

**Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, February 2, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. in the board room at 3 Primrose Street.

Present:	L. Bittman, Chair	J. Robinson
	K. Fetchick, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
	D. Leidlein, Secretary	44 Staff
	D. Nanavaty	70 Public
	R. Gaines	1 Press
	W. Hart	
	C. Lagana	

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

Item 1 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the consent agenda which included the minutes of December 21, 2009 and January 6, 12, 20 and 26, 2010, the Newtown High School band field trip to Toronto, the donation of \$2,000 to Newtown Middle School to be used for science enrichment, the resignation of Diana Brandt, teacher at Hawley School, effective June 30, 2010, the resignation of Rebecca Ruiz, teacher at Newtown High School, effective June 30, 2010, and an unpaid leave of absence for Lorraine Bresson, Newtown High School secretary, from February 17, 2010 to May 5, 2010. Mrs. Fetchick seconded. Mrs. Leidlein questioned why some items discussed with Mr. Faiella were not in the minutes. Dr. Robinson said we are only required to have the motions. The minutes are summaries of the meeting. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 3 – Public Participation

Mrs. Bittman reviewed the budget process.

Sandy Doski, 33 Great Ring Road, was concerned concern over cutbacks in the Reed library.

Sonia Stanczyk, 16 Sand Hill Road, is opposed to the cuts. We need the afterschool activities because they introduce us to a passion as she has found working on the literary magazine.

Nancy Maxwell, 14 Stonewall Ridge Road, said once you eliminate family life science it will never come back. She is also concerned about reducing the Spanish position. Most other schools have it for five classes per week. She is concerned that if the middle school library assistant position was eliminated who would manage the front desk when the teacher is working with the children. Also, eliminating the project adventure assistant would cause a liability when students are using equipment.

Jill Bontatibus-Beaudry, 36 Queen Street, said eliminating the .36 art teacher position at Reed will change the art program. We only have 25 hours of yearly art instruction which is six below the state.

Michael Isley, 225 Berkshire Road, is a middle school student and doesn't like the budget cuts. The activities should not be cut. They had a petition with the names of 75 students.

Nicole Joden, 18 Marlin Road, a seventh grade student, asked to reconsider cutting afterschool activities.

Mark Gerace, 23 Hall Lane, is a phys ed. teacher at Reed and moved here for the school system. The proposed cuts will rock the foundation on which Reed and the school system were built. Decreased instructional time affects the physical fitness levels and academic performance.

Kinga Walsh, 21 Horseshoe Ridge Road, is concerned about the communication to the community. The proposed budget showed the elimination of a music teacher from Reed because Dr. Robinson said the entire music program there was revamped.

Virginia Snowden, library media specialist at Reed, said that eliminating the clerk position impacts the program. She is able to work because the clerk keeps the library functioning which averages 120 student drop-ins daily.

Portia Boudish, 8 Loan Oak Meadows, a seventh grade student, spoke about the importance of afterschool activities and needing them to be successful. She also spoke about what they learn from Mrs. Beck.

Fern Paes, 5 Teachers Ridge Road, said there are 110 fewer students than last year. Before cutting teachers we should look at the administration. Anthem is looking at a 20% increase. She asked if we considered sending it out to bid. Regarding the afterschool program there could be a fee system which would allow help for those who couldn't afford it.

Gael Lynch, 72 Mile Hill Road South, teacher at Reed, was there on behalf of the Reed staff. She spoke about the two-teacher teams and that music, art and classroom studies are all tied together. Project Adventure reaps huge benefits for students. Eliminating the clerk in the library takes the teacher's time away from the students

Jeanne Bugay, 8 Allenby Court, Goshen, is the library media specialist in the middle school. She entrusts the library clerk with keeping the library functioning with a variety of duties and help with the programs

Sarah Beier, 7 Yogananda, asked for a change of venue and to hold everyone to two minutes. She was dismayed at the CAPT scores at the high school. If we have to decide between a math teacher and library assistant she prefers the teacher.

Max Galassi, 151 Huntingtown Road, some students can't afford activities that aren't supported by the school. Having afterschool activities is good.

David Smith, 41 New Lebbon Road, said maybe the afterschool activities should go to pay to play if people are willing to do so to keep them.

Mark Markovac, 3 Nelson Lane, said pay to play is a tax on certain people. If the educators think something is valuable then everyone should pay for it. He moved back here for the schools.

Roseanne O'Neill, 6 Hemlock Road, said she teaches Project Adventure and phys ed. at Reed. By eliminating this, the foundation leading to the middle school Project Adventure course will be missing.

Charles Hepp, 4 Winter Ridge Road, went though the strategic school profiles and the Department of Education website looking at the testing information. Spoke about grade level testing comparisons with towns in our DRG.

Julie Luby, 15 Fox Run Lane South, said it would be helpful to have a public participation at the end of the budget meeting agendas. The state hopes to decrease the ECS grant. If we cut now the state funding in the future will go down. Put forth a budget that is educationally sound that includes what we need.

Bill Toomey, 7 Skytop Drive, has a daughter in the middle school, and supports the afterschool programs at Reed. He said they would be happy to volunteer to keep the activities.

Karen Bender, 47 Farrell Road, supports all our teachers, programs and support staff. We should implement a fee before cutting afterschool activities.

Michelle Hankin, 16 Greenleaf Farms Road, said if the Board feels strongly about this budget they should let us vote on it. Having an indoor air quality program in place is a state statute. CO2 is not a toxic gas but elevated levels cause health problems and increased sickness. We should look at both middle school and Hawley and maybe save money by doing them at the same time.

Clair Talon, 62 Toddy Hill Road, said to put a budget through with the things we need. She wants her children to be well rounded and exposed to the arts and foreign languages.

Mrs. Bittman said we are mandated by state to provide a bus ride to all students. The Town side is also suffering financially. We want to come up with a number that will pass.

Dr. Robinson said she met with Bob Tait and Pat Llodra regarding insurance. They received numbers from their agent which are less than ours. We talked about self-insurance which we had at one time. Her concern is when we had two and three months of claims the money we had in reserve had been used by the town. We would need to have a document that stated the use for the money. We could also put out an RFQ for a new agent and see who responds. She feels a number of people would respond.

Mr. Hart asked if we could do that fast enough.

Dr. Robinson said Mr. Arum had the RFQ that Torrington used.

Mr. Hart asked about being self-insured.

Dr. Robinson said it would be the same coverage but we would be holding the money to pay out the claims.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if there was any indication of numbers we are looking at. Dr. Robinson said we put 15% in the budget. The town went down to 12%. We can reduce by at least 2% being self-insured.

Item 4 – Newtown High School

Mr. Dumais, principal of Newtown High School, said that next year's graduating class will need 22 credits for graduation. One credit requirement is in science which is a .5 teacher. Because of the construction there is no greenhouse so that person is teaching science this year. We will need another science teacher next year to be where we are now. If you combine the graduation requirement, plus the greenhouse teacher and one for health and science, that means we need two teachers. Regarding students per teacher we have always had the greatest number of students per teacher in our DRG. If we hired six teachers today we would be average in the DRG.

Mr. Nanavaty said Mr. Dumais was asking for four teachers, an educational assistant in science, and an increase in clerical for attendance. We are eliminating five elementary teachers due to enrollment along with the afterschool programs. He asked if we were willing to add one teacher at the high school if it would be in science, to which Mr. Dumais said that it would.

Mrs. Fetchick requested a list of classes and their enrollment and a list of extracurricular activities, the current stipends, and how many additional fees are asked of the students for such things as payment for uniforms. We heard in 2008 that we had enough staff for the students in the classrooms. Can we look at teachers teaching additional sections?

Mr. Dumais said in 2008 there may not have been enough space for additional classes. We didn't have a place to put the students. It would be less expensive to have teachers teach an additional section but it would also be taxing for them to teach an additional class.

Mrs. Bittman asked how many science teachers were at the high school.

Mr. Dumais said there were 22 science teachers.

Mrs. Bittman asked if he was looking at one to teach both grades.

Mr. Dumais said we have some cross certified but it would be better to hire a chemistry teacher because of the large freshman class. A chemistry teacher teaches four sections because there is an additional lab.

Mr. Nanavaty said the last four or five years we had a lot of students getting study halls in place of classes because there was no room. We were told we had the teachers to fill the addition and that all we needed were the classrooms. Where are you justifying four or five teachers when we were led to believe you only needed the classrooms? He remembered when the academic requirements were increased. He was concerned about it and voted against it because of not having the money for the teachers. Is science the area we need or another if we only allowed one teacher?

Mr. Dumais said the science classes are limited to 24 because of a safety issue. If we had twice as many rooms with the same number of teachers with full schedules, that number of students would fit into the same number of sections.

Mr. Nanavaty asked how many can take culinary in a semester given the availability. Mr. Dumais said no more than we have today which is 160 to 200.

Item 5 – Newtown Middle School

Mr. Nanavaty asked Mrs. Sherlock if she could add one thing back that had been cut what it would be not counting extracurricular activities

Mrs. Sherlock said she would ask to have the family and consumer science teacher be put back because she makes a real difference for our students. If we cancel it the rotation would change and the curriculum would have to be rewritten.

Mrs. Fetchick asked what Project Adventure was.

Mrs. Sherlock said that class starts with cooperative activities to build trust which includes a variety of activities like climbing walls and outdoor ropes course. In the middle school it is taught by Chester Washburn, who is a trained Project Adventure teacher.

Mrs. Fetchick asked about the current Project Adventure cut.

Mrs. Sherlock said we had added an educational assistant because there was a safety concern and it was important to have another adult.

Mr. Hart asked if we went to pay to play for afterschool activities if it would be difficult to administer.

Mrs. Sherlock said last year we had to cancel the late bus so now we have a number of students who don't participate because they don't have transportation. We would certainly administer it because that would be better than not having them be able to participate.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if pay to play was a Board policy and if there would have to be one for the middle school.

Dr. Robinson said it would be a Board decision.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if it would have to be administered through the Town and wanted a better understanding of how it works.

Mr. Nanavaty said that when the budget didn't pass twice we went to an activities fee charge. We have to seriously look at whether we want to do that again.

Mr. Hart asked if we could get a report on how it is handled and if the PTA had been approached at organizing car pools.

Mrs. Sherlock said they had not discussed that at the PTA meetings.

Mrs. Fetchick asked to supplement the listing to see if the students pay for supplies to participate in the activity.

Mrs. Sherlock said in drama the costuming is paid for by the cost of the tickets. Students don't have any expenses. We have activities fees that are separate and managed in her office. Stipends are paid out of her operating budget.

Mrs. Bittman asked about the cost for printing the literary magazine.
Mrs. Sherlock said that was self-funding.

Item 6 – Reed Intermediate School

Dr. Epple agreed with Mrs. Sherlock's comments on the afterschool activities. She is looking into allowing more flexibility at Reed and ways to fund her budget cuts.

Mr. Nanavaty asked that aside from the extracurricular activities what would she like put back into her budget.

Dr. Epple said she would like a physical ed. teacher put back. There are no educational assistants in PE or Project Adventure. She feels she could find money to reinstate the library clerk.

Mrs. Leidlein asked why there was such an increase in staff training.

Dr. Epple said an increase depends upon what is requested. We did use a teacher for some professional training.

Dr. Gejda said that part of it is an implementation of the grammar initiative. Reed was identified as in need of improvement and is working to address that issue.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if there were costs to the students in some of the afterschool clubs.
Dr. Epple said students in the knitting club, pottery club and Patriot Press buy some supplies.

Mrs. Fetchick asked for the costs and if the music program being was being changed with losing a teacher there.

Michelle Hiscavich, Director of Music, said the music technology curriculum was approved by the Board in 2008. We cannot absorb music technology into the music program because we cannot teach it with the current staffing.

Mr. Nanavaty said we approved the music technology curriculum for grades 6-12. By eliminating this teacher we are defeating that curriculum.

Ms. Hiscavich said that was correct.

Mrs. Fetchick asked what we were losing by not having this music technology.

Ms. Hiscavich said the students begin by exploring sound and they have a chance to create and compose.

Mrs. Bittman said she thought we were going to incorporate that concept into the program. Is that possible in Reed?

Ms. Hiscavich said we cannot because there are only eight stations in the class.

Dr. Robinson said she received misinformation because it was her understanding that when we looked at those areas it was going to be in those classes.

Mr. Gaines stated that he encouraged teachers not to speculate on the cuts because no decisions have been made yet. Comments were not only made at Reed.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if we should have a policy on discussing budget with the students. Mrs. Bittman said we are in the process of working with CABA to go through every policy.

Mrs. Fetchick said that teachers are not supposed to advocate for the budget in the school during school time.

Item 7 – Elementary Schools

Hawley School:

Mr. Hart asked about the job of the educational assistants in the elementary schools. Mrs. Peters said they are used in kindergarten, literacy center, classrooms, computer lab and library.

Mr. Nanavaty asked what the feeling was in Hawley for having a cafeteria. Mrs. Peters feels it would be successful and the majority of staff felt they would like a cafeteria.

Mrs. Fetchick asked for a description of what a lead teacher does. Mrs. Peters said that allows her to be in classrooms and more visible with parents, students and teachers. The lead teacher does scheduling, is liaison with the PTA and cultural arts committee, is the advisor to the student council, is involved in child studies and PPT's, and meets with student groups on a daily basis.

Mrs. Liestman said her lead teacher does all the supervision of non-certified staff and takes care of all discipline issues which frees her to manage the school. The parent population expects us to meet their needs also and the lead teacher plays a big part in doing that.

Sandy Hook School:

Mrs. Page said we are minus 30 students in enrollment and have requested no positions. The position she would ask for is a part-time technology coordinator.

Mr. Gaines asked about the contracted accompanist for the chorus. Mrs. Page said she reduced the specialist time to preserve the accompanist who is a retired music teacher and is needed for the concerts.

Middle Gate School:

Mrs. Liestman said her one reduction is an educational assistant. She commended the work of the EAs in the district. She has two of the newest teachers so Middle Gate staff will be affected.

Mr. Lagana asked if SmartBoards were an alternative to supplies like paper.

Mrs. Peters said technology has added the need for supplies.

Mrs. Page said in an elementary school there is still no substitute for paper and pencils.

Dr. Robinson said you will see some changes in supply lines. We have realigned what we had put in them. We used to put desks in supplies. Furniture is all in the plant operations and maintenance budget.

Mrs. Leidlein asked about the riser replacement.

Mrs. Liestman said we have been borrowing them for 11 years and they have been breaking because of being transported. Not having them in the school does not allow enough practice time before the concert.

Head O'Meadow School

Mr. Bircher said if he could have any wish it would be that the school system was like the one we had 10 years ago. Innovation costs money. His wish now was to find a position in the district for the two wonderful teachers he is losing.

Mrs. Fetchick said our enrollment is dropping. Data shows we drop off from 2006-07 which was our highest population. At what point in time would we suggest some redistricting.

Dr. Robinson said we are down 106 students this year with 50 plus at Head O'Meadow. Upper grade levels are up. When a school drops below 300 you have to look at whether you can operate that building efficiently. We have a facilities subcommittee of the Board and she wants to speak to them about the future.

Mrs. Fetchick said it was expected that we would have a drop off. For every 1% rise in unemployment we get a decrease in our population.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if there was money in the budget to do an enrollment study.

Dr. Robinson said there was not.

Mrs. Leidlein said she wanted to see that in the budget.

Mrs. Bittman agreed.

Item 2 – Old Business

CIP:

Mrs. Bittman spoke about the latest air quality study at the middle school and Hawley School. The numbers at the middle school are almost identical to the 2001 study and Hawley is elevated.

Mrs. Leidlein preferred more information from people in the business to speak to us about the issues with air quality.

Mrs. Bittman said the Health Department had no information to give us.

Mr. Lagana said there is a lot of information out there. He wants to know the ramifications on health issues.

Mr. Nanavaty said the Board has to decide when enough due diligence was enough. What he heard from the CIP committee was that since questioned by the Board of Finance this came to the forefront. If we lose a boiler at Hawley the school will close until a new boiler is installed. What are we going to do to protect all the schools in our district? Maybe we should put off the roof and do the HVAC at the middle school. The CIP subcommittee said Hawley had to be done and put it in the order in which it is listed.

Mrs. Fetchick said it wasn't another board. She was also concerned about the levels. When we put forth the CIP as it stood it was contingent on having the middle school retested. The standards apply to adults not children in classrooms. Maybe someone at the state could help us. Mr. Faiella is talking with someone for things we can do to remedy the situation. We have to come up with a special appropriation to go to the Board of Finance. She wants time to be able to talk to a health professional and possibly not have to do the air quality testing.

Mr. Gaines gave the Board the Connecticut public act that addresses this. It says that there is no health hazard. It is indication of ventilation. Sick school syndrome talks about lead and mercury. We might want to change the order and define the middle school HVAC project and pull it out to year three.

Mr. Hart said that the OSHA number is for general industry. It does not apply to state municipal workers. We are repeating discussions of the committee in 2003. The testing came back with the same numbers. Hawley and middle school need better ventilation. Hawley students are younger and don't move around. The more significant factor is the boiler problem at Hawley which is top priority. In year one we need to move on Hawley. Leave it unchanged.

Mrs. Leidlein asked for a little more time to make the right decision. We have to search to find an expert. She is not comfortable making a decision.

Mr. Gaines said at some point we have to decide if we've done our due diligence. No report said the levels were a health hazard or detrimental to the children. We should move on it.

Mrs. Fetchick said in her research the higher levels of CO2 can effect performance of students by causing them to have headaches, nausea and skin rashes.

Dr. Robinson said she spoke about a rash that flight attendants got years ago. People refused to go to work. It turned out that the new life vests had fresh paint which was flaking off and not a problem with the planes. If we survey the staff she guarantees hysteria will develop on the air quality. She spoke to the Health Department and Mark Granville. She would suggest hiring an independent industrial hygienist to talk about the numbers.

Mr. Nanavaty said if we spend Board money and this person assures us that it is okay are we going to see the light at the end of this tunnel? On occasion as a Board we have agreed to wait for a certain period of time when a member has a concern but we need to know by next week at the latest. He has some concerns about the readings also.

Mr. Hart said we need to be sure we have the facts. If they come back and say the numbers are high we still have to do something at Hawley or both.

Mrs. Leidlein said an emergency doesn't warrant doing the whole HVAC system.
Mr. Hart said we have to do Hawley either way.

Mrs. Bittman said the 2001 report recommends opening windows. We are looking at wide ranges. The boilers at Hawley were the number one priority. HVAC is the answer for the middle school.

Mrs. Fetchick suggested Kenny Foscue.
Dr. Robinson said he was with the state and runs the Tools for Schools program.

Mrs. Fetchick said she would feel more comfortable having someone come in because she cannot tell the public that this is not a health problem for the children.
Mr. Lagana said we need to do the middle school roof. We can change next years' CIP. We want some resolution.

Mrs. Bittman asked who would be able to answer these health questions.
Dr. Robinson said she would ask Mr. Foscue. If he can't come down she will ask him for a recommendation.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to re-approve the currently approved CIP as it stands with no modification. Mr. Hart seconded.

Vote: Mr. Lagana – aye
Mr. Hart – aye
Mr. Gaines – aye
Mr. Nanavaty - nay
Mrs. Leidlein – nay
Mrs. Fetchick – nay
Mrs. Bittman – nay

The motion was defeated.

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

Item 8 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:44 p.m.

Questions raised: Report on how pay to play is administered
List of what students pay for supplies in afterschool activities

Respectfully submitted:

Debbie Leidlein
Secretary