

**Board of Education  
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Thursday, February 4, 2010, at 7:30 p.m. in the Reed Intermediate School library.

Present:	L. Bittman, Chair	J. Robinson
	K. Fetchick, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
	D. Leidlein, Secretary	11 Staff
	D. Nanavaty	18 Public
	R. Gaines	1 Press
	W. Hart	
	C. Lagana	

Mrs. Bittman called the meeting to order at 7:34 p.m.

Item 1 – Public Participation – none

Item 2 – Discussion and Approval of Greenhouse Replacement

Mrs. Bittman said the greenhouse fell apart when we tried to move it so we need a replacement as a change in the educational specifications.

Joe Costa from Fletcher-Thompson, said the original project included moving the greenhouse but when we tried the structure wasn't strong enough to move. We wanted to design one that would be more permanent. It is the approximate size of the old greenhouse with a single room on a concrete slab with a gas fired heating system and some exterior lights. We want to issue it to the Public Building and Site Commission for permission to submit to the contractor and hopefully get suitable pricing.

Mr. Nanavaty asked if he knew the cost.

Mr. Costa said the cost was between \$30,000 and \$50,000 to move the old one. The Public Building and Site Commission is looking for \$100,000 more on the credit from not moving the old one. The target is between \$130,000 and \$150,000 for the new one.

Mr. Naanvaty asked if they were going to provide us with the monies in the present bid package for moving the building to offset the cost of a new one.

Mr. Costa said no amount has been agreed to. The estimate was between \$30,000 and \$50,000.

Mr. Nanavaty asked if we were looking for the contractors to provide the additional \$100,000.

Mr. Costa said it would be an increase to the contract. The credit we will receive is between \$30,000 and \$50,000 which is the value of relocating the old greenhouse. Mr. Hart asked if the people who took it apart have any liability for the damage. Mr. Costa said he didn't think there was any liability because it literally fell apart. It was not due to negligence.

Mrs. Fetchick asked who determined that we were going to add an additional \$100,000 to the budget.

Mr. Costa said the Public Building and Site Commission approved it.

Mrs. Fetchick asked what the time frame was for approval.

Dr. Robinson said we had to approve it now.

Mr. Nanavaty said all we are approving is the greenhouse. Once the bids come back the Public Building and Site Commission will determine if the money is okay. Are we sure that the way you designed it is satisfactory for the number of students and the purpose for which we are building it?

George Bachman, teacher for the greenhouse program, said it looks like it will fulfill the needs of the Greenery.

Mrs. Fetchick asked the size of the old one.

Mr. Bachman said it was 24 ft. x 36 ft.

Mr. Costa the exact size of the new building is 26 ft. x 27 ft.

Mrs. Bittman asked about the burglar system being a bid alternate.

Mr. Bachman said the old greenhouse had a burglar alarm and fire protection. His first priority of bid alternates would be the energy curtain.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the greenhouse replacement at Newtown High School as presented. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

### Item 3 – Special Education Budget

Dr. Regan said that right now we have a decrease in special education students for a total of 453 but we have an increase in students with multiple and intellectual disabilities and autism. We maintain our staffing level because of these students. We have 27 children with autism.

Regarding the outplacement of students and the Excess Cost Grant we establish a per pupil cost which is \$11,663 for this school year. When we have a student we can't supply appropriate education for in district those types of placements incur significant increased costs. The district is responsible for its own placement. If we place them we pay 4.5 times the per pupil cost which is \$52,483. That is the cost that Newtown has to assume for a student. Anything beyond that is supposed to be funded to the district through the Excess Cost Grant. We are supposed to get 100% reimbursed. We have budgeted 85% traditionally on average. This year there is an underfunding by the state and we will only receive 70% from ESC and a decrease down to 50% for the 2010-11 school year. This is for students we place. We have no choice over what is decided by the courts or DCF placements. For those students the formula changes. We are responsible for one times the per pupil cost which is \$11,663. We have ARRA money that we used and will use that next year to offset three students next year.

Mr. Hart asked what causes DCF to outplace students.

Dr. Regan said the students are Newtown residents and for whatever DCF feels appropriate the child is removed from their home. We assume the education costs. Some are not special education students. The courts can also tell DCF to remove them.

Mrs. Fetchick asked what the process was to move them back into the district. Dr. Regan said the agency will call us when they move the students back to Newtown. We also have children in the Newtown schools that live out of town and we send the other district a bill.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if they are in our enrollment. Dr. Regan said the other district has them as their student.

Dr. Robinson said every student has a unique ID so anywhere they go the state will show them at their home district. We also allow staff members to send their children to our schools for a reduced tuition.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if we had an understanding of why the number has gone up this year and why. Dr. Regan said it was an increase in agency placements. We don't know why. We found out there was a group home in Sandy Hook and that we were responsible for two students who have no nexus but because they live in Newtown they are our students. If we received 100% of the ECS money our special education budget would shrink by 4%. That isn't a good thing. Maintenance of effort is that we have to spend equal to or greater than our budget amount or we would lose approximately \$2M in federal grants that support Newtown. We don't see the state coming through with 100%. We received ARRA money and have staffing under that grant which disappears after next year then we will have to assume the cost for that staffing.

Mr. Hart asked if we were doing the job we should be doing. Dr. Regan said we are measured by the state every year. There are 22 indicators by which the federal government measures the states and we are in compliance with all 22. We have tried to increase the level of proficiency on CMT performance by special education students. We head up the state effort on inclusion and are a model district for our diagnostic practices.

#### Item 4 – Pupil Personnel Budget

Dr. Regan said this includes health, guidance, school psychologists and social workers.

Mrs. Bittman asked about the cost for professional services. Dr. Regan said the increase reflects anything we need to contract for evaluations for students that we can't do in the district. With new technology there are new applications needed for the students.

Mr. Gaines questions the cost to print reports cards at Reed. Dr. Gejda said they were working with PBS and Rtl so more parent materials are needed. Her budget will change depending on what we have to print from the previous year.

Mrs. Fetchick asked for clarification on that.

Dr. Robinson said three of the schools will be opening up the parent portal for access to student grades so progress reports will be eliminated.

#### Item 5 – Transportation Budget

Mrs. Fetchick asked if we met with St. Rose to see how we could be more efficient with transporting their students. Their buses are half full.

Mr. Dilonardo said he met with Mary Maloney about possibly consolidating other buses with Hawley or Reed. If we did that it would upset the second tier busing. The way students are distributed in town would take almost 20 buses for St. Rose.

Mr. Nanavaty asked who transported St. Rose students.

Mr. Dilonardo said there are five owner/operators, one Board of Education vehicle and the rest is transported by MTM.

Mr. Nanavaty asked why the Director of Transportation position was being eliminated. Dr. Robinson said she looked at this as an area to cut.

Mr. Nanavaty said we have 34 contractors and MTM. When it comes to making sure drivers are trained and schedules are created we don't have a company to rely on. He is concerned that if we eliminate this position and something happens that people will be calling Dr. Robinson, Dr. Gejda or the interim director of business. He has never known Newtown to operate without a Director of Transportation. Dealing with that department will take you or a representative away from what that person should be doing.

Dr. Robinson said that what he was saying was true. If we had one transportation company they would have the personnel to take care of things. The owner/operators will have to assume the training responsibility. There are 19 cuts to positions that are valuable. It will fall back on the Director of Business and the two women in the transportation office.

Mr. Nanavaty said last year the owner/operators gave up their contract increases. Now they will get their 2.25% increase. Has anyone approached them? The teachers are receiving 0% this year. Has anyone been approached to see where we could have cost savings?

Mrs. Fetchick said the teachers are getting an increase.

Mr. Nanavaty said they aren't in a better position than they were two years ago.

Dr. Robinson said the drivers are getting an increase too.

Mr. Nanavaty said the drivers are getting their increase back with a pay increase.

Mr. Nanavaty said during negotiations with MTM last year with the number he was given we could see savings over \$500,000 a year if the rates were similar as MTM rates. Has anyone approached them to modify their rates and extend their contract? In two years we have to negotiate but instead we could extend them three years now if they meet the MTM rates.

Dr. Robinson suggested that she and Mr. Nanavaty move forward on that.  
Mr. Nanavaty said the Director of Transportation should be involved in this.  
The Board agreed that Dr. Robinson and Mr. Nanavaty pursue this.

Mr. Hart asked if we locked in on diesel fuel through the end of 2010.  
Mr. Dilonardo said that Fred Hurley does this and was in the process of getting bids.

Dr. Robinson said usually a percentage is built in for what the district pays. We pay owner/ operator insurance so there are extra costs besides fuel.

Mrs. Fetchick thought the owner/operators paid their own insurance.  
Mr. Dilonardo said the decrease in insurance is for MTM. They pay their own.

#### Item 6 – Plant Operations & Maintenance Budget

Mr. Hart asked if the Hawley project could be paid for by the Hawley Fund.  
Mr. Gaines asked if the lower levels lights would also be eligible.  
Mrs. Leidlein asked what the requirements were to use the funds.  
Dr. Robinson said she spoke to Bob Tait who said we could use the \$70,000 for the cafeteria.

Mrs. Fetchick asked why the integrated phone system for the high school was in Mr. Faiella's budget.  
Mr. Faiella said there is a sum of money to get the system up and running. It is not expandable so it needs to get about \$144,000 of additional funds.

Dr. Robinson said Public Building and Site Commission is reviewing this. The voice over IP for the wing is reimbursable with the project. We can't tie it into the old system in the building. The cost of that is in the project and not reimbursable.

Mrs. Amodeo said this is to program the system and get it up and running and done at the recommendation from Joe Costa.

Dr. Robinson said they are putting through a change order to the Public Building and Site Commission.  
Mrs. Amodeo said there is \$600,000 in the package. When you added things in it came to \$783,000. We changed the FF&E to \$93,000.  
Mr. Faiella said this was driven by Bob Mitchell.  
Dr. Robinson said she would be meeting with Fletcher Thompson regarding this issue.

Mr. Nanavaty said what prevents us from approaching Public Building and Site about upgrading the phones in the current high school. Why can't this be kicked in with the renovations in some of the rooms?

Mrs. Bittman said this wasn't our problem and needs to go back to the Public Building and Site Commission.  
Dr. Robinson said they are already looking at putting an entire equipment piece into the project. We can talk to them about it.

Mrs. Fetchick said the phone system is a priority.  
Mr. Nanavaty said if we don't put it in our budget it may not get done.

Mr. Lagana asked if the two custodians at the high school were for the addition to which Mr. Faiella said they were.

Mr. Lagana asked if we needed them this year.  
Mr. Faiella said we did because they will be responsible for an area larger than what is normally assigned.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if anyone approached Blue and Gold for the visitor bleachers.  
Dr. Robinson said she wasn't sure if he had.

Mr. Faiella didn't know how active they were now. They gave up the responsibility of the snack shack.  
Mrs. Leidlein said Mike McNamara was the president.

Mr. Hart asked about the lightning protection for Reed and if we could pull that out and make it a single project and possibly get a better price to do all schools at one time.  
Mr. Faiella wasn't sure. Also, there was no lightning damage at Reed.

Mrs. Leidlein asked about the increase in the charge for Parks and Rec activities.  
Mr. Faiella said they use our buildings and we pay for custodial overtime.

Dr. Robinson said Mr. Bienkowski sent a letter telling them they had to pay but they didn't have the money. We continued this year to let them use the buildings.

Mrs. Leidlein said she was told if the PTA had a fund raiser on the weekend they had to pay costs. She was concerned that this didn't hold true across the board.  
Mr. Faiella said the PTAs are charged for custodians.

Mrs. Bittman said with the \$48,000 compared to the many families who participate have they considered raising their rates to cover the custodians?

Dr. Robinson said we have to continue this discussion with the Chair of Parks and Rec., Mrs. Bittman and Pat Llodra. Mrs. Bittman agreed.

Mr. Nanavaty said the taxpayers are paying for one Town budget. One town agency shouldn't be charging another town agency. It's all coming out of the same pot. That's why we eliminated Parks and Rec from using the pool. We stopped that charge.  
Mrs. Bittman said we have to decide as a town what our policy is to use the buildings.

Mr. Nanavaty said the Town does a lot of things for the schools and doesn't get reimbursed. The Town provided material and labor for the high school parking lot. The money comes in from the same source.

Mr. Hart said we should have someone come in and look at what we could do to save. Energy prices will only go up. How accurate are our predictions?

Mr. Faiella said we are not locked in on fuel oil. Northeast Utilities has a 5% increase in delivery of electricity.

Mrs. Fetchick said that last April Mr. Bienkowski negotiated with CL&P and saved \$300,000.

Dr. Robinson said Ed Arum is negotiating with them.

Mrs. Bittman asked how much an energy audit would cost and asked if the Board would like Mr. Faiella to investigate having one. The Board requested that he do that.

#### Item 7 – Technology Budget

There was a discussion on computer replacements in the schools.

Mrs. Amodeo said we were replacing all of the computers in Reed because they all hit the same seven year replacement time. We have a seven-year obsolescence rate and get a deal from Dell.

Mr. Nanavaty asked why the laptops for the high school are more expensive than the ones for Reed.

Mrs. Amodeo said the ones at Reed are mini laptops and the ones at the high school are for teacher use. Each new teacher gets a laptop. The desktop will have a permanent station in the lecture hall.

Mr. Hart said that the cost of the netbooks was high. He purchased one with an eight-hour battery for \$280.

Mrs. Bittman asked Mrs. Amodeo to look at the costs.

#### Item 8 – Curriculum Budget

Dr. Gejda said the primary budget drivers are program development, staff development, resources including textbooks, and contracted services. She spoke about the various curriculum committees. The state turned over whether teachers had demonstrated competency in their area to the district and also handed back the re-training for the mentors. We should look at alternatives in our purchasing without buying a book for each student and use in-district experts instead of paying for someone to train staff.

The curriculum and instruction for next year has been decreased by \$27,935 for an overall decrease of 6.7% from this year. Over the past two years this budget has been decreased by 20%.

Mrs. Fetchick said the sub budget seems high at \$482,000.

Dr. Gejda said we pay teachers \$100 per day for training. Sub pay is around \$85 per day.

#### Item 9 – General Services Budget

Dr. Robinson said general services covers the operation of central office, the business office, substitute funds, security services and cafeteria operation.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if there was any opportunity to reduce other staffing positions in the Board of Education offices.

Dr. Robinson said the biggest division with central office is the business office. There is the administrator, the accountant, two in payroll, an accounts payable person and an office manager. If you needed to make reductions middle management would be most vulnerable. We have people capable of learning additional tasks.

Mrs. Fetchick asked what increase we budgeted for salaries that are not under contracts.

Dr. Robinson said it is 3% overall except for those joining the union. We have all in technology and two in transportation.

Mrs. Bittman asked how much the office manager position was.

Dr. Robinson said it was \$60,000 to \$70,000 without benefits. It is the accounting supervisor position.

Mr. Gaines said security has a big increase for cameras and software.

Dr. Robinson said we have strategically placed cameras around high school that tie into system. We have a number of old cameras that are not working.

Mrs. Fetchick asked about the health insurance.

Dr. Robinson said that as of today the RFQ is being reviewed by the Town attorney and today she met with Pat Llodra and Bob Tait and agreed that the Board wants that to go out. Their agent AIM Consulting paid \$81,603 in commissions and T.R.Paul paid \$145,000. Both agencies have been informed that we will go out for an RFQ. We want one agent to serve both the Town and Board of Education. We are starting to look at self-insurance because we can't bid now. The Town was told by their agent they are down to 12%. We haven't heard yet.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if Mary Griffin would be at our next meeting.

Mr. Gaines asked for official word for the next meeting.

Mrs. Leidlein said we are heading in a better direction by sending out an RFQ and self-insurance.

Dr. Robinson said self-insurance will drop by 2%. It takes a couple of years to see the results of self-insurance. The other thing we don't know is Anthem didn't look at the new option for the teachers.

Mr. Nanavaty said we know the teachers have a POS or HSA plan. They can give us an idea of what our savings will be. We also need our claims for the last five years. We need to know what they are looking for in managing our claims.

Mrs. Fetchick said to go back to her again and tell them what the Town can get. She asked about unemployment which went up \$147,000 this year.

Dr. Robinson said that everyone we released may have collected. We also had some non-renewals and people we dismissed. We have to pay unemployment for the first 26 weeks and tier three an additional 13 weeks. They give us an amount with a maximum of \$500 per week. We have 19 people slated for layoffs.

Mrs. Leidlein asked after what number of years service can a retiree claim their pension. Dr. Robinson said they are vested in 10 years and could go out at age 60. At 20 years you can retire at age 55. The amount goes twice the average of your three highest years. The max is 35 years. We have about 30 who could retire. The best incentive is to pay their health insurance.

Item 10 – Public Participation

Julie Luby, 15 Fox Run Lane South, said she uses Parks and Red and it would not upset her to have a fee. We should carry no expense that affects the children. Also in Region 15 teacher retirement incentive is one year salary over 5 years with a minimum of 20 teachers with a firm commitment to retire.

Eric Paradis, 85 Riverside Road, regarding the 19 out-placed students we should look at a commonality of program to serve them in-district. Keep them in town.

Kinga Walsh, 21 Horseshoe Ridge Road, said that regarding changing computers every seven years, we have leaking roofs and a boiler at Hawley ready to die.

Mrs. Bittman said the roofs and schools are in our CIP.

Mrs. Bittman asked to explore the early retirement incentive.

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

Item 11 - Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:55 p.m.

Questions raised: Cost to print report cards at Reed  
Cost of an energy audit  
Cost comparisons for netbooks  
Insurance percentage from T.R. Paul  
Explore early retirement incentive

Respectfully submitted:

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Debbie Leidlein  
Secretary