

**Board of Education  
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Thursday, January 26, 2012, in the board room at 3 Primrose Street.

D. Leidlein, Chair	J. Robinson
L. Roche, Vic Chair	L. Gejda
C. McCubbin, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
R. Gaines	12 Staff
W. Hart	80 Public
K. Alexander	3 Press
J. Vouros	

Called to order at 7:40 p.m.

Item 1 – Public Participation

Katie Wolf spoke in favor of keeping Mrs. Matson in the choral director.  
Kyle Watkins expressed concern about losing the choral position just restored last year.  
Luke Scherin spoke in support of Jane Matson's position.  
David Swiegert agreed.  
Fred Neves spoke about the health coordinator, Judy Blanchard.

Mike Cummings, 98 Glen Road, supports the music program. He asked what would happen if the director of music position was eliminated and if one teacher was let go. He is concerned about keeping the same level of excellence. He asked if other areas could be cut or projects delayed to not lose a quality teacher. He represented approximately 200 families.

Lucy Rossi, 14 Rockywood Drive, read a letter from her daughter Mary Jo Rossi. The letter spoke about Judy Blanchard and keeping her position.

Kathy Rice, 42 Obtuse Road, supports the music program. She is against full day kindergarten. Studies show no benefit from full day kindergarten and it could cause harm and ruin self-esteem. Also, there is no academic benefit.

Karen Visca, 30 Mile Hill Road, said it will hurt the children if the special needs educational assistants are removed from the buses.

Donna Wallace Obloj, Lee Farm Drive, Southbury, Connecticut, works in the Connecticut Administration of Health and Physical Education said we needed to keep the district health coordinator position. She referred to the Connecticut Guidelines for Health.

Matt Cole, 9 Scenic View Drive, is a former student and spoke in favor of the high school music program.

Anna Wiedemann, 13 Clearview Drive, read a letter from Roseanne Loring which stated that Newtown's work has been recognized because of the health coordinator.

Gina Bradbury, 92 Castle Hill Road, is in favor of full day kindergarten. The children bring home work that there is no time to complete in school and there is also a lack of recess time.

David Smith, 41 New Lebbon Road, said music teaches discipline and allows for better learning in other areas.

Mary Oliver, a senior, said her whole life has changed because of the teachers she's had especially by Judy Blanchard. She teaches us how to be good persons.

Dane Vontoble, 3 Drummers Lane, said the budget as to be aligned to a strategic plan and return to blue ribbon status. He urged the China initiative be cut. We need to keep the health coordinator position. Adding six positions is without merit. Supports full day kindergarten and the gifted program. Offered to serve on any committee.

Amber Mason, 29 Taunton Ridge Road, is in favor of full day kindergarten for more individual time and extra attention. The goal is to have better than average students.

John Buterra, 27 Cannon Drive, has been a music teacher for 25 years. The director of music position is very important. His district eliminated it but had to reinstate it.

Rich Hyal, 11 Roosevelt Drive, supports the full day kindergarten.

Garin Gazidena, 48 Little Brook Lane, has a three-year-old son and protested the removal of EAs on school buses.

Carla Kron 4 Clapboard Ridge Road, supports the director of music position. She hasn't found a strategy in place for buying 100 iPods. She asked that we look at the temperatures in the schools with the air conditioning being on in September and October. This effects our student's learning.

Karen Rosman, 13 Stonewall Ridge, is in favor of full day kindergarten. There is very little recess or socialization.

Karen Kugler, 29 Brookwood Drive, supports full day kindergarten but we also need to fix the buildings. We need to have alternatives and solutions for the public.

Linda Thomas, 2 Clapboard Ridge Road, read a letter from her daughter, Abby Clements, in support of the Health Coordinator position.

Judy Blanchard, Plumtrees Road, stated some of the responsibilities of her position as Health Coordinator includes engaging the schools and community on health education including substance abuse along with the responsibility of the health curriculum. She holds parent sessions, chairs the strategic plan character development team and co-chairs the Newtown Prevention Council with Chief Mike Kehoe.

Dr. Ana Paula Machado, medical director for the school system, feels the Health Coordinator position is essential to the town. She knows what Mrs. Blanchard does with our students. She also supports the music department.

Michelle Assante, 16 Wendover Road, spoke in favor of the full day kindergarten. The China program is about being good citizens but it seems a bit extravagant.

Lisa LaPlant, 9 Fern Lane, has a four-year-old son and is concerned for his safety. She asked to keep the EAs on the buses.

Michelle Hiscavich, Director of Music, said she has been in the district for 24 years with 17 years as Director of Music. Parents in district value our program. We have been in the top 100 music programs in the state.

Kathy Hall, 19 Tamarack Road, is a Newtown High School math teacher. She supports full day kindergarten.

Chrissie Costel, 81 Cedar Hill Road, supports the full day kindergarten program.

Maria Horvath, 20 Main Street, supports the full day kindergarten.

#### Item 2 – Budget Discussion

Mrs. Leidlein asked about removing the EAs from the pre-school buses.

Dr. Robinson stated they were not being removed from preschool buses. Initially the decision was made to do that and parents were called but we decided against it.

Mrs. Leidlein also asked about the Ipads purchased for the district.

Dr. Robinson said they were first used as an aid for the special education population. We began downloading the software for IEPs so most are in special education. We are looking at the ability to do classroom observations on Ipads. We also used grant money. Mrs. Leidlein asked for more information.

Mrs. Roche asked what was spent on the Ipads for the next meeting.

Mrs. Leidlein asked for a revised list of prioritized items.

Mrs. Leidlein asked why studies found that there were no significant gains for students after grade 3 who attended full day kindergarten.

Mrs. Peters asked to wait for the research. It is important to know that it takes a number of years to get to that point.

Mrs. Leidlein asked for that information at the February 7 meeting. She referred to a study from Tufts. She would like it emailed to the Board.

Mr. Vouros wanted to know where the studies took place and how long ago. We need to clarify that if we move the pre-k program if the staff will be able to care for these children.

Mrs. Peters said we are mandated by their EEPs. Hawley has an OT to share.

Dr. Robinson said if the students are at different school they will develop a schedule for them.

Mrs. Roche said we've heard so many people supporting full day kindergarten but it will also impact the pre-K program. We have to make sure all of their services will be addressed.

Dr. Robinson spoke about her priority list. Full day kindergarten is the first priority. Because of concerns for NEASC in 2015 she requested positions for the high school as the second priority. We have a lot of work to do before 2015. Lack of clerical help was noted in the last NEASC report. Because of cuts at Reed which made scheduling so difficult she put positions back there as the third priority. Pupil personnel is the fourth priority, district level position is fifth and security staff is sixth.

Mrs. Roche asked for a list of priorities broken out as separate items instead of listing each school.

Dr. Robinson said the Ipads came out of ARRA funds and the IDEA grant.

Mrs. Leidlein asked for items listed after full day kindergarten to be prioritized.

Mrs. Roche asked where technology fell in the priority list.

Mrs. Leidlein asked Mrs. Amodeo for a list of prioritized items.

Mr. Hart asked about outsourcing security. Dr. Robinson would get that information.

Mr. Hart was dismayed that we have music and health and K-12 positions being swapped.

Dr. Robinson said trading these positions was not her first choice.

Mrs. Roche asked about the \$40,000 Mrs. Blanchard mentioned for salary.

Dr. Robinson said that amount was from a grant for the town.

Dr. Gejda said it is a federal grant for the Newtown Prevention Council which identified particular areas to be addressed. A town or coalition has to agree to use the funds for specific things. Mrs. Blanchard is the program director and doesn't get paid. There is also a program coordinator that tries to meet the conditions for the grant. To get the grant they needed a fiduciary agent to send out the monies from the grant. The Legislative Council receives \$125,000 for that grant. It includes the Police Chief, Mrs. Blanchard, and the Director of Newtown Youth and Family Services. The discussion was if Mrs. Blanchard would get paid if she took over some of the duties.

Mrs. Roche is concerned that the Health Coordinator position is on the table. She has strengths that can't be replaced. She agrees with the language arts and science positions and asked if we kept the music and health position where the priority would be for the two K-12 instructional leader positions.

Dr. Robinson said the math/science coordinator would have priority over the language arts position. We could add one this year and the other next year. Full day kindergarten is the start. Getting ready for NEASC would involve these district level coordinators. She would keep the math/science position.

Mrs. Leidlein asked the Board to comment on the full day kindergarten program.

Each member was in favor of the full day kindergarten program. Mrs. Roche is still concerned about the pre-school program and wanted her questions answered.

Dr. Robinson said we need to move the Sandy Hook children to their home schools which frees up a classroom at Head O'Meadow. We feel it's in the best interest of the students to be in their home schools.

For the next meeting Mrs. Leidlein asked for information on the contractual increases in the 2.26% and the percentage increase for the full day kindergarten program.

Mr. Vouros wanted more information on the two K-12 instructional leader positions and how they would work with every classroom. He asked if the math position at Reed should be under gifted.

Dr. Robinson said the .7 has been math. The math person had to increase because of the number of gifted math students. We have highly gifted teachers in the district used in curriculum development. Her priority is math science this year and literacy next year. She wants math and science to be spoken about like the music and health positions.

Mrs. Roche asked the responsibilities for Jane Matson and how they would be covered.

Dr. Robinson said Michelle Hiscavich would organize the music classes. The last person hired would be bumped. She's choral.

Ms. Hiscavich said Ms. Matson teaches four sections of chorus along with overseeing shows in the community, the musicals and the madrigal singers.

MOTION: Mr. Alexander moved to adjourn. Mr. McCubbin seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 3 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Cody McCubbin  
Secretary