

Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, August 16, 2011 at 7:30 p.m. in the board room at 3 Primrose Street.

W. Hart, Chair	J. Robinson
D. Leidlein, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
A. Buzzi, Secretary	2 Staff
D. Nanavaty	14 Public
L. Bittman	3 Press
R. Gaines	
K. Alexander	

Mr. Hart called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m. He stated that Mr. Bienkowski was in the hospital and wished him well.

Item 1 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to approve the consent agenda. Mr. Buzzi seconded. Mr. Nanavaty asked to remove the list of coaching assignments because one individual had resigned their position and he wanted to see if there was someone to replace that coach. Mrs. Leidlein asked to remove the resignation letter for one individual and asked for more information. The items approved were the minutes of July 12 and 26, 2011, the high school football team field trip, the resignations of Nicole Sieber, teacher at Newtown High School, Ilissa Nordyk, psychologist at Head O'Meadow School, and Jan Calabro, Special Education Supervisor. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 2 – Public Participation

David Kallan, 12 Bridle Path Trail, spoke in favor of the owner/operators.

Joe Borst, 10 Beechwood Drive, spoke about the bus contract. He referred to question #6 and asked if field and athletic trips were included in the bid. The answer was they were not. They are provided by Fran McCutchan who is also an owner/operator with that contract expiring the same date as the others. He asked who would take over these trips, if it would be an additional cost to the Town and how much it would be.

Lisa Dresner, 24 Fawn Wood Road, stated that people have been spending a lot of time arguing about the bus contract. The arguments are fiscally irresponsible. She urged everyone to keep in mind the more important picture of a quality education for our students.

Roy Kruger, 39 Flat Swamp Road, spoke in favor of the owner/operators and asked for the Board to discuss their bid with them.

Kinga Walsh, 21 Horseshoe Ridge Road, wants the final decision on the bus contract to be educationally sound. Every area should be looked at for spending. She admires the owner/operators but every system has glitches. It is reassuring that the Board is following their policies.

Item 3 – Reports

Correspondence: Mr. Buzzi stated the correspondence was received from the following residents: Sandy Schill, Mitch Bolinsky, Sherry Chapman, Anthony DiVanno, Jeff Capecci, George Stockwell, Kinga Walsh, Kirsten Bazuro, Paul Mangiafico, Jim Gaston, George Schmidt, and Phil Carroll.

Chair Report: Mr. Hart attended a CABE conference and presented a slide from the Iowa School Board Foundation which indicates the best place to spend money on

education is for professional development. The CABE conference coming up in November is very valuable to attend.

Superintendent's Report: Dr. Robinson mentioned the administrator's retreat in July focused on parent-school relationships and emotional literacy. The latter was conducted by Dr. Marc Brackett from Yale. She attended a National Superintendent's Roundtable in July which focused on public engagement.

A legislative update was provided from Siegel O'Connor on legislation we need to be in compliance with. Seven items will need action, including revising our bullying policy. They also moved the graduation requirement from classes graduating in 2018 to those graduating in 2020.

The Town submitted a grant proposal for sidewalks on Queen Street after a survey was conducted with 653 parents responding.

Dr. Robinson invited the Board members to join the new teachers for lunch on Friday at 11:45 a.m. in the Reed library. New teacher orientation would begin tomorrow for 26 teachers.

Mr. Hart moved the two financial reports to the next regular meeting.

Mrs. Leidlein said the July 31 reports addressed the educational assistants. She asked for a report on the outcome of the reductions and the programs that have been restored at Reed.

Dr. Robinson said the educational assistants were still being worked on.

Mr. Alexander was concerned about the year-end transfers if we wait until the next meeting.

That would not be an issue. Mr. Buzzi said the transfer policy would not be ready by then.

Facilities Committee:

Mrs. Leidlein said they met July and discussed the CIP.

There was nothing from the policy committee.

Item 4 – Old business

Middle School Roof Update: Mr. Faiella said the project is on schedule and we are cautiously optimistic that we can start school. Classrooms are 99% completed with our summer work. He expressed thanks to Rich Frampton and John Poeltl who have been there every day inspecting the work.

Item 5 – New Business

First Read of the Economics Curriculum: Candi Dietter, social studies department chair, spoke about the curriculum which is a one semester senior elective course.

Item 4 – Old Business (continued)

Transportation Bid: Mr. Hart presented information regarding our DRG and that we are third from the bottom in terms of lowest cost per student. Our total cost per student is about 5.7% below our DRG and 10% below the state average. Additional comparisons were provided regarding administrative costs and services with Newtown being 81% below the DRG in our administrative costs per pupil. He stated that we do not give Dr. Robinson a housing allowance and never have, and her salary is 5% below the DRG. Our transportation costs are 40% higher than the DRG and the state. We followed the policy and put this out for bid because we are the most expensive district. Transportation is the third largest line item in our budget. This does not include fuel. We

have regular routes, special needs routes and athletic and field trips. MTM provides special needs transportation. The three principles of MTM also have private contracts. Ms. McCutchan provides field trip transportation and she also has two owner/operator contracts. The field trip contract would be separately bid before it expires.

Mrs. Leidlein asked why we bid the athletic and field trips separately.

Mr. Buzzi said the reasoning stemmed from when Art Bennett did that transportation.

Ms. McCutcheon did some of the routes with him and when he retired the special education routes were bid also. Ms. McCutchan kept the field trip and athletic event transportation.

Mr. Hart would ask Mr. Bienkowski for his rationale for not including Ms. McCutchan in this bid. Currently half of our routes are driven by hired drivers, not owner/operators. He spoke to Sgt. Green who is head of the Connecticut State vehicle inspections. They are inspected once a year by the DMV at operator sites scheduled in advance. There are out-of-service violations and regular violations. He gave a comparison of the seven original bidders and their statistics for two years.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if anyone in central office was reviewing the bus inspection records. Dr. Robinson said that was the responsibility of the bus company.

Mrs. Leidlein stated we are looking at this data because people are talking about the owner/operator safety records. Compared to the other bidders the owner/operators safety records are not as clear cut as they should be. A bus company by contract could be made responsible to maintain those records.

Mrs. Bittman said it isn't our purview to oversee this. It's the responsibility of the DMV. She asked if Mr. DiLonardo looked at this information.

Dr. Robinson believed it was the purview of the DMV. We rely on the owner/operators as companies to take care of their buses. We don't have anyone in the district such as a mechanic to see if the violations are taken care of.

Mr. Buzzi said the contract states they follow the rules and regulations of the State DMV.

Mrs. Leidlein stated that we have a responsibility to oversee the safety of our students.

Mr. Hart said the state has used the same criteria for all the bidders.

Mr. Buzzi said that when you start a bid process you send out the request and everyone plays by the same rules. Everyone who bid had the same opportunity. Once submitted every bidder is considered equally. There is no more negotiation after that. It's against the law to go to one bidder to make changes. The other bidders will sue the town if we do that and win. The request for bid is a legal document. Our bid process is closed.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if you can negotiate with all the bidders.

The Board agreed that was not possible.

Mr. Hart stated that only the owner/operators and All Star would be presenting to the Board on Saturday.

Item 5 – New Business

Revised Strategic Plan Objectives:

Dr. Robinson reviewed the strategic plan process since it began in 2008. In April another meeting was held. The mission statement remained the same but the objectives adopted in 2009 were revised. She asked the Board to approve the revised objectives so we could move forward with the plan. The old strategies will change to align with the new objectives.

Mr. Alexander asked the schedule for updating the action plans.

Dr. Robinson stated the teams are developing now and will take five or six months to work with the revised strategies.

Discussion and Vote on CIP:

Mrs. Leidlein spoke about the meeting regarding the CIP. They discussed changing Hawley to leave the 21 section as is with the newer boiler and changing the boilers in the 48 section.

Mr. Faiella said they decided to do a redesign to upgrade the boilers and install a tempered air system with a cost savings. Brian Wetzel came up with this newer technology which will make these boilers more efficient. The boilers in the 48 section would be sized to take care of the entire building.

Mrs. Leidlein stated that we have to look at possibly breaking the high school auditorium work down. They moved the middle school design fees out to year 2014-2015 because we don't know the future of the building.

Mr. Nanavaty asked how this plan reconciled with the one approved by the Legislative Council in April of this year.

Mrs. Leidlein responded that some adjustments had to be made based on the budget.

Mr. Nanavaty feels there is no guarantee they will agree when this gets to Legislative Council because they approved it in April.

MOTION: Mrs. Bittman moved that the Board of Education approve the Capital Improvement Plan dated August 16, 2011. Mr. Alexander seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to go into executive session to discuss the Superintendent's evaluation, potential litigation and a personnel leave request and invited Dr. Robinson. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved that the Board of Education deny the leave for Evelyn Pancaldo. Mr. Alexander seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 7 – Executive Session Motion

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

Item 8 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Andrew Buzzi, Jr.
Secretary