

Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, February 9, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. in the municipal board room in the town hall at 3 Primrose Street.

Present:	L. Bittman, Chair	J. Robinson
	K. Fetchick, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
	D. Leidlein, Secretary	50 Staff
	D. Nanavaty	40 Public
	R. Gaines	2 Press
	W. Hart – by phone	
	C. Lagana	

Mrs. Bittman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Item 1 – CIP Discussion and Possible Vote

Mr. Faiella introduced Dr. Mark Granville from Brooks Laboratories who is an industrial hygienist.

Mrs. Leidlein asked at what numbers we should be concerned to have a study done regarding EPA guidelines for indoor air quality.

Dr. Granville said that CO₂ is not a toxic gas. The levels are a surrogate to decide if ventilation systems are operating at code levels. It wouldn't be considered unhealthy unless we were ten times higher than what we have in the schools.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if high levels can cause sickness.

Dr. Granville said ventilation is trying to achieve a level of fresh air coming in to dilute the things people bring into a building like sickness and chemicals. With elevated CO₂ levels you might feel the air is a little stale. If we took CO₂ levels in a typical house they would be in the 2000s after four people were in the house for two 2 hours. We normally do these measurements because people complain about the air quality. Many times you find the ventilation system is not up to current standards.

Mrs. Fetchick said that one of the indications of a problem in a building is 700 parts per million. Two areas in the middle school are around 2500.

Dr. Granville said if you followed the CO₂ levels continuously during the day the levels in the morning would be pretty close to the outside level. As people enter the building the levels will rise. The levels will fluctuate in a room depending upon the number of people in the room with the higher level when there is a full classroom.

Mrs. Bittman asked the time frame for taking the readings.

Dr. Granville said it takes a half hour to do a wing depending on the occupancy. The higher readings came from rooms full of students with doors closed. Lowered readings were half full rooms with doors open.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if high CO₂ levels can effect student performance and cause absenteeism. She referred to OSHA standards.

Dr. Granville said the OSHA health and safety standards were developed for the work environment, not the general public. The 5000 is the workplace standard for CO2. 4000 represents generally stale air. The source of CO2 in the school is from the number of people. We look at the balance between the respiratory load of the occupants and the fresh air coming. When the amount of fresh air is being reduced you have stale air and higher contributions of what people are bringing so you might find in the afternoons people complain about being tired.

Mrs. Fetchick asked Mrs. Sherlock for a comment.

Mrs. Sherlock said that periodically teachers tell her that every day around the same time they get tired but there was no pattern.

Mr. Hart asked if there was anything statistically different from the Hawley and middle school reading in January that indicate any urgency in working on the ventilation in those schools.

Dr. Granville said there was no way to take the data to make a rational decision on whether one was more urgent than the other. The one lesson from the data we have is that the ventilation is not up to suggested standards.

Mr. Faiella said he spoke to Brian Wetzel from CES who provided a couple of options but it would take a few months.

Dr. Robinson contacted OSHA who recommended an industrial hygienist to do follow-up on the work that Dr. Granville has done. Next Wednesday the hygienist will be at the middle school and the following Thursday she would be at Hawley School. There is no charge for this inspection.

MOTION: Mrs. Fetchick moved to hold off on taking a vote on the CIP until we get the info from the state. Mrs. Leidlein seconded.

Mrs. Fetchick said she was still concerned about the middle school levels which are higher than Hawley. In addition to the roof the air is a higher priority than the Hawley project.

Mr. Nanavaty said at the last meeting a request was made by one member to get additional information regarding the CO2 levels in our schools. It means that the ventilation system needs to be looked at. At Hawley School the students are sitting in rooms that do not have comfortable temperatures with some needing to open the windows in the winter. Hawley remains the priority. The Board of Finance put off a public hearing for our CIP. We need a decision tonight.

Dr. Robinson said we wanted someone totally unbiased and to make sure the public knew we were doing our due diligence for following up. People need to be comfortable and confident we are fully researching this. We need to monitor air quality on an ongoing basis.

Mr. Hart said the middle school is not worse than Hawley. Our expert said there is no significant difference between the schools. We have the boiler situation at Hawley. He agreed with Mr. Nanavaty.

Mrs. Leidlein said Hawley ranges were from 700 to 2100 and 750 to 2200. The middle school ranges were from 1000 to 2500 and 1300 to 2450.

Dr. Granville cautioned trying to put too much of a literal interpretation on these numbers. He would not be able to make a decision on these numbers to determine which needed to be done first. The testing was the same as done in 2003.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if Dr. Granville would recommend doing further testing for a need to put one school before the other.

Dr. Granville said he felt from what he has done they couldn't do enough measurement to make that decision.

Mrs. Bittman said we are trying to decide to let the design phase for Hawley School boilers stay in year one. The facilities subcommittee will look at the rest.

Mr. Gaines said the Hawley student-to-teacher ratio is smaller than in the middle school. The advantage in the middle school is that they change classrooms. The Hawley boilers are going to die. We should move the question on the CIP tonight.

Vote: 1 aye, 6 nays (Ms. Bittman, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Nanavaty, Mr. Gaines, Mr. Hart, Mr. Lagana) The motion was defeated.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to approve the CIP previously presented to the Board of Finance with the Hawley School design in year one. Mr. Nanavaty seconded.

Vote: 6 ayes, 1 nay (Mrs. Fetchick)

Item 2 – Public Participation

Kai Hedin, 13 Old Town Road, an eighth grade student gave the Board a petition to keep the middle school teachers and afterschool activities.

Julie Luby, 15 Fox Run Lane South, said the Board of Education should build an educational program that is good for the students that achieves what is in our mission.

Item 3 – Adoption of 2010-2011 Budget

Mr. Nanavaty said the high school is getting more and we are taking away from the middle school and elementary schools. He proposed to remove three teachers at the high school leaving one, remove the high school educational assistant for science, reduce the attendance clerk to stay as it is now, remove the maintenance mechanic, eliminate the three laptops, the lightning protection at Reed, the high school phone integration which we should approach Public Building and Site to have that cost come in the high school expansion project. These total \$437,260. His add backs to the budget include one custodian at the high school, the Reed art teacher, music teacher, one physical education teacher, the library clerk and the coaching and activities salaries for the afterschool activities. At the middle school he would add back the .3 art teacher, the family and consumer science teacher, the .92 educational assistant for Project Adventure, the library media associate and the coaching and activities salaries for the afterschool activities. He is concerned about eliminating the transportation director because we would be putting additional responsibilities on the superintendent and director of business. This brings the total to \$549,949 for all add backs. At the last

meeting Dr. Epple said she was going to try to come back with some funds. There is a \$112,689 difference between what we want to remove and add. Her number comes to \$71,384. We are terminating a lot of elementary teachers because of enrollment. He doesn't think full day kindergarten will be a reality. He wants to find \$55,405 to put back 4th grade orchestra. It was taken out before he came on the Board. Each year parents ask for it. That cost would be for one teacher to split time between the four elementary schools.

Mrs. Leidlein agreed to remove the three teachers from the high school but would rather see none added. She also agreed with removing the EA at the high school and the change for the attendance clerk. She would remove the maintenance mechanic, the lightning protection at Reed, the high school phone integration, one PE teacher from the middle school, the portable basketball hoop for the high school pool for \$750, the supplies for the science teacher at the high school for \$5,733, the storage racks and carts for PE for \$2,000, and removing the officer manager position at central office for \$65,000. For equipment she would eliminate 3 Smartboards for the middle school math for \$9,000, 5 laptops at Sandy Hook for \$5,545, 6 projectors at the middle school for \$14,358, 4 Smartboards at Middle Gate for \$15,764, 3 laptops at Hawley for \$11,823, 4 Smart Doc cameras for \$3,188, 8 Elmo docs for \$7,200 at MG, the Head O'Meadow Smartboards for \$31,592, the middle school replacement projectors for \$31,930, 3 laptops at the high school for \$3,327, and the Railyard at the middle school for \$3,695. She would like to add back the library clerk at Reed, the PE teacher at Reed and money for an enrollment study.

Mrs. Fetchick agreed to not add teachers at the high school, remove the educational assistant and the change for the attendance clerk, swap the maintenance clerk for two custodians at the high school, remove 3 laptops for new high school staff, remove the phone integration because it belongs in the high school expansion budget, and remove the portable basketball hoop and the storage racks. Things to add back are the PE teacher for Project Adventure at Reed, the afterschool activities at Reed and the middle school, and the Reed library clerk position. We don't have good information on our health insurance. Pat Llodra and Bob Tait feel our health insurance should be at 10 or 11%. She wants to reduce it by \$525,000 to an 11% increase. Regarding afterschool activities we are slightly over budget for what we are spending which should be looked at. She agreed with removing all of the Smartboards that are not necessary to teach classes and to removing the central office manager. We are going to receive \$50,000 for the Hawley cafeteria. She would like to remove \$20,000 from that budget and \$20,000 from the high school for the bleachers. We should speak to Blue and Gold about them. The warehouse is in the CIP to be finished. In town side CIP we can take out \$25,000 for the windows. Mrs. Fetchick asked why Reed can function with two PE teachers when the middle school has four. We should reduce the PE teachers at the middle school by two to make it the same as Reed. She would also like to remove the lead teachers at Hawley and Middle Gate. She asked about replacing all computers at Reed in one year and if it was possible to do that between two years.

Mrs. Amodeo said if we split that into two years, the next year Sandy Hook inventory is seven years old and we would be in the same situation.

Mrs. Fetchick said that was off the table. Regarding the warehouse repairs we have \$25,000 to replace windows. It's in the CIP.

Pat Llodra said the money in the CIP is supposed to complete that project. If the project survives we expect it to be completed soon.

Mrs. Leidlein said she also recommended adding back the afterschool activities at Reed and the middle school.

Mr. Hart accepted Dr. Epple's recommendations for special teacher add backs. Since the main items are for repairs he proposes taking \$200,000 out and let district staff decide what is important. These are not for repairs but for improvements that we might be able to wait a year to do. He cautioned eliminating the new teachers at the high school. Our pupil teacher ratio is the worst of all our schools. He agreed with putting back the afterschool activities at Reed and the middle school and also with Dr. Epple's recommendations.

Mrs. Bittman agreed with most of the recommendations and wanted to add back as much staff as possible. She was in favor of Dr. Epple's recommendations. She wants to keep the afterschool programs at Reed and the middle school. Regarding the two central office positions she would rather give the Superintendent a set amount of money to run the office and let her choose. She also supported adding the 4th grade orchestra.

Mr. Nanavaty spoke about the preliminary tax information the Board received from Bob Tait which showed that if the Town and Board of Education budget was passed as is by the voters the estimated tax increase would be 4.58%. A \$1M reduction in the total budget would save the average taxpayer less than \$100 per year or \$9 per month.

Mr. Dumais addressed the reductions to the high school budget. The Board changed the number of credits to graduate which necessitates an additional science teacher. Without adding the science teacher we are behind where we are this year. A small item is the attendance secretary for 1700 students. It is better to have it overseen by one person instead of coordinating it between two.

Mrs. Sherlock said that Reed currently has three PE teachers on a six day cycle. The middle school is on a five day cycle. If we only had two PE teachers we would only have class once a week. If the Board is going to make additional cuts she asked to please give her a dollar amount instead of taking positions.

Mr. Gaines said Reed had 4.2 PE teachers and the middle school has 4.

Mrs. Sherlock said Reed counts their Project Adventure teacher as a PE teacher.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if the family and consumer science class was removed would the middle school schedule have to change.

Mrs. Sherlock said if you take a rotation class, the students will have it for a quarter of the year.

Mrs. Page said she appreciated the offer of orchestra at the elementary level but then there would be challenges given the schedules we need to have to make that work. There is not unanimous agreement in supporting this.

Mrs. Liestman said the elementary schools are taking quite a cut. We would like to see the full day kindergarten or some remedial service for special needs students. Most important is that we have some input. We support music but the challenges of the school day are great. We would like academic support.

Mrs. Amodeo said that regarding technology instead of cutting the little items she'd rather consider a dollar amount from her budget so they can do some bargaining with the vendors.

Mr. Bircher said that with the cuts in educational assistants the students will get less services even though they are the ones that need it the most. He'd love to have music but doesn't want it on the backs of children having trouble with our curriculum.

Mrs. Bittman said she would add back the afterschool programs at Reed and the middle school, the library clerk at Reed, the PE teacher at Reed, the central office staff position and the high school science educational assistant.

Mr. Hart suggested taking \$200,000 out of plant improvements and \$90,000 out of the technology budget and let the professionals decide their reductions.

Mrs. Fetchick said the property and equipment cuts total \$133,727.

Mr. Hart said 3 laptops for the high school should be kept in abeyance until we come to some resolution. Split the difference for \$115,000.

MOTION: Mrs. Fetchick moved to reduce the technology budget in property and equipment in the amount of \$115,000 off the bottom line. Mrs. Leidlein seconded.
Vote: 7 ayes

MOTION: Mr. Hart moved to reduce the building and site improvement budget by \$200,000. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Dr. Robinson said that regarding the central office positions we have to add unemployment back in and will need to have additional smaller stipends because the work will have to be dispensed differently. It should be for \$100,000.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to add back the transportation director to the budget and remove \$100,000 from the central office staff budget to be decided by the Superintendent as to how it is applied. Mr. Nanavaty seconded.

Mrs. Fetchick was not in favor of adding back the transportation director. There are three people in that office. It is already out of the budget. She'd like an additional position eliminated.

Mr. Hart said we were temporarily adding it back in and leaving it up to Dr. Robinson as to how she wants to meet the \$100,000 cut.

Mrs. Leidlein said it should be worded differently to remove \$30,000 from the central office budget rather than adding back the transportation director.

Mr. Nanavaty said the transportation director with benefits is \$84,978. He doesn't agree to eliminate this position.

Mr. Gaines said transportation needs leadership. Eliminate an amount from central office and add back in the transportation director and let the Superintendent decide up to \$100,000.

Vote: 4 ayes, 3 nays (Mrs. Fetchick, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Lagana)

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to remove the proposed high school maintenance mechanic for \$81,700. Mrs. Fetchick seconded. Vote 7 ayes

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to add one custodian for the high school for \$63,000. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

MOTION: Mrs. Fetchick moved to remove 3 teachers at the high school, 1 science educational assistant and the .01 attendance clerk position. Mrs. Leidlein seconded.

Dr. Robinson said the reason it was back in the budget is that it hasn't been working. There are two different people trying to track the students.

Mrs. Fetchick amended her motion to delete the attendance clerk to which Mrs. Leidlein agreed.

MOTION: Mrs. Fetchick moved to remove 3 high school teachers and 1 science EA from the high school. Mrs. Leidlein seconded.

Mr. Hart said he would only cut two teachers from the high school.

Dr. Robinson said the school is on warning from NEASC. We have to plan four years before their visit. Putting in 2 teachers would be a step forward. The science EA is to go between those new science labs to be sure they are clean and ready to go.

Mrs. Bittman supports 2 teachers for the high school for science and health.

Vote: 3 ayes, 4 nays (Mrs. Bittman, Mr. Hart, Mr. Gaines, Mr. Lagana) The motion was defeated.

MOTION: Mr. Hart moved to eliminate two of the proposed additional teachers at the high school. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 5 ayes, 2 nays (Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Nanavaty) The motion passed.

MOTION: Mrs. Fetchick moved to add back 1 PE teacher at Reed and the library clerk at Reed. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 7 ayes The motion passed.

MOTION: Mrs. Fetchick moved to add back the extracurricular stipends at Reed and the middle school for \$102,000. Mr. Nanavaty seconded. Vote: 7 ayes The motion passed.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to add the .36 art at Reed and the .30 art teacher at the middle school. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 4 ayes, 3 nays (Mrs. Fetchick, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Lagana) The motion passed.

MOTION: Mrs. Fetchick moved to reduce the health insurance budget by \$520,000 which brings us to an 11% increase as opposed to the 15% in our budget.

Mrs. Leidlein seconded.

Mr. Gaines and Mr. Hart agreed that it was premature to cut that money.

Mrs. Fetchick said the Town put 11% into their budget.

Dr. Robinson said she spoke to our agent today with Mrs. Bittman and Mr. Nanavaty and we are still at 22%. They affirm what Anthem is telling them. We have to look at our experience rate before we jump at a percentage.

Mr. Nanavaty said if we were to be self funded the quote was 14.38%. There is room for negotiation. At some point we will move to self funding. The Town's initial offer was higher than our percentage. Our agent said she spoke to Anthem who said the Town is not below us.

Mr. Hart said we should go to self insuring if we can. There are complexities to do this. We need to pursue a new agent and self insuring.

Mrs. Leidlein agreed and said we need Town support on this issue.

Mr. Gaines said we need to resolve this before open enrollment in May. Any reduction of the current levels would have to be made up from some other area of the budget. He will vote against motion.

Vote: 2 ayes, 5 nays (Mrs. Bittman, Mr. Nanavaty, Mr. Hart, Mr. Gaines, Mr. Lagana)
The motion was defeated.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to add back the family and consumer science position at the middle school for \$56,645. Mrs. Fetchick seconded.

Mr. Nanavaty said it is more than just home ec. It is a life learning program and an integral part of the curriculum and rotation. We can look at other areas in the middle school to cut.

Mrs. Leidlein said a lot of the topics in the curriculum are covered in health and project adventure. She does not support it.

Mrs. Fetchick also does not support it.

Mrs. Bittman said Mrs. Sherlock suggested giving her a dollar amount to make reductions.

Mr. Gaines asked if we should just total up the cuts and let the administrators determine the cuts or do we tell the program we want cut.

Mrs. Fetchick said we are abdicating our responsibility if we don't pick the specific positions.

Mr. Gaines said maybe the administrators would prefer to just have the dollar amount. The result would cut the curriculum. We have to decide to be concerned with dollar

amounts and let the administrators handle the positions. We are voting to eliminate the position not the curriculum.

Mr. Nanavaty said when we eliminate staff we are affecting programs and curriculum. He is willing to withdraw his motion and put back half of that number leaving it up to the middle school principal as to who she will keep or let go.

Mr. Hart asked if that included the art teacher.

Mr. Nanavaty said it did not. It included the EA for Project Adventure, library assistant and the family life skills position for a total reduction of \$95,334.

Mr. Nanavaty withdrew his motion. Mrs. Fetchick withdrew her second.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to add back \$95,334 for staff at the middle school to be decided by the principal as to how it is applied. Mr. Gaines seconded.

Mrs. Bittman said education needs should drive the budget, not the positions.

Mr. Lagana said that if we are going to target dollar amounts we shouldn't change for each item.

Mr. Hart said we shouldn't consider them one position at a time. A dollar basis is the fairest.

Vote: 5 ayes, 2 nays (Mrs. Fetchick, Mrs. Leidlein) The motion passed.

MOTION: Mrs. Fetchick moved to reduce another \$65,000 from the staff budget in central office. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Mrs. Leidlein made a friendly amendment to reduce the amount down to \$40,000. This was accepted and seconded.

Mrs. Fetchick said we have to streamline some of our practices in central office.

Dr. Robinson said an additional \$65,000 will be very difficult. She agrees with streamlining and becoming more tech savvy.

Mrs. Leidlein added an amendment to change the amount from \$65,000 to \$40,000.

Vote: 2 ayes, 5 nays (Mrs. Bittman, Mr. Nanavaty, Mr. Hart, Mr. Gaines, Mr. Lagana) The motion was defeated.

MOTION: Mrs. Fetchick moved to eliminate the Hawley lead teacher for \$71,595 plus benefits. Mrs. Leidlein seconded.

Mrs. Fetchick said enrollment is lower now.

Mrs. Leidlein said she preferred the Board have a policy on these types of decisions. As population drops we need to look at our staffing.

Mr. Nanavaty said if we do this then we have to add back a teacher position to Hawley. We would only see a savings of \$20,000.

Mrs. Peters said if that position is cut then another elementary position would have to be cut. The lead teacher is not an administrative position.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if another teacher could help out.

Mrs. Peters said we would have to add stipends to get the needed help. She can't ask her teachers to take on more responsibility.

Dr. Robinson said we have taken the elementary schools to the bone. Education is so different now with additional help needed.

Vote: 1 aye, 6 nays (Mrs. Bittman, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Nanavaty, Mr. Hart, Mr. Gaines, Mr. Lagana) The motion failed.

Mrs. Bittman said the final reduction was \$184,229 for a 4.8% increase.

Item 4 – Public Participation – none

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

Item 5 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Debbie Leidlein
Secretary