

**Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, October 18, 2011 in the board room at 3 Primrose Street.

W. Hart, Chair	J. Robinson
D. Leidlein, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
A. Buzzi, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
D. Nanavaty	8 Staff
L. Bittman	15 Public
R. Gaines (absent)	2 Press
K. Alexander	

Mr. Hart called the meeting to order at 7:38 p.m. and asked to remove the minutes from the consent agenda.

Item 1 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Buzzi moved that the Board of Education approve the consent agenda which included the High School Junior State Club trips for this year, the Newtown High School Band and Chorus trip to Virginia Beach, Virginia in May, and the donation of \$2,500 to Middle Gate School. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 6 ayes

MOTION: Mr. Buzzi moved to approve the minutes of October 4, 2011. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 5 ayes, 1 abstained (Mr. Nanavaty)

Item 2 – Public Participation – none

Item 3 – Reports

Newtown International Center for Education (N.I.C.E.):

Jason Hiruo spoke about N.I.C.E. which is supported by an annual grant through the Hanban-Confucious Classroom Network and the College Board. He recently received notification that we have one of the top 50 programs in the United States. We are also recognized by the United Nations as the number one program in Connecticut. High School students Abby Doski, Marina Leonart- Calvo and David Swigart spoke about the program's impact on them as students.

Mr. Hiruo thanked Dr. Robinson for her guidance in this program. It's phenomenal and there is no cost for the district.

Mr. Nanavaty reminded the Board that the Superintendent brought this program to Newtown.

Dr. Robinson said the Board embraced the concept and Mr. Hiruo and the teachers make it all happen. There is much community interest and a waiting list for host families. Mr. Hiruo stated PBS offered to do a national documentary on the program and will be here in January. They also talked of meeting us in Liaocheng.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if we were looking to have the same types of programs with the existing languages.

Mr. Hiruo felt it would be very easy to develop programs with other countries.

Dr. Robinson stated she, Mr. Hiruo and Mr. Dumais were going to Shanghai in December to solidify their partnership.

Correspondence:

Mr. Buzzi said the Board received correspondence from Maggie Conway, Karen Pierce, and Kathy Huffman.

Chair Report:

Mr. Hart attended a PTA President's meeting and sent a response to the correspondence from John Kortze. He was attending a CAFE conference Wednesday.

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Robinson had been asked to research the cost of having a .32 rotation teacher at Reed which would be for periods one and six where we now have Asian music. World language is a shortage area with fewer candidates available.

Dr. Gejda said we have attempted to have an afterschool program at Reed for the students who returned from the magnet school for sixth grader but the schedules don't allow it.

Dr. Robinson stated that the effect of fewer hours of EA support varies by school depending on how the principal and staff prioritized the hours. For some it's harder to have coverage for lunch and duties, some have less remedial support and some have less help with back up activities such as preparing materials for class.

Dr. Robinson mentioned Dr. Jeffrey Fagan who is a 1996 Newtown High School graduate who received the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers on October 14 in Washington, D.C. This is the highest honor from the U.S. government for science and engineering professionals in the early stages of their independent research careers.

The middle school roof ribbon cutting was held on Monday. The last pieces to close out project should be finished by the end of this week. It has been a very positive experience.

Mrs. Leidlein said regarding the language teacher, we put money aside for unemployment for EAs in the amount of \$71,000 so there is some money available. She wants to know the original hours for each EA position and wants more detailed input from the schools.

Mr. Nanavaty said these were the results of the reductions by the Board of Finance and Legislative Council.

Mrs. Leidlein stated some of the blame sits here. When we deliberated the budget and eliminate the high school assistant principal she asked to use that money for the EAs.

Mr. Nanavaty was trying to make clear that during any budget reductions there will be some pain. Dr. Robinson asked the high school principal where reductions would be made. We were able to provide jobs for EAs who were laid off.

Mrs. Bittman said we made that choice comparing us to other towns in our DRG. It was not a decision made to hurt a group.

Mrs. Leidlein said the EAs were originally in our budget but the science teacher wasn't. If we were overextended in the EA department, then why were they there?

Dr. Robinson stated that unbeknownst to us and the Bureau Chief of Special Education it was our turn for a parent survey for satisfaction regarding special education. We weren't aware we were being surveyed but it is valuable to read the comments.

Mr. Nanavaty said we need improvement in parent training and support and we also didn't supply translators.

Dr. Robinson stated that we need to revitalize our effort to get parents involved in training.

Mrs. Leidlein was concerned with #6 and #8 which addresses meeting educational needs and having staff appropriately trained. That may come back to accountability by staff to meet the child's education plan. She asked if she and Dr. Regan came up with an action plan to make sure we address the areas parents feel they aren't part of the education process and that their child's needs aren't being met.

Common Core of State Standards:

Dr. Gejda spoke about the common core of state standards which were adopted in July 2010 as part of the state application of Race to the Top funding. The standards are in English/Language Arts, mathematics and literacy in history/social studies, science and technical subjects. There has been major work being carried on in the areas of curriculum and assessment.

In the summer of 2010 content specialists compared Newtown curriculum against the state and developed plans. We adopted the national writing standards as the basis for our student writing work on district PLC days. Math and literacy groups worked on drafts that were not released until during the school year.

During the summer of 2011 teachers attended workshops on the new standards and are using the transition document to guide our work. Grade level teachers in grades K-4 are meeting with math coaches to familiarize themselves with the changes they need to make in their curriculum this year. Literacy teams are reviewing book lists, reading comprehension is focusing on higher order questions on text-based responses that require students to give facts but also to infer from the reading they are doing.

Students are still accountable to the CMTs. The State assessment will remain the same for now. Our challenge is to provide the classroom instructional material needs and to have adequate time at the kindergarten level for material coverage.

Dr. Robinson said this is the first time the state has adopted the national common core of standards. Right now we have flexibility of incorporating what we need for our students.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if the new assessment in the spring of 2015 was a replacement.

Dr. Gejda stated it replaces the CMT and CAPT.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if we could expect to see a modified math, reading and writing curriculum.

Dr. Gejda said we are currently working on them.

Mrs. Leidlein asked to see the current curriculum when the revised are brought to the Board.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the financial report for the month ending September 30, 2011. Mr. Buzzi seconded.

Mr. Bienkowski said we spent \$7.8M over the previous month. We have an increase in the deficit for special education now having 25 students. We budgeted for 23. Next month we show projected expenditures.

Mrs. Leidlein asked to have the revised end of the year financial report from 2009-10 in the normally presented form.

Mr. Bienkowski said the reporting done is in compliance with GAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principals) requirements. The total is on the Town audit and EDOO1.

Vote: 6 ayes

Mr. Hart mentioned the October 1 enrollment numbers. The total number of students is what Chung reported. He wondered if he should do another report. His total is correct but the other predictions are off.

Mr. Nanavaty felt the concern would be how accurate is three years out.

Item 4 – Old Business

Transfer Policy:

Mr. Buzzi went over the policy revisions. He took out the amount for the transfers and changed it to any amount for the transfers between any object code will be brought to the Board. Following this procedure we will have a motion to transfer between object codes. All transfers for emergencies or between object codes go before the Board. If the Board can't meet to approve the transfer, the Superintendent has the authority to make the transfer.

Mrs. Leidlein believes transfers between object codes satisfies his concern. Within object codes are allowable. For management reporting she suggested putting a threshold within object codes above which we would need Board approval.

Mr. Buzzi said we don't need to get involved in detail management. That's not the responsibility of the Board.

Mrs. Leidlein feels it's the responsibility of the Board to be the stewards of the taxpayers' money.

Mr. Buzzi said we approve a detailed budget and don't need a lengthy debate on detail decisions the Superintendent should make. Mr. Hart agreed.

Mr. Nanavaty said if there are changes within object codes you will see that in the monthly financial reports. We are proper stewards of the taxpayers' money.

Mrs. Leidlein suggested that Joe Centifanti look over the policy.

Mr. Hart said he's an auditor, not a lawyer. We spoke to Tom Mooney about it.

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to revise this version of the policy to omit #1 which addresses detail accounts within an object summary category and keep #2 regarding funds to cover any emergency expenses that might come up. Mr. Alexander seconded. She thinks it's important to understand where money is being moved around as suggested by an accountant who is involved in the audit process that we have a limit. The \$50,000 for emergency conditions meets the criteria.

Mr. Buzzi feels no professional would agree with this motion because it would require every change be approved by this Board. Every district in the state allows the Superintendent or Director of Business to have the authority to transfer between object codes. We created a good balance with this policy.

Mrs. Leidlein said the auditor recommended Board approval over certain threshold amounts.

Mr. Nanavaty stated by this change if an IEP was held and it was determined that the student needed special services that would mean the student would have to be without those services before the Board could meet. This would not let the Superintendent allow this to happen.

Mrs. Leidlein said a threshold would take care of that with the Superintendent transferring under that threshold.

Mr. Nanavaty asked what would happen if the cost for the students was \$100,000? It's better for the Superintendent to make that decision immediately and then bring it to the Board.

Mr. Hart referred to the CAFE model policy which doesn't include that.

Vote: 2 ayes, 4 nays (Mr. Hart, Mr. Buzzi, Mr. Nanavaty, Mrs. Leidlein)

The motion failed.

Item 5 – New Business

Student Representative to the Board:

Dr. Robinson asked the Board to consider a student representative on the Board. We have been approached by a student who is extremely interested and has an excellent background. She supports the concept.

Mr. Nanavaty said five years ago this was proposed to the Board. We felt there should be a policy in place. He suggested checking the CAFE policy.

Mrs. Leidlein is also interested in the selection of the student. Are we opening this up to all high school students?

Mr. Nanavaty feels there would be a recommendation from the student government at the high school.

Mr. Hart would like to know the selection process. The role must be well understood.

Board Goals for 2011-2012:

Mrs. Leidlein felt with three or four new members on the Board we should wait to decide on the goals.

Mrs. Bittman said we are the ones with the most experience so these could be a good guidepost. They could be changed later. She suggested an additional item under #1 would be improving the special education program.

Mr. Hart felt with 20 years of Board experience this Board should decide.

Mr. Nanavaty thought the full day kindergarten should be discussed with the Facilities Ad Hoc Committee.

The goals would be discussed at the next meeting.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if parents were notified of what to do if there were issues with transportation. Dr. Robinson said the principals said that was done in the beginning of the year but it was not a problem to do it again.

Item 6 – Public Participation

Laura Roche, 41 Cobblers Mill Road, asked about the impact of fewer EAs in the schools. Where were the programs hurt in each school? Hawley is training parents to help with reading.

Cody McCubbin, 13 Arlyn Ridge, inquired about how we determined waste.

MOTION: Mr. Buzzi moved to adjourn. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 6 ayes

Item 7 - Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Andrew Buzzi, Jr.
Secretary