

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, September 7, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. in the library of Reed Intermediate School.

W. Hart, Chair	J. Robinson
K. Fetchick, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
D. Leidlein, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
D. Nanavaty	2 Staff
L. Bittman	5 Public
R. Gaines	2 Press
W. Hart	
C. Lagana	

Mr. Hart called the meeting to order at 7:34 p.m.

Item 1 – Consent Agenda

Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the consent agenda and to correct the date of the minutes to August 17, 2010. Mrs. Bittman seconded.

Mrs. Fetchick asked to remove a personnel item to be addressed at the next meeting. The consent agenda items included the minutes of August 17, 2010, the high school cross country team trip to Warwick, Rhode Island on September 24, 2010 and the resignation of Lisa Smith, teacher at Reed Intermediate School. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 2 – Public Participation - none

Item 3 – Reports

Correspondence: Mrs. Leidlein said the Board received correspondence from Kinga Walsh and Larry Gardner regarding the professional development time on the first Wednesday of each month beginning in October.

Chair Report: Mr. Hart said he received one correspondence from John Kortze who thought the Board of Education would be providing Bob Tait with access to the Board of Education Phoenix finance system by August 30. We actually were going to start looking at it then. He has spoken to Dr. Robinson, Carmella Amodeo and Pat Llodra regarding this and said we would not be ready until sometime around September 17.

Mr. Nanavaty suggested that rather than setting a date that Mr. Hart could report the status to the Board.

Mrs. Bittman asked what actually was going to happen on the 17th.

Mr. Bienkowski said Mr. Tait would be able to see any of our account information that is on Phoenix and be able to run reports and get his own information. It would be to read only.

Mrs. Bittman wanted to be sure it was strictly to view only and asked if the Town wanted to combine programs.

Dr. Robinson said we are not close to doing that. The last meeting was to first analyze how we do business. Mrs. Llodra is interested in having a consultant do an analysis of both sides and see if it was possible. It has taken a full year plus to get our staff up to speed with the system so there would be additional costs involved. We have to see if there are efficiencies or losses to combine the systems.

Mr. Hart told the Board a volunteer was needed to serve on the upcoming calendar committee. No volunteers spoke up.

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Robinson said the Prevention Council received a DFC Grant of \$125,000 per year for five years. This combines school, police and youth services. The first goal is to increase community collaboration.

The Federal Jobs Bill will provide \$251,988 to Newtown to be used for teachers or EAs over 27 months. She recommends using this money when the \$600,000 ARRA funds drop off. It can only be spent on instructional salaries.

Dr. Robinson stated that the lead teacher position at Head O'Meadow School was filled using the funds from the difference in salaries. This provides support for the new principal equitable to the other schools. Jennifer Meyers was selected.

All schools have reached Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) this year removing Reed and the Middle School from the list for performance of their special education population.

Dr. Robinson asked that the Board consider the positive benefits for increasing our student performance if we implemented full day kindergarten.

We have been notified by NAEP that a sample of our 8th grade students will be selected to take the math, English, or science test in February.

Mrs. Leidlein asked the length of the test and if we were required to participate.

Dr. Robinson responded that the test was 45 minutes to an hour and was not optional.

She received an email from Dr. Chung stating he was asked by Jeff Capecci to attend a meeting with the Legislative Council and Board of Finance on October 6 to discuss his report.

Mr. Nanavaty spoke about the enrollment and that Sandy Hook and Middle Gate were running close until third grade. He suggested looking at redistricting.

Dr. Robinson said the Facilities Committee should look at that option.

Mrs. Fetchick noticed that the current numbers are lower than the lows from Bothwell and Prowda in 2007. The downward trend happened sooner.

Dr. Robinson provided the non-public school enrollment for the 2009-2010 school year. St. Rose had 360 which included 81 in pre-K and 41 in Kindergarten, Fraser Woods had 88, Housatonic Valley Waldorf had 25, the AIS Magnet School had 40 and Abbott Tech had 48 students. There were 28 out-placed special education students.

Mr. Hart asked the cost of tuition.

Dr. Robinson said there is none for Abbott Tech. We pay \$1,500 for the vo-ag program at Nonnewaug, and \$1,500 for the magnet school. We also have half-day magnet schools at ACES and CES and pay approximately \$2,000 per student.

Mrs. Fetchick asked about the decision to have a lead teacher at Head O'Meadow.

Dr. Robinson said she was negligent in having a discussion with the Board.

Mr. Nanavaty said he had no problem with the appointment but would like an introduction to the Board in the future. This is an administrative decision and if money was available it was appropriate for the Superintendent to act.

Mrs. Leidlein said Mrs. Meyers is an excellent choice. She was just concerned that it wasn't in the budget discussion.

Mrs. Fetchick said her concern was that it wasn't discussed with the Board.

Mr. Hart said the decision was within the current dollars in the budget and the Superintendent has the ability to hire.

Facilities Committee:

Mr. Hart said they met last week to discuss the Chung report and started the process to put together an ad hoc committee with Board of Education and other boards in Town. If the numbers in the report play out we need to start looking at our options which will impact the community at large. We want to get input from the Town. Mrs. Leidlein, Mrs. Bittman and Mr. Gaines volunteered. Mr. Hart feels the chairperson should not be someone on a Town board.

Mrs. Fetchick was opposed to having someone chair who was not selected by the community.

Mrs. Bittman sees the chair as not a voting member who just facilitates the group to keep it non-partisan.

Mr. Nanavaty said this would be an ad hoc committee. We need people with certain skills to move the group along.

Mr. Faiella reviewed some of the work done over the summer. At Hawley the phone system has been updated, the Café was completed and the boiler replaced. At Sandy Hook the portables were painted and the PTA replaced fencing. At Head O'Meadow work was done to move the principal back into the main office. At the middle school new HVAC was installed in the data center and there were code updates in the nurse's office.

Item 4 – Old Business

High school expansion update:

Mr. Faiella said the work on stairwell 4 was completed which allowed the school to open.

Mrs. Leidlein asked why the lot on Oakview was taped off.

Dr. Robinson said it is not our property and shouldn't be used.

Mr. Hart said Parks and Rec decided to close it off. We can't supervise the lot so the risks were too great to allow parking.

Mr. Nanavaty said after attending the Public Building and Site meeting he was concerned about what their contract said. Morganti told us September 1 was the date at the July meeting. We need to have a discussion with Bob Mitchell and hold back fees until we get some accurate reporting. He asked Mr. Hart to contact Mrs. Llodra regarding the proposed contract time. There is no indication of that or of a guaranteed price. He hopes the Town or Dave Grogins has a complete contract. The money is there for the greenhouse but we need to see if we can get a better price. This greenhouse will be scientifically appropriate and no different than culinary or science labs. If we wait to put it up we will lose the spring semester for the students.

Mrs. Bittman asked why Morganti wasn't picking up some of the cost. Mr. Nanavaty said Bob Mitchell asked them. They weren't being honest with us for the timing of the stairwell. He suggested Morganti coming to the meeting next week.

Mrs. Leidlein asked the amount of the credit. Mr. Nanavaty said they say \$50,000 but we feel it should be \$100,000. We have to meet with Bob Mitchell because Public Building and Site needs to pursue this. The firm number is \$447,000 for the greenhouse. It has to be done because it was an ed spec that was sent to the state.

Dr. Robinson said we could revise the ed specs and still get the reimbursement. The greenhouse is a classroom. Bob Mitchell had said he would talk to Bob Tait.

Mrs. Fetchick asked the cost of the greenhouse without alternates to which Dr. Robinson said it was \$314,000.

Dr. Robinson said the impact of not moving into the new addition was that everyone had to unpack and relocate to the old classrooms. Students had to be reassigned. Educationally we will be impacted when we move which we would like to do on November 2. This takes away from our professional development time and also delays us getting into the existing building to do the renovations. PE classes are a concern because they will have to be held outdoors until Thanksgiving.

Middle School Roof Project:

Mr. Faiella there was a presentation at the Public Building and Site meeting by Steve Botello of Garland who proposed not going for state reimbursement and instead going to a design build.

Mr. Nanavaty said we have to wait and see what Public Building and Site will do. The position is to do it using the existing insulation in the roof. The salesman said they could do it cheaper without state reimbursement.

Mrs. Bittman asked about eliminating the .5 pitch.

Mr. Faiella said the pitch is helpful but not the problem with the roof. He would like to see all of the insulation taken out of the building as it has been leaking for a number of years.

Item 3 –Reports (continued)

CIP Committee:

Mrs. Fetchick said they presented the CIP at the last Board of Finance meeting.

Wednesday Early Dismissal:

Dr. Robinson indicated the Wednesday focus will be on writing. It will be across the grade levels. This is a K-8 project for all teachers including art, music and PE. There will also be writing across the content areas.

Mrs. Bittman referred to Mrs. Walsh's email that this was mandatory for teachers. Dr. Robinson said it was mandatory for all staff to attend.

Mr. Nanavaty said the regional school systems are already doing this. Whether this is mandatory or not these teachers will jump at doing this because it will improve their teaching and in turn help to improve student learning.

Mrs. Fetchick asked about the high school.

Dr. Robinson said the high school will begin their PLCs this year. Our expectation is that the teachers will find additional time per month for a second meeting. The elementary schools, Reed and the middle school have been doing PLCs by grade level. The high school will do PLCs at subject level.

Regarding activities for students on those Wednesdays, Education Connection will extend its program and also run a program at Reed for those not part of a program. Enrichment activities will be offered also. The cost is \$15 for pick up by 4:00 p.m. and \$25 for pick up by 6:00 p.m. Newtown Youth Academy is also setting up activities. Hawley and Reed would cost \$15 and Sandy Hook, Middle Gate and Head O'Meadow would cost \$10 on an as-needed basis. Each principal will send out the options. We will provide transportation at no additional cost.

Strategic Plan Update:

Dr. Robinson spoke about the mission statement and objectives of the Strategic Plan along with the capital improvement plan, communications plan, achievement plan, character education plan, and personal success plan and how the district is in alignment with the plan. All principals based their goals on the strategic plan.

Connecticut Mastery Test Report:

Dr. Gejda spoke about the CMT results. Grade three students for math were 86.1% at goal and above, reading 78.5% and writing 78.3%. Grade 4 students for math were 89.7% at goal and above, reading 79.8% and writing 83.1%. Grade 5 for math were 89.9% at goal and above, reading was 86.9%, writing was 85.6% and science was 82.5%. Grade 6 students for math were 93.8% at goal and above, 94.3% for reading and writing was 84.7%. Grade 7 students for math were 91.6% at goal and above, reading was 92.3% and writing was 75.8%. Grade 8 student were 90.2% at goal and above, reading were 94.5%, writing was 84.1% and science was 86.4%. This year all NT schools met AYP in all content areas and subgroups. Individual student reports would be mailed home on September 10, 2010.

Item 5 – New Business

Transfers:

MOTION: Mrs. Bittman moved that as proposed by the Board of Education Finance Committee last fall and subsequently used during most of FY2009-2010, that the Newtown Board of Education officially move to an encumbrance financial reporting system, employing transfers only in the event of error or correction, giving Board of Education financial statements more clarity, accessibility, and easy-to-understand year-to-year accountability. Mr. Gaines seconded.

Mrs. Bittman said we should finalize this. The finance committee decided this last year to give us clarity.

Mrs. Fetchick said the state statutes say that if there are transfers they have to be stated and not approved by the board only if there is an emergency. Transfers allow us to have a discussion about where the money is coming from and going to.

Mrs. Bittman said we encumbered this year instead of using transfers.

Mr. Hart said the state allows us to define transfers as broadly as we like. There isn't a requirement that we transfer at the micro level. The state requires we stay within our budget amount.

Mr. Nanavaty said the Board of Finance wanted monthly reports and commented on where we moved money. The encumbrance system is transparent. The transfers occur in the final report at the end of the fiscal year.

Mr. Bienkowski said there are circumstances that increase the budget. Our policy says transfers have to exceed a 5% negative balance. He was in another district that didn't do transfers and approved making the change.

Mrs. Bittman said when Mr. Bienkowski puts the budget together it will show what was actually spent last year. That's the intent of the motion.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if we could do both. We have a responsibility to the money being spent.

Mr. Nanavaty stated the timing of the statute is at the end of the fiscal year.

Mr. Nanavaty asked to move the question:

Vote: Mr. Lagana – yes
Mr. Gaines – yes
Mrs. Bittman – yes
Mr. Nanavaty – yes
Mrs. Leidlein – nay
Mrs. Fetchick – nay
Mr. Hart - yes

The motion passed.

Item 4 – Old Business (continued)

Series 9000 Board Bylaws Policies:

The Board decided to give their comments to Mrs. Fetchick to review with the policy committee.

Item 5 – New Business (continued)

Formulating Goals for the District:

Mr. Hart asked for Board input on the top five goals to accomplish for the district.

Mrs. Leidlein liked one to address building communication.

Dr. Robinson said the goals are ongoing but the action steps are different.

Mrs. Fetchick said our goals should tie into the strategic plan.

Mrs. Bittman mentioned long-range planning.

Mr. Hart asked the Board to submit their choices to him. Those mentioned were communication, efficiency improvement, long-range planning and all-day kindergarten.

High School Addition Plaque:

Mr. Nanavaty said it took six years for the project so there are former Board members who were involved. We should add those names with dates they served.

Mr. Gaines suggested contacting former Board members to see if they would like to be included.

Item 6 – Public Participation

Carla Kron, 4 Clapboard Ridge, was pleased to have Powerschool. Regarding the enrollment report she suggested asking a realtor for information on the houses that sold this year. Regarding the lead teacher at Head O'Meadow when you create a new position it is a long-term impact on the budget. It should have been discussed with the Board. She suggested notices be sent on line such as newsletters and the adult education book.

MOTION: Mrs. Bittman moved to adjourn. Mrs. Leidlein seconded.

Item 7 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Debbie Leidlein
Secretary