

**PLEASE NOTE: These minutes are pending approval by the Board of Education.**

**Board of Education  
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, January 25, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. 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	15 Staff
L. Bittman - absent	14 Public
R. Gaines	3 Press
K. Alexander	

Mr. Hart called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m.

**Item 1 – Introduction of Superintendent’s Recommended Budget for 2011-2012**

Dr. Robinson announced that the budget would be posted online instead of printing books as in the past and gave her estimate of expenditures for 2011-2012. Our objectives are that within five years student performance on all standardized tests in all subject areas will be consistently in the top three districts in our reference group, that all students develop and demonstrate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as problem solving, critical and creative thinking, collaboration and application of technology, and finally that all students will develop and demonstrate the character attributes necessary for personal well-being and to be a contributing member of the community. Enrollment, out-of-district placements, class size, and district performance compared to our reference group, DRG B, were highlighted.

Dr. Robinson first presented the status quo budget which would only maintain the school district as it is with no new services or resources. The key budget drivers for 2011-2012 are student needs, flat enrollment, contractual obligations, energy costs, transportation, health insurance, state fund uncertainty and unpredictable special education funding. The status quo budget would be a 3.68% increase which comes to \$2,475,600.

To provide the highest quality education Dr. Robinson recommended having a full-day kindergarten program at a cost of \$304,800, increasing the high school staff to meet the student needs for \$346,300, restore the total cost of ownership in technology for \$169,000, and restore deferred maintenance for \$573,500. This brings the requested budget to a 5.76% increase which is an additional \$1,393,800.

**Item 2 – Public Participation** – none

**Item 3 – Reports**

**First Selectman’s Report:**

Mrs. Llodra focused on two areas. The ECS is our largest source of funding from the state. Governor Malloy is going to fund at the same level as the past two years and try not to apply the 14% penalty due to the loss of ARRA money. Secondly, she addressed Public Act 10-111 and the expense of implementing the secondary school reform which will be costly. There will be no implementation until we see how the state can fund it.

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Robinson spoke about the community conversations program held at the Reed School last Saturday. The meeting was on character traits and attended by students, clergy, the First Selectman and other community members. Mrs. Llodra said it was very enlightening and the approach to talking about difficult issues is a great strategy.

Dr. Robinson explained how snow days were determined. We have had five days so far. Legally we cannot go past the end of June. If we end up with a total of 13 snow days the next day would be taken off the April break.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if there was any thought to adjusting the half days to add instructional time.

Dr. Robinson said stopping the early release days would not make a difference in the days we have to add at the end of the year. She can discuss this with the senior leadership team but we feel we are doing powerful work on these days.

Approve the June 30, 2010 Year-end Financial Report:

Mr. Hart asked to postpone this item until he meets with Mr. Bienkowski.

Approve Financial Report:

MOTION: Mr. Buzzzi moved to approve the financial report for the month ending December 31, 2010. Mr. Nanavaty seconded.

Mr. Bienkowski made a few comments on the financial report.

Mr. Gaines asked if we had any information on the excess cost grant.

Dr. Robinson said with the new governor it would probably be late again as last year.

Mr. Bienkowski stated we have it in the budget as 75% over the threshold.

Vote: 6 ayes

**Item 4 – Old Business**Minutes of January 6, 2010:

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the minutes of January 6, 2011.

Mr. Alexander seconded. Vote: 6 ayes

2011-2012 Calendar:

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the 2011-2012 school calendar only, excluding early release days. Mr. Buzzzi seconded.

Mr. Hart said there were three issues on this item which are the calendar itself, the early release days and the parent teacher conference days. Dr. Gejda is working on an extensive report and it is also worth spending time looking at our whole professional development program. The public act signed by the Governor states we are required to have two flexible conferences per year for each student.

Dr. Robinson felt it was important for the community to have input in the calendar. It was a very collaborative and cooperative committee. Chris Geissler, Maggie Conway and Lisa Wallace are committee members who spoke about the calendar.

Mr. Geissler said the committee began reviewing calendars from surrounding districts. Everyone wanted an early end to the school year and professional development in the calendar. The first day back for teachers is the convocation and the second day they are in the schools busy with children touring the buildings and various meetings which do not include the whole staff. The committee also wanted feedback from the community.

Mrs. Conway said there was a lot of give and take but it was not rushed. Some teachers brought feedback from the staff.

Mrs. Leidlein asked what student data was used to decide to add back the February break.

Mrs. Wallace said there was no data for that decision. There were many opinions and the survey was referred to. There were no hard fast numbers.

Mrs. Conway said we didn't want to have Friday and Monday off so we started with Monday and Tuesday. We added three days to February because a day was added in August. It wasn't good to go back to school for Thursday and Friday. Also, many families go away so students are out days from both weeks.

Dr. Robinson said there is no data on how many parents take their children out of school.

Mr. Nanavaty said the survey was inconclusive. There was no data the last time. The survey was two years ago. You can't dismiss the work this committee did. Teachers are coming back to school earlier and we have the same dismissal date as this year.

Mrs. Leidlein wants the decision backed by data in regards to student learning. She feels it's important to have an extra week of instruction prior to CMTs. She wants data to support whether the body of students will be affected by parent decisions to take students out of school. She has a problem without knowing more about the early release days and needs to look at the calendar as a whole with early release days decided.

Mr. Gaines asked what other district did for the February break.

Mrs. Leidlein said the six she saw had three with the full week and three with a long weekend.

Mr. Geissler said Bethel had Monday and Tuesday, New Fairfield has Wednesday through Friday plus President's Day with Wednesday and Thursday as professional development days. Danbury has Friday and Monday and Region 9 has the full week including President's Day.

Mr. Buzzi said the previous Board chose not to remove the February break. He feels that a full week is important for families. The early release days need to be discussed further. He can vote on this basic structure of this calendar.

Mr. Alexander asked if most of the teachers preferred the February break.

Mrs. Conway said many teachers preferred the full week given the snow days in February and when families go away they have to repeat instruction the following week. There were two teachers from the middle school and one from the high school on the committee.

Mrs. Wallace said the teacher community feels strong about having the February break. Mr. Nanavaty said that for years we had the full week and our students did well on the tests. They aren't tests they study for. Approval doesn't prevent us from discussing the early release days another time.

Mrs. Leidlein disagreed and wanted to see the full calendar.

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to postpone the vote on this calendar until we made a decision on the early release professional development days.

There was no second to the motion.

Mr. Gaines said he received a number of emails from those opposed to a full week in February and a lot of controversy over quality education. There is a long period of time in the beginning of year with no break. He prefers the long weekend in February.

Mr. Buzzi said if there is a week of no school for family activities then students won't be taken out at other times. That gives us the most students in school when school is scheduled.

Mrs. Leidlein wants to see our absentee rates in February when we don't have the full week and asked about a regional calendar.

Dr. Robinson said we are just starting to work on the regional calendar. Once we do the regional calendar it has to be voted on by the Board. She pulled the absentee data from last year but cannot document parents taking their children out of school. She didn't see any trend for one week or the other and was unable to supply the committee with any meaningful data to support a difference in attendance.

Mrs. Leidlein said most of the regional districts have had long weekends.

Mr. Hart said we delegated a committee, he respects their efforts, and would support the calendar as proposed.

Vote: 4 ayes 2 nays (Mrs. Leidlein and Mr. Gaines)

Mr. Gaines said his no vote was not a reflection of his admiration for the committee.

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

Item 5 - Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Andrew Buzzi, Jr.  
Secretary