

**Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Monday, December 21, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. in the library at Reed Intermediate School.

Present:	L. Bittman, Chair	J. Robinson
	K. Fetchick, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
	D. Leidlein, Secretary	D. Raymo
	D. Nanavaty	2 Staff
	R. Gaines	3 Public
	W. Hart	2 Press
	C. Lagana	

Mrs. Bittman called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Item 1 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Hart moved to approve the consent agenda which included the minutes of December 1, 2009 as edited. There were no personnel items. Mr. Gaines seconded.
Vote: 7 ayes

Item 2 – Public Participation - none

Item 3 – Reports

Correspondence:

Mrs. Leidlein stated that the Board received the following correspondence: December 1 from Elaine McClure with thanks for the gift from the Board, December 1 received a letter from Jodi Bialek regarding a busing issue, and December 6 received correspondence from Priscilla Jones advocating for a gifted and talented position in the budget. Recently the Board received correspondence from Susan McGuiness regarding a busing issue.

Dr. Robinson said the first letter was regarding the number of substitute bus drivers. She found out that the regular driver had a serious illness in the family and was out a number of times. We have spoken to the owners to make sure they have properly trained subs.

Chair report:

Mrs. Bittman said that she, Dr. Robinson and Mr. Hart attended the legislative breakfast to discuss schools and the state. They spoke about special education funding and burden of proof. She met with each of our local chairpersons and spoke about the ad hoc facilities committee and working together. In early January Dr. Robinson will have a presentation regarding where the district is and what we are trying to accomplish for the Legislative Council. The Monday before every Board meeting she, Mrs. Fetchick, Mrs. Leidlein, and Dr. Robinson will go over the agenda. Mrs. Bittman said she would join Mrs. Fetchick on the policy committee. We also need a committee to discuss Kent House.

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Robinson said central office has had our second series of flooded offices. The heat was turned off to repair the leaks so the working conditions were quite cold today. It is too cold to caulk the windows so there is some discussion about putting plastic up in the meantime.

We have been working on developing a policy for using NTV and televising various meetings. We had a recent meeting with Pat Llodra and Gary Davis to discuss a policy to govern decisions on the use of televising selected board and commission meetings and roles and responsibilities.

A question was raised from the last meeting about shortening the passing time between classes to five minutes. It is currently five minutes and during lunch passing, it is four minutes.

Mr. Nanavaty said AT&T uverse had a local government channel. He asked if NTV was affiliated with Charter. Dr. Robinson said 17 was our educational channel.

Mr. Nanavaty said we should contact them to see if they can broadcast channel 17.

Financial Report and Transfers:

Mrs. Raymo said we submitted our excess cost grant and will know the end of January how much we will get. We will continue to watch special education costs and approving purchase orders on an as-needed basis.

Mrs. Fetchick asked about equipment listed under the property account.

Mrs. Raymo said we are creating a property account to meet federal guidelines regarding the definition of equipment. We will create an account under Mr. Faiella's budget for equipment system-wide.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to approve the financial report and transfers dated November 30, 2009. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Student Survey Results:

Dr. Gejda spoke about the youth survey regarding substance abuse which has been given in Newtown since the mid -90s. It's been administered every two years. Over the last several years it was administered in-district. This past year we worked with a consultant to put the survey online. The report is authored by Dr. Archie Swindell. It is given to students in grades seven through twelve with 150 students per grade level. Questions are divided into five domains. Domain one is alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, domain two is family, domain three is individual, domain four is school, and domain five is community.

Dr. Gejda thanked Judy Blanchard for the work she's done with this survey. Mrs. Blanchard said they decided to do the survey online for a shorter turnaround time.

Mrs. Bittman said that Trumbull brought in people from the community regarding underage substance abuse and asked if we were going to have this in Newtown.

Dr. Robinson said we need to educate parents in terms of internet safety. She has been working with Mark Pompano on some issues and the PTAs are working toward a pilot program like Trumbull's. We are trying to assemble a like group to do something similar in the spring. It has to fit with our health curriculum.

Mrs. Fetchick said she was hoping that we would also involve the parents at these meetings.

Mrs. Blanchard said we received a community conversations grant and have scheduled a meeting on underage drinking. We had 180 people sign up so far with 50 students.

Mr. Gaines expressed concern about the availability of alcohol for students in grades seven and eight. Does this mean the children are more aware of this or is there really an increased problem using drugs?

Mr. Lagana said he was concerned if the parents know the children are drinking. Adults need the programs as much as the children.

Mr. Nanavaty was also concerned about the students perceptions of their neighborhood. They are more perceptive of what is going on. We have to be aware that this is only 150 students per grade.

Mr. Hart asked how the sample was selected.

Mrs. Blanchard said in the high school you have representation from AP, college prep and basic program students. In the middle school we survey an entire cluster. Historically, New England tends to be higher compared to the National results.

Mrs. Bittman asked if we ever surveyed the parents on drinking, to which Mrs. Blanchard said we have not.

Mr. Lagana asked about steroid use.

Mrs. Blanchard said our coaches address that. There are also many over the counter drugs students can buy.

Item 4 – Old Business

Update of CIP Process:

Mr. Hart said that in 2001 we had a survey of air quality in schools. A committee formed in 2003 to look at all schools regarding their HVAC system. Head O'Meadow was completed and Hawley was next to being done. The Hawley issues are in three categories with one being inadequate ventilation except for opening windows. The second more serious issue is old heating equipment. A boiler has an erosion issue. If we lose a boiler it affects the water supply and we would have to close the school until it was repaired. The third item was to provide air conditioning in the whole school. He met with Mr. Faiella and Brian Wetzal from CES to see if we could reconfigure this project. It

could be broken up into four sections. The first is engineering and cost analysis and the second is to replace the boilers and heating supply. The third phase is air conditioning installation. Mr. Wetzel came up with a ductless split system so we could only air condition parts of the building. One alternative is to do nothing which is not acceptable. The second is to just replace boilers. We could also only implement phase one and two but it would not be a good choice to leave out the air conditioning in phase two.

Mrs. Fetchick thought Mr. Wetzel was going to do some cost analysis on other options. Mr. Wetzel said phase three has the option of air conditioning throughout the building.

Mr. Hart said we are only discussing that piece. We are trying to focus on the critical factors with the option to do the air conditioning later.

Mr. Nanavaty said his concern with Hawley on Church Hill Road is that the only way to cool the rooms is to open the windows but then you have students dealing with the street noise. \$5.8M is not too far off from the \$5.4M that was turned down by the Legislative Council. The \$8.5M as the high for capital expenditures is close to what we had in the CIP for Hawley expenditures. CES did very extensive workups for the original project. Why are we looking at another \$500,000?

Mr. Wetzel said the ventilation and air conditioning systems are new technology. We tried to determine systems that could be phased in over a number of years.

Mr. Nanavaty asked it was really necessary for us to lose a year the way it is broken out. He questioned the \$300,000 to \$400,000.

Mr. Wetzel said the engineering and design work would start in 2010. We had a full design which went out to bid. Our original design cannot be spread over three years.

Mrs. Fetchick said we are supposed to meet January 6 but the committee hasn't seen this yet. She asked if we were going to have any more information on options for the middle school roof as the state guidelines have changed.

Mrs. Bittman said whatever is decided in the morning meeting on January 6 should be emailed to the Board members.

Mr. Nanavaty said we need two meetings to discuss this before we vote.

Mr. Hart said we have to do both the ventilation and heating upgrade first. It can be phased in for two years.

Mrs. Bittman said she would call John Kortze to see if they could have two meetings so we could discuss this at our meeting on January 12.

Approve Revised 2010-2011 School Calendar:

Mr. Nanavaty pointed out two typos on calendar Option 2.

Mrs. Fetchick spoke about the calendar committee that had surveyed parents, teachers and administrators. Data showed that parents want to start school later and many

preferred to start after Labor Day. The parents also wanted to end earlier. We looked at other community calendars also.

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved that the Board of Education approve the Option 1 revisions to the 2010-2011 school calendar. Mr. Hart seconded.

Vote: 6 ayes, 1 nay (Mr. Nanavaty)

Mr. Nanavaty said the students start two days earlier in Option 2. Even if we have four snow days they get out the middle of June like the parents prefer. Option 1 looks at potentially getting out June 20. Option 2 achieves what the parents are looking for.

Mrs. Bittman said the parents did not want to start school in August.

Newtown High School Expansion Project Update:

Dr. Robinson said she was concerned that she hadn't seen any change orders. Public Building and Site Commission has a change order process. She spoke to Bob Tait and told him that because they never came to her to sign the change orders the state would not approve them. The change orders require her signature so they are changing their process.

Budget Update:

Dr. Robinson told the Board that Mrs. Raymo would be gone after the first week in January. The estimate for our insurance is 25%. We will put it in the budget at 15%. Other districts are coming in 2% to 7% for their total budget.

Mr. Nanavaty asked how the Board felt about asking Anthem to come in and justify the 25%. We spend in excess \$9M a year to Anthem to handle our insurance costs. We have to seriously look into this.

Mrs. Fetchick asked about the possibility of other insurers.

Mrs. Raymo said you would have to put out a RFP. It is better to put a bid together. It costs to get the data together. We also don't have time for this budget cycle. A broker can tell you what the market is and they will know who will bid.

Mrs. Bittman said we need to develop a sub committee for the insurance bid. We should ask Anthem to come in on January 12. Mr. Nanavaty said he would be on the sub committee.

Mr. Nanavaty said that six months ago Anthem said they were going to increase their insurance. We need the broker and representatives from Anthem.

Mrs. Raymo said she spoke to our broker who feels there is a math error. They don't have any history on the two new plans that are being put into place.

Mr. Nanavaty stated that they said their numbers would be lower.

Mr. Gaines said that when we are ready to use the expansion at the high school we will need additional teachers.

Dr. Robinson said the reality is what the budget can carry. The high school continues to need teachers. She is looking closely at enrollment and where the students are. We may have to take teacher positions away at the elementary level.

Mr. Nanavaty said we are looking at a sports literature course which will be an additional cost to the Board.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if we had any updated numbers on the cost to open the addition. Mrs. Raymo said Mr. Faiella has been working with the heat and electricity engineers to get an estimate.

Mrs. Fetchick asked what percentage we were expecting from state funding next year. Mrs. Raymo said excess cost may be going to be 50%. The state deficit is going to balloon. We might get 60%.

Mrs. Fetchick is concerned about paying for salaries next year and about adding new things to our budget instead of looking at what we can take out of the budget.

Dr. Robinson said she is trying to make reductions in a way that education doesn't suffer. Transportation is going up 4.5%.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if any principals came in under budget. Dr. Robinson said that they did.

Item 5 – New Business

Superintendent's Goals:

Dr. Robinson said that several of her goals are a continuation of what we did last year. Everything is tied to the strategic plan. She has been meeting with each of the principals and presented a copy of the strategic plan for Hawley School as an example. She has been working with the administrators and have a very strong collaborative district leadership team.

Mrs. Bittman requested a copy of the strategic plan for all members.

Item 6 – Public Participation

Audrey Greenwood, 7 Susan Lane, liked the correspondence and chair report. She spoke to AT&T regarding airing Channel 17 programs and they said they needed a digital output. Parents should see the data on drug survey. Regarding the calendar she doesn't like to lengthen the summer and there should be more discussion on education than having a calendar to please the parents.

Mrs. Bittman thanked Mrs. Raymo for her service as interim business director.

Mrs. Fetchick said she enjoyed working with Mrs. Raymo and that she has done us a great service.

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

Item 7 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Debbie Leidlein
Secretary