

Please Note: These minutes are pending Board approval.
Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting held on January 4, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chamber in the Municipal Office Building at 3 Primrose Street.

D. Zukowski, Chair	L. Rodrigue
J. Vouros, Chair	A. Uberti
D. Ramsey, Secretary	T. Vadas
D. Cruson	5 Staff
R. Harriman (absent)	20 Public
J. Kuzma	1 Press
J. Larkin	
C. Savo	
M. Irvine	

Ms. Zukowski called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Zukowski read a statement regarding holding board meetings and asked for no more clapping by the public. She also asked that to be sure minutes were properly represented, if anyone had edits to what they said to send them to her.

Item 2 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Cruson moved that the Board of Education approve the consent agenda which includes the correspondence report. Mrs. Larkin seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 3 – Public Participation

Don Lococo, 27 Hi Barlow Road, was concerned about the subcommittee regarding wellness, mental health and emotional support. Even before the pandemic there were students with mental health issues. It's important that this subcommittee is for a broader purpose.

Phil Palilla, 6 Winding Brook Road, addressed the new DEI Coordinator position. This position ties into social emotional wellness of our students. He teaches and has seen that certain students who go through college don't focus on the subject matter. This has permeated into the high school and junior high school levels and was not happy with what is being taught.

Item 4 – Reports

Chair Report: Ms. Zukowski spoke about keeping school in-person with the Omicron spread and supporting our staff in their efforts to address learning loss and the normal duties and responsibilities of a board of education. She asked for support of our administration during these difficult times.

Superintendent's Report: Dr. Rodrigue sent a communication regarding the DPH guidance for families and staff to review. Our priority is in-person learning and keeping our practices in place. Our schools have spent hundreds of hours contact tracing and quarantining students. Screen and stay is no longer necessary. We are in the process of utilizing test kits and N95 masks and they will be distributed as needed.

Anne Dalton added that the focus has changed to move from contact tracing to keeping ill people at home.

Dr. Rodrigue noted that we have an update on the Hawley HVAC Project tonight and welcomed Chris Moretti, Jenna Connors, Carla Tischio, and Kelly McClaren who would provide an update regarding the move.

Committee Reports:

Mr. Vouros reported on the Para Climate and Culture Committee. There are representatives from each building, the union president, he as a Board member, the superintendent, and principal, Dr. Gombos. This committee maintains an open dialogue between the para group and district leadership. The dialog is extremely positive and feedback is rewarding.

Student Reports:

Ms. Savo updated activities at the high school including Capstone notifications.

Mr. Irvine reported that student art was being shown at the Municipal Center and mid-terms would begin in two weeks. Congratulations to those who qualified for State competitions.

Mr. Cruson noted that the CAFE Legislative Breakfast would be held Tuesday, January 11 at Sandy Hook school at 7:30 a.m. Area 5 legislators, Board members and Superintendents were invited.

Item 5 – Old Business

MOTION: Mr. Cruson moved that the Board of Education approve the new Social Emotional Health and Wellness standing committee to be added to the list. Mrs. Larkin seconded.

Ms. Zukowski supports this committee with Mrs. Kuzma as chair and Mrs. Larkin as a member. She added herself as third member.

Motion passes unanimously.

Coordinator of Health and Wellness:

Dr. Rodrigue sent the Board information on this essential role which is needed again. It was a position years ago and parceled out to other people. This person would develop programs for all students, working with the Board of Education on the Health and Wellness committee, provide a partnership with the Director of Health, and maintain a high level of communication with families and staff. Anne Dalton does much of this now, along with our grant writer. Dr. Rodrigue would post it internally and propose to hire by March 1 of this year. We have some funds available to cover it this year.

Mr. Cruson noted the job description included a lot of what Mrs. Dalton is doing now. By adding this position it would allow her to get back to supervising the nurses.

Dr. Rodrigue said it would as she has been pulled away from her role. Mrs. Dalton and many nurses were paid overtime for work that extended beyond the school day.

Mr. Vouros, Mr. Ramsey and Mrs. Kuzma support this full time position.

Mrs. Larkin was also in support and asked how we would measure the effectiveness for this position over time.

Dr. Rodrigue stated that this position reports to the Superintendent and is also policy-related and curriculum-related. You truly measure the need for the position if students are being successful and families feel there is a level of support for them. You look at all that stems from the position to measure its effectiveness. There are a variety of ways to measure the work of this position.

MOTION: Mr. Cruson moved that the Board of Education approve the Coordinator of Health and Wellness position to being March 1, 2022. Mrs. Kuzma seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 6 – New Business

Update on Facilities Planning for the Hawley HVAC Project:

Chris Moretti spoke about the Hawley project and relocation. Also on the committee is Carla Tischio, Lead Teacher at Hawley School, Kelly Maclaren, Lead Teacher at Sandy Hook School, and Jenna Connors, Assistant Principal at Reed. We began with the projected enrollment for Hawley and look at each school. Kindergarten and 1st grade with eight sections and 132 students would be housed at Sandy Hook School. Grades 2, 3 and 4 with 9 to 10 sections and 182 students will be housed at the Reed School. We looked at all potential areas and considered everything with a preliminary list. We wanted to make sure we could fit comfortably and be accepted and welcomed.

Mrs. Tischio, Mrs. Maclaren and Ms. Connors outlined their work.

Bob Gerbert noted that the project is out for bid at this time and there was a walk-through last week. Bids due January 13. The goal is to have the final bid number for the Board of Selectman and start the project.

Mr. Vouros said the team involved in the transition planning is more than phenomenal and he was very excited for the children to go to these schools. We also have to look at the traffic flow for these schools.

Mr. Moretti said we have transportation on our list to consider busing and traffic and will work with Dr. Rodrigue, All-Star, and Mr. Gerbert, Dr. Gombos, and Mr. Correia.

Dr. Rodrigue has met with All-Star and will work on this once we get the accurate enrollment. We would also work with Newtown Police regarding traffic.

Mrs. Kuzma asked how in-school and PTA events would be handled.

Mr. Moretti stated we have a list of items to address like PTA, communications, and school culture to be considered. He would like to anticipate some events. At Reed it might be a bit harder. He would like to keep our identity and have individualized school events. It is important to have cross school events and possible field trips.

Mr. Gerbert mentioned we have tremendous support from the Town, Dan Rosenthal, and Public Building and Site Commission members.

Superintendent Search:

MOTION: Mr. Cruson moved that the Board of Education establish a Personnel Search Committee for the purpose of recommending to the Board one or more candidates for the position of Superintendent of Schools, and move further, that the Personnel Search Committee be comprised of the following individuals in their capacity as members of the Board: Rebekah Harriman, Jenn Larkin, Janet Kuzma, Donald Ramsey, John Vouros, Deb Zukowski and Dan Cruson. Mr. Vouros seconded.

Ms. Zukowski said the first step is to create an Ad Hoc Superintendent Search Committee. The second step is for the committee to select a third party search consultant. The third step is for the committee to work with the consultant to prepare a job description. The leadership then works with the directors of Human Resources and Business and Finance to prepare a request for proposals. The committee reviews the submissions and selects the candidates to interview. She recommended that Mr. Cruson be assigned as Chair of the Search Committee because he is a team player and has experience with a superintendent search.

Mr. Ramsey wanted to appoint Janet Kuzma as co-leader with Mr. Cruson. Mrs. Larkin seconded. Mr. Ramsey wanted a fresh perspective with a new Board member and reduce the burden on one person.

Mr. Cruson said the leadership person doesn't make the decision because everyone on the Board has a voice.

Ms. Zukowski agreed with also having a new person.

Mr. Vouros noted that the leadership position for this search requires someone in addition to Mr. Cruson and that would be Mrs. Harriman who has done this before, has the experience and knowledge to take us through this, and would be extremely beneficial to have her work with Mr. Cruson. He understands having a new Board member but everyone will be involved. The leadership team facilitates and organizes this for the rest of the Board. He proposed that Mrs. Harriman join Mr. Cruson.

Mrs. Larkin agreed with part of what Mr. Cruson said but also agrees with adding Mrs. Kuzma because she would make a better contribution than Mrs. Harriman.

MOTION: Mr. Ramsey moved that we amend the motion to include Dan Cruson as chair and Janet Kuzma as co-chair. Mrs. Larkin seconded.

Vote on amendment: 4 ayes, 1 nay (Mr. Vouros)

1 abstained (Mr. Cruson) Motion passes.

Vote on main motion: 5 ayes, 1 nay (Mr. Vouros) Motion passes.

Minutes of December 21, 2021:

MOTION: Mr. Cruson moved that the Board of Education approve the minutes of December 21, 2021. Mrs. Kuzma seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 7 – Public Participation

Laura Main, 42 The Old Road, said in February the Connecticut Department of Education released a position statement on culturally responsive education. The Board will need training to support Mr. Johnson and his work. The Board needs to learn about a culturally responsive education.

Wendy Leon Gambetta, 19 Saw Mill Ridge Road, worries about what she heard at the December 21 meeting when patriotism was mentioned in conjunction with school. Citizens were forced to fly flags on Veteran's Day. Patriotism cannot be taught in schools. It's a personal value.

Tony Keating, 7 Oak Ridge Drive, said DEI cries out for diversity and is beneficial for our children. He mentioned equity and incidents in the country.

Kevin Kuzma, 12 The Boulevard, appreciated the changes in quarantining and thanked the Board for seeing the big picture. It's not the job of our children to protect the adults. Children deserve a normal childhood.

Carl Miller, 72 Forest Drive, graduated in 2021 and stated that a rich and diverse education benefits children.

Kenneth Miller, 72 Forest Drive, is in fifth grade and experienced racism in school. His friends are smart and strong enough to understand. DEI helps everyone to be part of the world.

Sherry Grummands, 5 Black Walnut Drive. We speak about other cultures as a family. Her sons would say their classmates should be represented and supported.

Jennifer Padilla, 32 Glen Road, spoke about the updates to the COVID plan. You're stripping options away from parents like discontinuing contact tracing. That ability gave her the option of deciding whether her child attended school. She asked for a voice and a choice for families.

Cheryl Boyajian, 2 Vona Way, said when COVID decisions are based on data she is in full support of continuing to follow guidelines. Put children first and trust the same science from two years ago.

Tom Damon, 18 Horseshoe Ridge Road, spoke about still sending children to school in masks which get contaminated during the day. Some want to reverse the policy. There are spiking cases but no death rates. End the mask mandates for our children.

David Weiss, 13 Horseshoe Ridge Road, is thrilled Mr. Johnson joined the district and is excited to see a positive impact on the community. He thanked the Board for the DEI standing committee. There is nothing political about the words diversity, equity and inclusion and they should not be removed from policies.

Linda O'Sullivan, 10 Farmery Lane, addressed the debate over DEI. Some believe the American story is relevant and some don't. She spoke about Newtown Allies for Change

Rachel Torres, 13 Saw Mill Ridge, spoke about Mr. Johnson's presentation and was asked how he saw unity and patriotism fitting in with DEI. She didn't see the relevance of this to his presentation. Fear and ignorance is at the root of DEI. Some associate patriotism with not challenging historical leaders.

Cara Dogaly, 2 Monitor Hill Road, was commented about the childish behavior tonight. She works in diversity and inclusion and supports the decision of going back to school all in.

Lisa Terifay, 11 Longview Terrace, noted that after the DEI presentation one Board member spoke about patriotism. Perhaps it should be discussed in Newtown. She loves Newtown and loves our country. It was disappointing to see DEI called political.

Lisa Lewellen, 32 South Main Street, has three special education children and the one in sixth grade is called names. Our children with special needs are ostracized and reminded the Board of a special education survey three years ago regarding reading interventions for students with dyslexia. None of the action steps were followed through.

MOTION: Mr. Cruson moved to adjourn. Mrs. Kuzma seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 8 – Adjournment.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Donald Ramsey
Secretary

Correspondence Report
12/21/2021 – 1/04/2022

Date	Name	Subject
12/21/2021	Nerlande Foote	BoE
12/21/2021	Lorrie Rodrigue	Loss in Learning (response to Kferro821@gmail.com
12/21/2021	Donald Ramsey	Correspondence Report
12/21/2021	Deborra Zukowski	Comments welcome on draft of my words, recognizing De. Rodrigue's resignation
12/21/2021	Linda Chamiec-Case	DEI
12/21/2021	Cynthia Aponte	Powerschool Issues – Please Read
12/21/2021	Lauren Oliaro	New Mask Rule
12/21/2021	Jessica Delagrange	Mask Policy
12/21/2021	Nelson Guizzo	Recent developments
12/21/2021	Bonnie Early	Unmask Our Kids
12/23/2021	Jane guo	Newtown
12/23/2021	Kiley Gottschalk	BOF 12-27-21 Agenda
12/23/2021	Dawn Valzania	Quarantine Policy
12/23/2021	Deborra Zukowski	Fwd: CIAC Memo Update of Winter Sports Mask Guidance
12/26/2021	Kinect ED' via	MSBA School Board Leader Workshops
12/26/2021	Kinect ED	MSBA School Board Leader Workshops
12/26/2021	Deborra Zukowski	Dec. 26, 2021 Week in Preview
12/26/2021	Lorrie Rodrigue	Sunday Highlights
12/29/2021	Daniel Cruson	CABE Legislative Breakfast
12/30/2021	Donald Ramsey	Sorry More Corrections
12/30/2021	Tamarra Kemsley	DEI statement from a former student
12/30/2021	Kathy June	BOE Mailing – January 4, 2022
12/30/2021	Daniel Cruson	Communications Subcommittee Minutes
12/31/2021	Nerlande Foot	12/21/21 meeting
12/31/2021	Kate McGuirk	Support for DEI
12/31/2021	Don Lococo	Social, Emotional, and Wellness Subcommittee
12/31/2021	Linda O'Sullivan	(no subject)
12/31/2021	Linda O'Sullivan	Re: Patriotism in education?
12/31/2021	Wendy Leon - Gambetta	DEI
12/31/2021	Laura Main	In-Person BOE meeting
01/02/2022	Lorrie Rodrigue	Sunday Highlights
01/02/2022	Deborra Zukowski	Jan 2, 2022 Week in Preview
01/02/2022	Laura Main	In-Person meeting

TO: Lorrie Rodrigue, Superintendent
FROM: Suzanne D'Eramo, Director of Human Resources
RE: Superintendent's Report – Certified Staffing Update for DECEMBER 2021
DATE: December 30, 2021

DECEMBER 2021

CERTIFIED RETIREMENTS:

Randi Kiely (eff. June 30, 2022)

CERTIFIED RESIGNATIONS:

None

CERTIFIED NEW HIRES:

Veronica Egas – NHS Spanish (start date 1/21/22)

Jenna Skelton – NMS SPED (start date 1/10/22)

CERTIFIED OPEN POSITIONS:

None

ADDITIONAL DISTRICT HIRING NOTES:

Here is a recap of all certified/non-certified who began working in December:

Building subs/LT subs = 3

Custodian = 1

Paraeducators = 4

BT/Job Coach = 2

Athletic Trainer (interim) = 1

Of the 11 newly hired employees, 1 indicated a diverse ethnicity or race other than white. This equates to a total of 9% broken down as follows:

Hispanic or Latino = 1

Hawley HVAC Relocation: BoE Update

January, 4, 2022

Enrollment Projections

- **Plan: K-1 (SH), Gr. 2-4 (RIS)**
 - *K-1: 8 sections, 132 students- Sandy Hook*
 - *Grades 2-4: 9-10 sections, 182 students- Reed*

Principals Work To Date

- Principals (RIS, SH, HAW) have met and toured the buildings
- Principals have generated a list of items to be researched
 - Space, staffing, furniture, supplies, schedules, lunch/recess, drop off/pick up, phone lines, communication, etc
- Principals have met with Lead Teachers (SH, HAW) and Assistant Principal (RIS) to review list, explain work to be done and answer any questions
- Have created Question Forms for teachers (specials, special education, classroom)
- Lead Teachers and Assistant Principal have completed preliminary work but much depends on finalized enrollment
- Everyone will be welcomed by home schools and thought of as part of the building
- Communication with parents to begin when more information is available

Lead Teachers and Assistant Principal Work To Date

- Will review their meetings, research, questions and suggestions

Questions

DRAFT

Coordinator of Health and Wellness

The Coordinator of Health and Wellness will work collaboratively with staff, administration, and families to support the physical, social and emotional health and wellness practices in the Newtown Public Schools. This individual will be responsible for developing and overseeing wellness programs and initiatives, supporting curriculum and practices, and responding to health crises. The coordinator will have oversight of the following:

- Developing programs to deal with health-related issues that have an impact on students K-12
- Acting as a resource for the BOE and the Superintendent regarding the development of policies, practices, and protocols on health and wellness
- Working with members of the BOE Health and Wellness Committee to provide updates regarding current practices, new initiatives, and programming related to social-emotional learning
- Championing district-wide wellness programs, including working with the HR Director to review employee wellness initiatives
- Serving as a resource in the community and school-based committees related to student issues: depression, suicide, drug and alcohol use
- Providing a partnership with the Town's Director of Health and serving on the Prevention Council
- Coordinating and implementing surveys related to drug and alcohol abuse
- Working collaboratively with the district's grant writer to secure funding resources for social-emotional programs and initiatives
- Maintaining a level of communication with families and staff regarding health emergency preparation, response, and support systems (e.g., pandemic)
- When appropriate, planning parent nights to share relevant information on topics of concern (e.g., health and safety, drugs, depression)
- Working with members of the district Safe School Climate Committee and building SRBI teams to provide support for district practices and programs
- Completing the annual Health and Wellness Assessment for the State of CT
- Acting as a resource for school health professionals, counselors, and health teachers
- Partnering with local organizations to support programs related to mental health for students and families.
- Coordinating district health fairs

NEWTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Newtown, Connecticut

ENROLLMENT REPORT AS OF December 23, 2021

Current Monthly Enrollment

Cumulative Year-to-Date

Grade	Nov(e)			Dec			Sept 8th			Dec
	2021	Added	Left	2021	2021	Added	Left	2021	2021	
K	287	1	1	287	284	6	3	287	287	
1	272	0	2	270	275	2	7	270	270	
2	263	1	0	264	265	3	4	264	264	
3	284	2	0	286	282	9	5	286	286	
4	277	0	0	277	271	7	1	277	277	
Total Elementary	1,383	4	3	1,384	1,377	27	20	1,384	1,384	
5	275	1	1	275	278	2	5	275	275	
6	301	1	0	302	301	1	0	302	302	
Total Intermediate	576	2	1	577	579	3	5	577	577	
7	293	0	0	293	294	3	4	293	293	
8	287	1	0	288	288	2	2	288	288	
Total Middle	580	1	0	581	582	5	6	581	581	
9	346	1	0	347	346	4	3	347	347	
10	329	3	1	331	336	3	8	331	331	
11	358	3	2	359	359	4	4	359	359	
12	356	0	0	356	359	1	4	356	356	
Total High	1,389	7	3	1,393	1,400	12	19	1,393	1,393	

Special Education

Pre-Kdg	67	4	0	71	64	11	4	71	71
NCP, RISE, PAL	30	0	0	30	33	0	3	30	30
Out-of-Town	38	0	1	37	39	0	2	37	37
Total Enrollment	4,063	18	8	4,073	4,074	58	59	4,073	4,073

ENROLLMENT BY SCHOOL

Hawley	304	2	2	304	301	8	5	304	304
Sandy Hook	379	1	0	380	372	10	2	380	380
Middle Gate	389	0	1	388	391	2	5	388	388
Head O' Meadow	311	1	0	312	313	7	8	312	312
Total	1,383	4	3	1,384	1,377	27	20	1,384	1,384
Reed Intermediate	576	2	1	577	579	3	5	577	577
Middle School	580	1	0	581	582	5	6	581	581
High School	1,389	7	3	1,393	1,400	12	19	1,393	1,393

Special Education

Pre-Kdg	67	4	0	71	64	11	4	71	71
NCP, RISE, PAL	30	0	0	30	33	0	3	30	30
Out-of-Town	38	0	1	37	39	0	2	37	37
Total Enrollment	4,063	18	8	4,073	4,074	58	59	4,073	4,073

(e) = End Of Month

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NEWTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Newtown, Connecticut

ELEMENTARY CLASS SIZES AS OF December 23, 2021

Grade	Hawley	Sandy Hook	Middle Gate	Head O' Meadow	Reed	TOTAL
Pre K		71				71
K	16	18	18	17		
	17	18	16	17		
	16	18	18	18		
	16	18	14			
		15	17			
Total K	65	87	83	52		287
1	19	14	16	16		
	19	18	18	18		
	18	16	15	17		
		15	17	17		
			17			
Total 1	56	63	83	68		270
2	20	17	19	19		
	20	20	19	18		
	19	19	19	17		
		19	19			
Total 2	59	75	76	54		264
3	21	18	18	20		
	21	19	17	20		
	20	19	18	19		
		19	19	18		
Total 3	62	75	72	77		286
4	21	21	17	20		
	20	20	19	20		
	21	19	19	21		
		20	19			
Total 4	62	80	74	61		277
Total K-4	304	380	388	312		1,384

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**Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting held on December 21, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chamber in the Municipal Office Building at 3 Primrose Street.

D. Zukowski, Chair	L. Rodrigue
J. Vouros, Chair	A. Uberti
D. Ramsey, Secretary	T. Vadas
D. Cruson	2 Staff
R. Harriman	50 Public
J. Kuzma	
J. Larkin	
C. Savo	
M. Irvine (absent)	

Ms. Zukowski called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 2 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Ramsey moved that the Board of Education approve the consent which includes the donation to Newtown High School and the correspondence report. Dan Cruson seconded. Motion passes

Item 3 – Public Participation

Rachel Torres, 13 Saw Mill Ridge, is a parent, social studies teacher at Newtown High School, SAID Club advisor and also on PEAC. She commended the efforts to create a more inclusive environment for students. Mr. Johnson will be instrumental in providing training for staff and his work will help guide policies. She welcomed the new Board members but was disheartened by the proposal to remove the words from the policy as they are not political. Removing this language would be detrimental to the progress we hope to make with the town. She would push forward the freedom policy with Mr. Johnson's addition. She was also in favor of forming a DEI committee.

Most supported the statement.

Jennifer Padilla, 32 Glen Road, welcomed the new Board members. She spoke about the words diversity, equity and inclusion. These concepts keep our children safe in schools and provides a clear path to improve the environment. She urged the Board to consider the DEI subcommittee.

Most agreed.

Pia Ledina, 33 Old Bethel Road, was a former teacher and is a parent of children who went to Newtown schools. Educating is the job of the entire community. We must listen to those asking for help. Improvement requires the courage to change.

Most agreed.

Saahil Ray, 46 Bradley Lane, is a member of SAID and works closely with Mrs. Torres. Posters about diversity have been placed in school and donations have been given to the Black Lives Matter chapter of New Haven. DEI are words that symbolize what we represent. He was on the panel for the DEI Coordinator and he is a valuable resource.

Most agreed

Cyrena Arokium, 38 Bradley Lane, is in 11th grade at Newtown High School. She was disappointed in wanting to remove Mr. Johnson's words from the policy. It is important to

incorporate culturally responsible instruction. DEI continues to grow in and out of the classroom. You are never too old to learn, unlearn, or re-learn.
Most agreed.

Naiya Amin, 11 Whitewood Road, spoke about diversity, equity and inclusion which are not political words. Treat others the way you would be treated. Teaching us to be kind was not political. Taking these words from the policy would be changing values. Do not make this political.
Most agreed.

Giselle Martinez, 101 Walnut Tree Hill Road, is a junior and in the SAID group. This group shows we care about our differences. A movement toward unity is not political. We are not political and just want a more inclusive school for everyone.
Most agreed.

Tony Keating, 7 Oak Ridge Drive, encouraged the Board of Education to push back and refuse to endorse political indoctrination. DEI proponents say they are strong political words.
A few agreed.

Leah Crebbin, 20 Valley View Road is a junior and has been a member of SAID for two years. She disagreed with the remarks at the last meeting. DEI are essential and it is important for the Board to support policies that support DEI and Mr. Johnson.
Most agreed.

Item 4 – Reports

Chair Report: Ms. Zukowski spoke about Dr. Rodrigue's resignation. She leads from a place of joy and truly loves her students, staff and community. During the height of the pandemic she was poised and intent ensuring children would learn when schools were closed. She created an environment where students and staff can flourish. She thanked her for all she has done and wished her the best.

The Town will receive approximately \$7.5M of American Rescue Plan funding. Of that amount, \$2.5M will be allocated to the Hawley HVAC project. Mr. Vouros, along with Dr. Rodrigue, will organize school and classroom visits for Board members.

Ms. Zukowski thanked Michelle Ku for her leadership on the Board and Dan Delia and Debbie Leidlein who have been dedicated public servants. She also thanked returning member Dan Cruson and new members Janet Kuzma, Jennifer Larkin and Don Ramsey.

Superintendent's Report: Dr. Rodrigue said this was bittersweet for her. She started her career in Newtown and will end it here. She has been truly blessed with the students and community. Covid is at a 5% increase in Newtown but there is still low transmission. St. Rose went remote but at this time there is no impact on our staffing. Contact tracing by our nursing staff and administration is extremely challenging. She recognized the amazing work of our nurses. There is new guidance from the CIAC regarding athletics. We will address this at the January 4 meeting. She wished everyone in the community a safe and peaceful holiday.

Committee Reports:

Mr. Cruson reported a school health update webinar January 4 with the Department of Education is available for all Board members. He also distributed a CAFE and CAPSS statement on civility on the volatile environment at Board meetings. He is working on the annual CAFE Legislative Breakfast for Area 5. This will be in early January and open to Board members and legislative leaders in Area 5.

Student Report: Ms. Savo congratulated the new members of the National Computer Society. Various clubs have met with pictures being taken for the yearbook. The hockey team won in overtime last week. The Chess Club won first, second and third place in their competition.

MOTION: Mr. Ramsey moved that the Board of Education approve the financial report for the month ending November 30, 2021. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Vadas presented the financial report.

Mr. Vouros asked why it has been difficult to fill the three behavior therapist positions.

Dr. Rodrigue said schools are experiencing this across the nation but we have filled some very important positions recently.

Mrs. Vadas noted that we had to hire an outside group for the behavior therapist positions.

Motion passes unanimously.

Item 5 – Old Business

Update on DEI Work:

Dr. Rodrigue has been meeting with Mr. Johnson regarding general timelines and commitments including reviewing the mechanism to share sensitive and confidential information on bullying which would include the Anonymous Alert App. We want to be sure there is clarity around Mr. Johnson's role for the success of these commitments.

Mr. Johnson gave his presentation regarding diversity, equity and inclusion and his timeline of work as coordinator.

Mr. Cruson asked him to elaborate on professional development.

Mr. Johnson said for the high school he wants to introduce the terms again. A major part of his presentation was about participating in conversations which are often fearful. Some who are predominantly white fear saying something offensive. He addressed how we create safe spaces among staff and students. He used best practices and also had discussions in break out rooms.

Mr. Ramsey was moved by Mr. Johnson's comments and appreciated the tone of the feedback we received. He asked how he saw unity and patriotism in his work.

Mr. John was not sure how that is connected to DEI in public schools but would hope patriotism can reflect all people.

Mrs. Harriman extended her appreciation for Mr. Johnson being at the meeting and the way he delivered his presentation.

Mrs. Kuzma questioned the Anonymous Alert App.

Mr. Johnson wanted to expand options for reporting conversations and also be able to report discrimination and racial bullying.

Mr. Ramsey asked if there was a way to quantify where we are now with the number of incidents.

Mr. Johnson noted that collecting data is what we want.

Dr. Rodrigue said the app goes to the administration and can be used by parents, students and staff members. She is also still part of it. We also get information in other ways and report all incidents to the state.

Mr. Johnson stated that we want to make sure students are safe so assessing this tool allows us to do that.

Item 6 – Old Business

Standing Committees:

MOTION: Mr. Ramsey moved that the Board of Education approve the preexisting Standing Committees from the 2022 Board of Education Standing Committee list. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Harriman agreed with the list of standing committees but has to oppose the committee assignments proposed by the Chair. It was not in the best interest of the Board for the Chair to put herself on the Policy Committee and move her after being on the committee for six years. She believes the Chair received feedback from multiple stakeholders and she has to oppose the motion.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman moved to modify the motion to reassign the Policy Committee to myself and remove Deborra Zukowski from the Policy Committee. Mr. Cruson seconded.
Vote: 3 ayes, 4 nays (Ms. Zukowski, Mr. Ramsey, Mrs. Kuzma, Mrs. Larkin) Motion fails.

Vote on main motion: 6 ayes, 1 nay (Mrs. Harriman) Motion passes.

Mr. Vouros asked why Ms. Zukowski removed Mrs. Harriman who has been serving on the Policy Committee for six years.

Ms. Zukowski said it was her intent to have Mrs. Harriman chair the committee. Unfortunately, she did not see how it would work with another member on the committee. After a discussion with her, Ms. Zukowski made the recommendation.

Mrs. Harriman said that as a leader it was important to put our needs, wants and ego aside and put what is best for the district. I know the chair has longed to be on the Policy Committee. This committee is a working committee that has to move forward with efficiency and she feels it would not be in the best interest of the Board as evidenced in past Board meetings.

Vote: 3 ayes, 4 nays (Ms. Zukowski, Mr. Ramsey, Mrs. Kuzma, Mrs. Larkin) Motion fails.

Vote on main motion: 6 ayes, 1 nay (Mrs. Harriman) Motion passes.

MOTION: Mr. Ramsey moved that the Board of Education approve the new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion standing committee to be added to the list. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Ms. Zukowski said the membership for this committee would be Mrs. Harriman as chair, Mr. Cruson and Mr. Ramsey.
Motion passes unanimously.

Mrs. Kuzma proposed forming a committee to address the health and wellness needs for the schools because of the rising mental health concerns. The committee will work with the Superintendent and Health and Wellness Coordinator to prioritize social-emotional programs and practices, establish a culture that supports mental health services for all staff, students and families, assess district and community resources to ensure mental health services are accessible, monitor and evaluate the implementation and impact of district health and wellness policies and protocols, and provide regular feedback to the Board of Education, and recommend changes or modifications to the health and wellness program for Board approval.

Ms. Zukowski said this committee and membership will be approved at the next meeting. She reported that Policy 9130 on committees stated the committees will be staffed 30 days after the first regular meeting in December. She assigned three members of the Board to each committee. She asked all Board members to provide questions to the subcommittee chair prior to meeting. She will reach out to the FOIA Commission to see if other Board members could speak at these meetings as members of the public.

Item 7 – New Business

Health and Wellness Coordinator:

Dr. Rodrigue spoke about this position which was cut and parceled to various school staff such as our grant writer and nursing supervisor. This would be opened internally in our district and fits under ESSER so there would be no cost. This is a very critical juncture for our students so we need to address their needs. We have had conversations with SEL and DEI and are looking for them to work together. If funding would need to be in our budget in the future it would need Board approval.

MOTION: Mr. Ramsey moved that the Board of Education approve the minutes of December 7, 2021. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Ramsey moved that the Board of Education approve the minutes of December 16, 2021. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 8 – Public Participation

Tony Keating, 7 Oakridge Drive, was impressed with Mr. Johnson's presentation. Not everyone is in agreement with the core problems in the country regarding race and minorities.

Linda O'Sullivan, 10 Farmery Lane, referred to the December 7 minutes and on page 6 said she did not say children were experience bullying and was quoted incorrectly. She also spoke about academic preparation.

One-quarter agreed.

Kristi Parille O'Connor is not a resident but is a Spanish teacher at the high school and co-advisor of SAID. Don't stand in the way of DEI work. Students are brave and fearless and are fierce in their fight for DEI. She is leaving her position at the end of the year not because of the students but because of what is going on in this room. She thanked those who continue to fight for progress and thanked her students past and present.

Most agreed.

Don Lacoco, 27 Hi Barlow Road, stated the Board has been working on making sure policies are addressing the need for equity and inclusion for years. The Connecticut Board of Education states that each school district should have teachers from other ethnic and economic backgrounds.

Most agreed

David Deschenes, 9 Saw Mill Ridge Road, thanked Mr. Johnson for his presentation. He is a Newtown parent of two daughters and living here has contributed to their character. DEI is so important. Listen to the young, wise Newtowners who addressed you tonight. They offered excellent advice.

Most agreed.

Ajene Arokium, class of 2017, always looked down in class when certain topics were mentioned. We went to school to learn and become critical thinkers. Newtown doesn't prepare us for the world we live in. DEI is inclusive of all histories. Be better and do better for the students.

Most agreed.

Jessica Velasco, 103 Brushy Hill Road, thanked Anne Uberti for the email regarding the curriculum audit and social studies curriculum that is being written. She wanted certain lessons to be halted immediately in grade 7 from a specific textbook. History should not be one sided.

Most agreed.

Brian Atherton, 30 Charter Ridge Drive, said that equity is very subjective. Parents should take a role as the family unit in the interpretation of equity because it's a very sensitive subject. His ten-year-old shouldn't be coming home talking about equity.

Kate McGrady, 126 Philo Curtis Road, is a teacher and doesn't want a white washed education. The schools should be teaching historical events. Many parents don't know about specific historical events. Why do we continue to hide the true history?

Most agreed

MOTION: Mr. Ramsey moved to adjourn. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 9 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Donald Ramsey
Secretary