incredible teacher at Head O'Meadow School, whose job was at stake and didn't want to lose her.

Dina Lago, 17 Taunton Lake Road, said that regarding the eighth grade award ceremony there are many students who participate in afterschool activities and she hoped to keep them.

Chris Laroque, 42 Riverside Road, spoke as a private citizen. He said the middle school driveway was an added cost that was not in the Board of Education budget. He was glad to see a surplus of \$100,000 in the last financial report and did not want our surplus to be spent on large budget items.

Mrs. Bittman clarified that we were talking about this year's budget.

Mr. Nanavaty asked to table the evaluation of the superintendent because of the complex agenda. It could be moved to the July meeting to which all agreed.

Item 3 – Reports

Correspondence: Mrs. Leidlein said the Board received correspondence from Karen Pierce regarding Valentines for the Troops at the middle school, Fran Maturo regarding the GATES program and the Family and Consumer Science course at the middle school, Po Murray on the budget vote, Elise Romanik and Lisa Pruner regarding preserving the cluster at the middle school, and a letter from John Kortze regarding the middle school driveway paving costs.

Mrs. Bittman said she received a letter from Jeff Capeci regarding hopes that the Town and Board of Education work together to save money. She also received a personal email from Sandy Hook School regarding not taking the library media specialists out of the budget.

Chair report: Mrs. Bittman said she attended a joint meeting with Dr. Robinson, the Town and the new insurance consultant this week. She feels this will be good for the Town and Board of Education.

Superintendent's Report: Dr. Robinson reported that the middle school moving up ceremony was the night before with 3,000 people in attendance. High School graduation is this Thursday night and the staff is working with the seniors to have the ceremony be more respectful minus the inflatables. We had to pay an additional \$500 last year to Wesconn for extra time to clean up after the ceremony. We expect 4,000 attending this year.

We have scheduled our administrator's retreat for July 27 and 28 which will focus on teamwork and professional learning communities. Our new teacher induction is scheduled for August 23 -27.

The enrollment report shows a slight decline since September but having 33 seniors graduate mid-year shows a slight increase the second half.

Dr. Robinson said she attended a Newtown PAC meeting which is for parents who have children with special needs. The conversation was on things that concerned them.

Policy Committee: Mrs. Fetchick said they have started the community relations section and would be meeting this week.

Facilities Committee: Mr. Hart said there was no report.

MOTION: Mr. Lagana moved to approve the financial report for the month ending May 31, 2010 and technology purchases as discussed. Mr. Gaines seconded.

Mr. Nanavaty asked about the technology purchases.

Dr. Robinson said in the financial report summary we are forecasting a balance. We have had a request from the middle school for three Smartboards for a total of \$13,500 and 20 Enos for the high school for a total of \$62,010.

Mrs. Fetchick said since we have a deficit in the budget for next year why would we use any surplus from this year.

Dr. Robinson said we can't carry a surplus.

Mrs. Fetchick said if we purchase the Reed computers this year we would add money into next year's budget. Why isn't that an option?

Dr. Robinson said we left the Reed technology in next year's budget.

Mrs. Leidlein wanted the proposal for the budget before making this decision.

Mr. Nanavaty said we also haven't addressed the \$90,000 for the middle school paving and questioned the Reed computers which are on his cut list. He will see computers go before he sees teachers go.

Mr. Hart asked if these items were in the Superintendent's budget.

Dr. Robinson said they were but taken out in first round of cuts.

Mrs. Raymo clarified that the middle school paving cost was encumbered because we anticipated that need.

Mrs. Fetchick said she didn't want to discuss the technology purchases and the middle school paving until we know next year's budget. She could not find the paving in the 2009-2010 budget or CIP and was surprised to hear about it now. The facilities committee has not discussed it either.

Mr. Nanavaty said he wasn't surprised and had commented to Mr. Faiella on what to do about the driveway. We have buses entering the driveway and we've let it go for awhile.

Mrs. Raymo said she anticipated it because Dr. Robinson and Mr. Faiella discussed it before she prepared the financial report. There is a total amount of \$122,566 that we haven't spent.

Mrs. Fetchick mentioned the financial report was missing the budget summary report. Mr. Hart said he would still like to see a column with the last month's information.

Mrs. Bittman asked if we approved this report it does not approve the \$90,000 for the paving.

Mrs. Raymo said that was correct. The technology purchases were not encumbered.

MOTION: Mr. Hart moved to amend the existing motion to approve the financial report for the month ending May 31, 2010. Mrs. Fetchick seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 4 – Old Business

Newtown High School Expansion Project: Dr. Robinson said we are still two weeks behind and gave a status report on items provided by Mr. Faiella who stated the full project should be complete by February 1, 2011.

Approve Early Release Day:

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved that the Board of Education approve instituting an early release day every month for the scheduling of school team meetings beginning with the start of the 2010-2011 school year. Mr. Lagana seconded.

Dr. Robinson cited her reasons for having the early release day each month. A high priority goal of the principals is developing professional learning communities. This lets the teachers discuss student work. It is impossible to have these in the high school. By adding 10 minutes over two years to the school day it allows for 20 hours over the course of the year. The purpose of this time is for collaboration.

Mr. Nanavaty asked about the furlough days this year.

Dr. Robinson said we went from 183 to 180 days.

Mr. Nanavaty said next year we are giving those three days back to the teachers. He is looking at some way to achieve what she wants and also see some cost savings such as buses and support staff. He doesn't see a savings from the early release days.

Dr. Robinson said it represents some valuable time at no cost.

Mrs. Leidlein said this is a high priority for the high school but the other schools have been meeting. She asked if it was possible to just have this for the high school.

Dr. Robinson said the other schools are able to schedule some professional learning community time but we have not been able to bring the grade levels together between schools.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if we had data from other school districts to see if this type of collaboration was useful. We do have professional development days.

Dr. Robinson said there is research on PLCs in terms of school improvement. If we are going to make this a cohesive school system we have to have time for our teachers to talk to each other. Freeing up teachers during the day would be expensive because we would have to use subs.

Mr. Lagana said we should have some sort of accountability and result from this collaboration.

Mrs. Leidlein said she supported collaboration but wanted to vote on this after the final budget.

Mr. Hart said collaboration was essential and he supported this. It should be built in at a fixed time.

Mrs. Bittman thought this was a brilliant way to solve the problem. This is not a budget issue at this point. She feels strongly to get our grade schools together and hoped we would go forward with it.

Mrs. Leidlein agreed.

This discussion was postponed until later in the meeting.

Lunch Price Increases:

MOTION: Mr. Hart moved that the Board of Education approve the lunch price increases for the 2010-2011 school year. Mr. Nanavaty seconded.

Mr. Nanavaty said the reports from Chartwells shows the costs have exceeded their revenues. With this 25 cent increase we are moving into the plus column.

Mrs. Fetchick would like assurances that if we add money this year we won't have this discussion again.

Mrs. Raymo said this has to be reviewed each year. We try to stay within our budget but everything has gone up.

Mr. Nanavaty said if the Board approves this then the burden is on Chartwells to provide a profit. Expenses have not taken a downturn.

Mrs. Fetchick wanted to be sure they were trying to save and not put the whole burden on the students.

Mr. O'Donnell of Chartwells said they are looking at any way they can to make a savings.

Mrs. Leidlein asked what would happen if there was a loss in 2010.

Mr. O'Donnell said they would guarantee the number up to our fees. The loss this year is below our fees so they are absorbing the loss. We guarantee to break even next year.

Mrs. Leidlein asked the dollar amount.

Mr. O'Donnell said they cover up to a \$25,000 loss.

Mrs. Leidlein asked what would happen if we were at \$100,000 next year.

Mr. O'Donnell said that would have to be negotiated in the next contract.

Mrs. Leidlein said she wanted protection from a large shortfall.

Mr. O'Donnell said with their labor reductions and cost increases he feels they would be in good shape.

Vote: 7 ayes

Approve Chartwells Contract:

Mr. David said this is a five-year contract which is renewed each year. We are in the second year so we are just continuing the present contract.

Mrs. Raymo said State law requires us to renew the existing contract.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved that the Board of Education approve the Chartwells contract for the 2010-2011 school year. Mr. Gaines seconded.

Mrs. Leidlein said she would not vote because she hasn't seen the contract.

Mr. Lagana said it was not realistic to vote on something we haven't seen.

Mrs. Bittman said the vote would be delayed until the end of the meeting. Copies of the contract would be provided for them to review.

Discussion and Possible Vote on 2010-2011 Budget:

Dr. Robinson said we had to add back certain items that would increase the amount of infrastructure cuts to \$1.7M.

After the first of June there were changes and we recalculated unemployment compensation. She recommended deferring maintenance items for \$227,000 and left in the planned replacement of computers at Reed. Bob Tait would be setting up a fund for pay to play and the money will stay with the Board.

Mr. Nanavaty said in the following year we should think about keeping all our generated fees.

Dr. Robinson said the pay to play fees at the high school were \$50 and \$100 and recommends going up \$100 with a family cap. The middle school and Reed fees are the same.

Mr. Nanavaty asked the plan for collection if students don't pay.

Dr. Robinson said the payment will have to be taken care of before the child plays.

Mr. Nanavaty asked if everyone would have to pay the same for each activity.

Dr. Robinson said we would have to determine the costs and look at each activity and cap the amount at \$450 per year. We also need to establish a scholarship fund to help those who cannot afford the fees.

Mrs. Bittman said if we acted on these activities she would like the administration to come back to be sure one activity isn't grossly affected. A regulation would be needed.

Dr. Robinson said that would be developed.

Mr. Hart asked if we would calculate the amount we send to the town on what was budgeted or would they get what actually comes in.

Dr. Robinson said we would give them what they projected this year.

Mr. Hart was concerned that this was something the school board could do.

Mrs. Raymo said we would have to set up proper accounting practices.

Mr. Hart says the State law says we have to appoint a treasurer that has to be bonded.

Dr. Robinson went over staff reductions which included system wide eliminating extra days for math, reading and library specialists, 1.3 EAs at Hawley, .86 EA at Middle Gate, .86 EA at Head O'Meadow but adding a .5 kindergarten teacher there, a .86 EA at Sandy Hook and a second grade teacher there, a 1.0 EA at Reed School and two teachers there, at the middle school the family and consumer science teacher, a computer teacher and four grade 7 cluster teachers, there was nothing at the high school, 1 tech specialist, a .86 bus driver and move an elementary psychologist to the IDEA grant for a total of \$746,337 in reductions. We have exceeded the required reduction by \$180,543.

Mrs. Bittman asked the total on pay for play.
Mrs. Raymo said it was \$168,318.

Mr. Hart asked about the Reed gate.
Dr. Robinson said she recommended that we do that work.

Mr. Lagana asked if the PTA put up the playground.
Mrs. Bittman said this was the basketball area outside the cafeteria.

Mrs. Leidlein said the total for all staff reductions was \$311,019. Anticipated surplus and money for technology would come close to cover those staff reductions.

Mr. Lagana asked what we could do to carry over the surplus.
Dr. Robinson said we can't carry over surplus.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if we could purchase technology now for next year. Mrs. Raymo said that we could.

Mr. Hart doesn't like changing our priority list such as adding the middle school paving. He would want to look at what we approved in February.

Mrs. Leidlein said our priority all along was to keep our staff.
Mr. Hart said he would prefer to buy the Reed computers by June 30.

Dr. Robinson said the reason the middle school paving came up was because over the winter we temporarily patched areas but it became worse. Bus drivers were also complaining.

Mr. Nanavaty said the Town has helped us in the past.
Dr. Robinson said they are helping us with this also. The \$90,000 is the cost and they are supplying the labor.

Mr. Nanavaty asked how sure we were with this surplus. He asked Mrs. Raymo if she would feel comfortable if we took the \$100,000 and purchased half of the Reed computers.

Mrs. Raymo said we would encumber that money and watch everything else.

Mr. Nanavaty said whenever we needed technology and couldn't afford to do it in one full year we split it up. If we are saving staff I don't see why we don't do that.

Mrs. Bittman said she felt strongly that it has to be a balancing act between staff and computers which are also very important for the students.

Dr. Robinson said that regarding computer replacement we plan to replace one-seventh each year with the plan to replace Reed this year. The tech department is working to keep them running but we are getting behind because there are major problems with the computers at Sandy Hook. We almost can't afford not to replace some of the computers next year.

Mr. Hart suggested the possibility of buying the Reed computers out of this budget and do the middle school paving next summer.

Dr. Robinson thought that was a good idea.

Mr. Gaines thought it would be better not to do the middle school driveway until the roof work was completed.

Mr. Hart suggested keeping the Reed gate.

Mrs. Bittman wanted to keep the high school visitor bleachers.

Mrs. Raymo said we have \$213,000 for the Reed computers and monitors. If we do the middle school driveway next year we still have \$90,000 left.

Mr. Hart said to leave it as a surplus and return it to the town.

Mrs. Fetchick asked about the Head O'Meadow classroom wall.

Mr. Faiella said we closed a section of a wall there this year. He felt that \$30,000 was an accurate cost.

Mr. Hart asked if it could be done this summer. Mr. Faiella said it could.

Mr. Hart prefers to leave us a little pad this year. We talked about moving the middle school driveway repair to next summer. Would the roof and driveway conflict?

Mr. Faiella said they wouldn't but he would have to do some work on the driveway this summer.

Mrs. Bittman said if we are redoing our high school stadium we would need good visitor bleachers.

Mr. Faiella said the cost would be \$20,000 over three years for a total of \$60,000.

Mrs. Leidlein said for next year she would like to see additional teachers at the high school for social studies and foreign language.

Mr. Hart said for next year we should bring world language to Reed.

Mr. Nanavaty said we are cutting EAs which are an important addition to our teachers. He doesn't want people to think eliminating teachers was a smoke screen. We have seen over \$400,000 in early retirement which saved a lot of teachers. By eliminating EA's and three other areas we have positions we are not filling, we have been able to save the teachers we projected we would have to let go.

Mr. Hart also noted receiving the \$200,000 from the Legislative Council.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if we still had an emergency repair fund.
Mrs. Raymo said we did not cut that fund.

Mrs. Fetchick said this year we had restricted the overtime account and asked if we were going to have something in place to not have as much as we have had in the past.
Mrs. Raymo said we were and the effort was to close that gap.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved that the Board of Education purchase in this current fiscal year the replacement computers for Reed Intermediate School for \$213,300. Mr. Hart seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

MOTION: Mr. Gaines move that the Board of Education defer the middle school driveway repair to fiscal year 2011-2012. Mrs. Fetchick seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Mr. Hart said it would be good to return some money to the town.
Mr. Nanavaty asked what amount he was looking for.
Mr. Hart said \$100,000.

Mr. Nanavaty said as we get closer to the end of the fiscal year and we can come up with \$200,000 he would then consider allowing them to spend the \$75,000. We could make a motion to authorize the Superintendent to be able to purchase the Smartboards and Enos for \$75,510.

Mrs. Bittman said she would only agree if we had a surplus amount in the motion.

Mrs. Leidlein said that would be after purchasing the RIS computers.
Mrs. Fetchick said she prefers to leave it as is and give the surplus back.
Mr. Hart suggested just buying the Smartboards for \$13,500.

Mrs. Fetchick said we may also have expenses for this year that come in past June.
Mrs. Raymo said that was correct and we were estimating the utilities now.

Mrs. Bittman said she wanted to give Dr. Robinson some flexibility in using surplus funds. Voters wanted this money spent on education.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if we wanted to give \$100,000 to the Town and only had \$75,000 left due to the extra end of the year bills would that come from the \$100,000?

Mrs. Raymo said we would have to give back the \$100,000.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved that the Board of Education give the Superintendent discretion to purchase Smartboards for the middle school and Enos for the high school maintaining a \$100,000 surplus not to exceed \$75,500. Mr. Hart seconded.
Vote: 6 ayes, 1 nay (Mrs. Fetchick)

MOTION: Mr. Hart moved that the Board of Education approve the modified budget as presented on the spreadsheet. Mr. Nanavaty seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Dr. Gejda spoke about the importance of the early release day for teacher collaboration. Mr. Gaines asked Jo-Ann Peters about how this would affect Hawley School because they release sooner than the other three elementary schools.

Mrs. Peters said that with the early release time we would have building-based time so the teachers could meet with their own grade level meetings and then go to the district meetings.

Dr. Gejda said we would ask Hawley to meet at the other schools.

Mrs. Peters said it would be a longer day for the Hawley staff. The district based meetings would probably take place one-third of the time.

Mr. Gaines said there is a savings advantage of not having students in school on professional development days. Maybe one or two could be full days.

Mr. Nanavaty said if we have the early release day it shouldn't stop there. We are adding additional time to the school day so if we had the three additional days without students it won't affect the total school day. He hoped there was a way to report back to us to show it was working.

Mrs. Bittman agreed.

Mrs. Fetchick said collaboration is important to teachers. She was concerned about taking away learning time from the students. She wanted to see some type of study talking about how this helps.

Dr. Robinson said we have been sending people to training on PLCs. The high school is having training this summer. Administrators sit in or visit these PLCs and discuss student work. This determines how they would teach.

Mrs. Peters said we have been wanting this for years and asked the Board to seriously consider this.

Mr. Dumais said the inability to do this on a monthly basis would make it difficult to be an effective program. We just don't have the time.

MOTION: Mr. Hart moved to amend the motion to require a quarterly report from the Assistant Superintendent. Mr. Lagana agreed. Vote: 7 ayes

MOTION: Mr. Hart moved that the Board of Education approve instituting an early release day every month for the scheduling of school team meetings beginning with the start of the 2010-2011 school year and to include quarterly status reports to the Board of Education by the Assistant Superintendent of Schools. Mr. Lagana seconded.

Vote: 7 ayes

Chartwells Contract for 2010-2011 School Year:

Mrs. Fetchick said she would like to see any contract pages with changes.

Mrs. Raymo said she would email any changes.

Vote: 7 ayes

Item 5 – New Business

Mrs. Leidlein read the email from John Kortze.

Mr. Lagana said it sounded like we could carry over surplus.

Mrs. Fetchick said Bob Tait said we could create an account to carry money over.

Mr. Lagana asked for clarification if we can get money back.

Mrs. Leidlein agreed that we need clarification.

Mr. Hart suggested contacting the Board attorney.

Mr. Nanavaty agreed.

Dr. Robinson said we cannot carry over surplus money.

Mr. Gaines said Mr. Kotze could have been referring to the Town surplus.

Dr. Robinson said she spoke to Bob Tait and he explained to Mr. Kortze that we cannot have a surplus. The only way is if the Town gets the surplus and agrees that the money can be given back to us.

Mr. Hart asked if we needed a motion to set up the new activity fees account.

Dr. Robinson said we would just write a regulation.

Mrs. Leidlein asked what would happen if all of the Town boards agreed to carry money into the next year.

Mrs. Raymo said if there was money left over they could increase our budget for the next year.

Mr. Nanavaty said we have to decide what benefit we would receive from doing this. Even if the Town were willing to hold our money before we could spend it we would need the approval of the Legislative Council which violates state law.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved that on behalf of the Newtown Board of Education pursuant to section 10-215f of the Connecticut General Statutes, I hereby certify that all food items offered for sale to students in the school (s) under our jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education will not meet said standards during the period of July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011. Such certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to, school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, and any fundraising activities on school premises, whether or not school sponsored.

Mr. Hart seconded.

Mr. Lagana asked for clarification.

Dr. Robinson said if a district chooses the healthy food option they would get five cents per meal reimbursement from the state but would have to adhere to acceptable items in vending machines, no cupcakes in classroom, no bake sales, and no food on the list at the snack bars. This is something we have to vote on every year. She recommends that Newtown opt out. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 6 – Public Participation

Robin Fitzgerald, 24 Old Farm Hill Road, asked if the budget could be put on the website with the final cuts from the beginning. She complimented the Board on a great job.

Charles Hepp, 4 Winter Ridge Road, said the notion of giving \$90,000 back to the Town is frustrating. Should use that money to reimburse teachers for buying their own supplies and for taking the furlough days. If you go to \$150 and \$200 for pay to play those fees would be the highest in the state.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to go into executive session for non-union salaries and invited Dr. Robinson. Mr. Lagana seconded.
Mrs. Fetchick said she has asked for a list of administrator and non-union salaries.
Vote: 6 ayes, 1 nay (Mrs. Fetchick)

Item 7 – Executive Session

Executive session began at 11:35 p.m.

Item 8 – Possible Vote from Executive Session

Motion: Mrs. Fetchick moved that the Board of Education award non-union salaries 0% increase for the 2010-2011 school year. Mrs. Leidlein seconded.
Vote: 2 ayes, 5 nays (Mr. Nanavaty, Mr. Hart, Mr. Gaines, Mr. Lagana, Mrs. Bittman)
The motion failed.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to adjourn. Mr. Nanavaty seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 9 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:17 a.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Debbie Leidlein
Secretary