

**Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, December 7, 2010 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	R. Bienkowski
D. Nanavaty	9 Staff
L. Bittman	11 Public
R. Gaines	3 Press
K. Alexander	

Mr. Hart called the meeting to order at 7:36 p.m. and welcomed First Selectman Pat Llodra.

Item 1 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the consent agenda which included the minutes of November 16, 2010, the donation of \$2,500 for Hawley School from their PTA Spending Committee to purchase an upgraded sound system for the music room, the resignation of Christine Altieri, teacher at Sandy Hook School, the resignation of Rose Ann Beck, teacher at Newtown Middle School, the donation of a defibrillator for Newtown High School, and the donation of a motorized wheel chair for the Newtown Public Schools. Mr. Buzzi seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 2 – Public Participation

Maureen Cassetta, 12 Johnny Appleseed Drive, read a letter about the Wednesday early dismissals. There are child care issues for parents who work. She agrees it is important for teachers to share but does not want class time taken away. She wants to see data to support the district's rationale for the early release days. She also wants conferences scheduled in a more thoughtful way. Communication between parents and the district is flawed.

Item 3 – Reports

Correspondence: none

Chair Report:

Mr. Hart stated he and Dr. Robinson attended a CABE convention. He would address the owner's meeting later on the agenda.

Superintendent's Report:

The State Board of Education approved a change in the cut off for entering kindergarten which should be passed in this legislative session.

The governor-elect met with urban superintendents where he said he intends to focus on early childhood education will all students being able to read at proficiency by third grade. His priority would be the 30 lowest performing districts.

The Danbury Board of Education will not be raising the tuition for the AIS magnet school next year. Most of our 40 slots have been filled by kindergarten students.

The administrators worked on the conference schedule for next fall with consideration to the parent concerns. They will be stacked on the same days next year.

Mrs. Bittman asked if the middle school and Reed School will be on the same conference schedule and how will it affect busing.

Dr. Robinson said it would be a problem either way. Last year they were stacked and parents complained. The principals staggered them this year and had problems. We will go back to stacking next year.

Mrs. Bittman mentioned how the high school counselors scheduled their conferences which she felt would be good to try in the other schools.

Mr. Gaines asked if there was a way to allow parents to schedule their children across the schools to accommodate everyone.

Dr. Robinson would check into that.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if Cathy Hydeck and Maritza Nezvesky were in the discussion.

Dr. Robinson said Cathy joined the administrators meeting. She told us there would be problems and pointed out issues to the principals in developing the fall schedule for next year.

Comments from the First Selectman:

Mrs. Llodra spoke of ways to bridge the gap between the municipal government and the Board of Education and hoped to meet with the Board once a month. Through collaboration we were successful in self-funding our health insurance and developing an ordinance which will go to a public hearing and the first Legislative Council meeting in January. The Legislative Council worked on the school facilities committee to examine whether there should be one group to oversee the buildings in town. There is additional collaboration regarding space needs for the Town and Board of Education.

Regarding the state of the State and the state of the Town, all indications are that Newtown continues to thrive. At the legislative breakfast they were told the pension is almost bankrupt and that municipalities should prepare to absorb revenues. Governor-elect Malloy will preserve the level of funding through the ECS grant. We will manage the financial impact as partners.

Mr. Nanavaty said this was the first time a First Selectman came to us in a spirit of collaboration and not to criticize the Board. The Newtown school system has always done what they have had to do. While being optimistic the State has to face realities. He would like to hear how she would share the State decrease with the Board of Education.

Mr. Hart agreed. Working together is important to find a solution in these financial times.

Facilities Committee:

Mrs. Leidlein said they met with representatives from the Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee that asked us to consider what type of area we would need 30 to 50 years out. We looked at the Planometrics study and decided we didn't want to limit what we could do. If we needed an expansion at the high school level we asked for the maximum number of acres for any type of school. We've been looking at Mr. Faiella's

budget list to prioritize it to be included in the budget. We are also looking at options to deal with the enrollment decline. We will work in collaboration with the ad hoc facilities committee.

Item 5 – New Business

Hawley School Report:

Jo-Ann Peters introduced staff members Lynn Holcomb, Theresa Coleman, Chris Breyan and Debbie Cowden. Mrs. Peters spoke about the enrollment at Hawley School which is 14 students above the projection with two additional students scheduled to enroll in January. Dr. Chung originally predicted 366 students for next year. His revised projection using the October enrollment is 416 students. She feels kindergarten enrollment will increase if we offer full-day kindergarten. The presentation was an electronic picture storybook. Mrs. Peters feels collaboration is essential to the instruction we provide students. To have the benefit of meeting with colleagues throughout the district is essential. This gives us time to collaborate as a team with all four grade levels.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if Hawley would have the same increase in first grade if we have a full-day kindergarten program.

Mrs. Peters said half of our first graders come from all day kindergarten programs. We will have more like seven new first grade students but more going into kindergarten.

Item 4 – Old Business

Newtown High School Project Update:

Dr. Robinson received word from Bill Halstead that they need to have 10% of the alarms to test positively within the school which we don't have at this time. Alarms went off over the weekend. They found the alarms indicated certain sections but actually were in the old building. These are safety holdups. There is no move in date.

Mr. Hart said last week there was still a lot to do. The computer lab wasn't set up and there was furniture missing.

Mr. Nanavaty said the gym will probably be ready when we get the TCO. The gym can be used but they are putting the bleachers in. Once we get the TCO there are still punch list items like venting the gas cook tops, not having the proper ones, or shallow sinks in the culinary prep room that drain the wrong way. These punch list items will prevent us from moving in our students and teachers. Chartwells needs a week to learn how to operate the new equipment and be ready to have food for the students.

Mrs. Leidlein asked about how to recoup monies due to these increased delays.

Mr. Nanavaty said this is a Town project and the Town attorney may be able to make a claim on costs for us. Being a Town project the remedy might be not paying Morganti a certain amount. The Town will see that benefit.

Mr. Alexander asked if some of the delays were due to the architects.

Mr. Nanavaty said there are circumstances where there might have been some delays on the part of the architects possibly because they were reaching the end of their contract.

Dr. Robinson said Mr. Dumais set up a punch list site for the teachers to keep track of the work in their areas and also for PB&S to monitor.

Early Release Wednesdays:

Dr. Gejda gave a quarterly report on the early release days with the focus on writing. This has had a very positive impact on the district. Conversations on these days have spread over into committee meetings. We've had teachers volunteering to present student work for review and 30 teachers offered to facilitate PLCs.

Mrs. Leidlein expressed concern about the loss of instructional hours on these days and asked if any teachers felt that way.

Dr. Gejda said teachers prefer to stay in the classroom rather than go out of the district. There is always tension about not being in the classroom.

Mrs. Leidlein said many teachers are taken out of classrooms for multiple days to attend workshops. Can they be combined with early release days?

Dr. Gejda tried to coordinate our professional development on those days. To do that for two hours is not cost effective. Most of the time we are pulling teachers out of the classrooms to participate in the TEAM program. There is some professional development we can't avoid.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if whole grade level teachers were being pulled out.

Dr. Gejda said we did for the Amy Benjamin grammar training. The second workshop will be in February for third grade training.

Dr. Robinson said the State mandates the TEAM training which is conducted during school days. The third grade is the only group getting grammar training.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if we looked at alternatives to having them every other month so not so much time is taken out of the classroom. There are other ways to electronically collaborate.

Dr. Gejda said teachers are doing that now. She would see if there were any other programs.

Mr. Nanavaty stated that no one disputes the value of PLCs. Any change will generate some type of criticism. This year we took a very dramatic step which is a great benefit for teachers. This is the most cost effective way to do it. To address some of the concerns he asked for the administration to look at the PLCs to see if some modification can be done and quantify it educationally and financially. If we can have teachers come in on a Saturday once a month, quantify it. It's difficult to find day care. Put a number on it and see if people want us to provide another alternative.

Mrs. Leidlein asked what data we were going to look at to see if this work has been effective to improve our student' progress.

Dr. Gejda said we have district writing prompts that are given three times per year and are hoping to see improved results.

Mrs. Bittman said if we are teaching the teachers it will be a cumulative effect over the next three years.

Dr. Robinson stated that we used to operate by site-based management. The first early release day was the first time the third grade teachers met. There will be new learning by teachers from teachers.

Mrs. Bittman said she would like to see incremental reports on the changes.
Dr. Robinson said the PLCs will take the CMT results and learn from that.
Mrs. Bittman wants the administration to listen to the parents regarding discrepancies between classes.

Mr. Buzzi said we are talking about professional development time versus instructional time. He asked for data on how much professional development time is mandatory, how much is voluntary and the difference in professional development time before we instituted this program. He wants to know the real impact.

Mrs. Bittman said we took away professional development days that were outside the instructional days. We need to factor in Columbus Day and Veteran's Day for professional development.

Item 5 – New Business (continued)

Project Succeed:

Dr. Robinson said we were studying the possibility of moving Project Succeed under the district umbrella. This program is for medically fragile students. This year there are four students with three residing in Newtown. We are looking to see if there is a financial advantage for us. She gave 60 days notice to Education Connection.

Mr. Bienkowski said there could be up to \$80,000 in savings. We have to take the excess cost grant into consideration. It also depends on the cost of staff members involved. There is one child from New Fairfield which we would charge tuition but that would go to the Town as revenue.

December 21, 2010 Board Meeting:

The Board agreed to cancel this meeting.

Discussion and Possible Action Regarding the Audit:

Mr. Buzzi read the report and asked if we contacted the auditors to come to a Board meeting. He suggested waiting for any discussion until we meet with them.

Mr. Hart felt we should have a report from the auditors annually.

MOTION: Mr. Buzzi moved to table the discussion of the audit. Mrs. Bittman seconded.
Vote: 6 ayes, 1 nay (Mrs. Leidlein)

Item 6 – Public Participation

Lereine Frampton, 6 Pebble Road, spoke about the voter outreach program. She would like to have this for the high school students next year and possibly the elementary schools. Mr. Hart suggested discussing this at another meeting.

Laura Roche, 41 Cobblers Mill Road, appreciated the information on the early release days. Professional development and writing is very important. The entire fourth grade team at Sandy Hook was out two days for GATES training. She was glad Mr. Buzzi requested more information.

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

Item 7 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Andrew Buzzi, Jr.
Secretary