

Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, September 20, 2011 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 (8:25 p.m.)	R. Bienkowski
D. Nanavaty	1 Staff
L. Bittman (8:15 p.m.)	25 Public
R. Gaines	2 Press
K. Alexander	

Mr. Hart called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to go into executive session to interview the candidate for the Special Education Supervisor position. Mr. Alexander seconded. Vote: 5 ayes

Item 1 – Executive Session

The Board interviewed the candidate and came out of executive session at 7:45 p.m. Mr. Hart stated that Mrs. Bittman and Mr. Buzzi would be delayed.

Item 2 – Public Session for Vote

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved that the Board of Education appoint Eric Colon-Rodrigues Special Education Supervisor effective on or about October 4, 2011 with the salary per the administrator's contract. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 5 ayes

Mrs. Leidlein asked to remove the minutes of September 6, 2011 from the consent agenda. There were items she spoke about that weren't in the minutes and asked that the meetings be audio recorded.

Item 3 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the consent agenda which included the field trip for Newtown High School band and cross country teams, the donation of a car to be used by the Newtown High School automotive classes, the resignation of Diane Whamond, school psychologist at Reed, the resignation of Linda Adamek, teacher at Middle Gate School, and the child-rearing leave of absence for Laura Schmidt to begin on or about December 9, 2011. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 5 ayes

Item 4 – Public Participation

Bridget Seaman, Hanover Road, asked the Board to do the right thing to reverse the decision and keep the owner/operators.

Joe Borst, 10 Beechwood Drive, asked when the bus contract would be available to the public. Regarding the administrator's contracts he hoped they would forego any increase in salary given the economic times.

Doug Fuchs, Sandy Hook, said many have made vacation plans for February and asked the Board to keep the calendar as put forth.

Sandra Maresi, Red River Lane, spoke in favor of the owner/operators.

Michael Talluto, 38 Orchard Hill Road, asked for the results of the background checks for drivers for All Star Transportation.

Mr. Hart said they are required by the State and should be in file at the company.

Jessica Paynter, 24 Palestine Road, said people in town don't understand why we are not keeping the owner/operators and asked to keep them.

Item 5 – Reports

Chair Report: Mr. Hart said we are working to finalize the bus contract and have one in draft form. It is a two-page document attached to the bid.

He met with group headed by Kinga Walsh to put together a budget information document.

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Robinson read Joan Libby's report from her interview with LeReine Frampton regarding the St. Rose kindergarten student who was left on her bus on Friday, September 9, 2011. The interview was conducted on September 15.

Mrs. Leidlein asked why the press was contacted before the Board met with Ms. Frampton.

Dr. Robinson said she was called by the News-Times reporter and was surprised she had that information. She then alerted the Board.

Mrs. Leidlein was concerned that we were making statements before clarifying the information with the person in question.

Dr. Robinson said the driver received numerous calls to set up a meeting but didn't come in until September 15.

Mr. Hart said this is public information but when he spoke to the press he didn't say which bus was involved. We have to keep this from happening again. First, we have a driver who changed her route and secondly, the bus wasn't checked until she returned home. Also, the video camera wasn't working.

Mr. Gaines indicated there have been several instances where the video camera wasn't working.

Dr. Robinson said the protocols to follow are to walk the bus and not change the route. This driver is conscientious, has a good record and she felt assured this would not happen again on her bus but this is a good lesson for everyone.

Mr. Hart suggested sending a reminder to the bus drivers to run their routes as specified and a notice to principals that the drivers have to take the time to walk their bus before they load again even if students are waiting.

Mr. Gaines asked if there was some way to create a spot check for these cameras.

Dr. Robinson had spoke about insisting upon random checks and bringing in the tape.

Mrs. Leidlein said there is some confusion about who parents should contact and asked if information had been sent home as to the procedure.

Dr. Robinson stated the parent called St. Rose first not knowing to call the transportation office.

Mr. Alexander asked if we had access to an after-hours number at St. Rose to access student home phone numbers.

Dr. Robinson said our transportation staff has contact information for St. Rose and we also have someone in our transportation office until the last child is dropped off. Dr. Robinson then spoke about the educational assistant layoffs. Mrs. Leidlein asked Dr. Robinson to get the number of hours each school had to reduce. Dr. Robinson stated we didn't have to lay off anyone. Jobs were available to those who wanted one.

Mrs. Leidlein asked for information on the new Chinese studies program at Reed. Dr. Robinson said Michelle Hiscavich was teaching this international music program. Mrs. Leidlein also asked if there was a curriculum for the board to review.

Correspondence:

Mr. Buzzi stated the Board received correspondence from Lisa Berger, Melanie O'Connell, Sherry Chapman, Stacie Doyle, Debra Wollman, Karen Hrabcsak, Karen Marron and Joanne Barnhart.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the financial report for the month ending August 31, 2011. Mr. Gaines seconded.

Mr. Bienkowski spoke about the non-certified sub-object accounts that reflected a negative position last month. A problem area is the ACES magnet school which has nine of our students attending. We only budgeted for six and were also approached to provide transportation. The grant for the Danbury magnet school is less because we are short four students. We are having a problem with our student athletic insurance. The company nearly tripled the rate so we will be going over the claims. They are going up because with the economy some people are losing their insurance and taking ours for their children to be covered. We are looking at other carriers but didn't have enough time to put one in place for the start of school.

Mr. Nanavaty mentioned there was a student from New Fairfield in our pre-school program. We brought it back to Newtown because the majority lived here. Dr. Robinson stated we agreed to keep that student because there was no program in New Fairfield.

Mr. Nanavaty was surprised we were providing transportation to ACES as we are not required by the state law to do that.

Mr. Bienkowski said the grant is the same at \$1,300 per student.

Mr. Nanavaty asked why we weren't providing transportation to ACES but not to the CES program in Trumbull.

Dr. Robinson said we are trying to find a way to do that. There are only four students going to Trumbull so the amount of the reimbursement is only half of what we receive for the nine students going to ACES.

Mr. Nanavaty asked why our insurance company for student athletes said our claims were too high which increased our costs.

Mr. Bienkowski said they are supposed to give us 60 days notice but that didn't happen. The law doesn't apply to this Massachusetts insurance company. We needed to have the interscholastic sports covered so we had to move forward.

Mr. Buzzi suggested moving the renewal date to July 1 or August 1.

Mr. Bienkowski said they would look at that. We are soliciting quotations now. If we find a more advantageous product we'll see what we can do to cancel the current company.

Mrs. Leidlein asked to have at the next meeting a revised copy of the 2009-2010 year-end report showing unliquidated encumbrances and also an accounting of the legal fees regarding Mrs. Getzinger.

Vote: 7 ayes

CMT/CAPT District Results:

Dr. Gejda spoke about the CMT results in mathematics, reading and writing performance. Proficiency targets for No Child Left Behind have increased by 10%. Sub groups also have to meet the AYP target scores. If a sub group contains fewer than 40 students that group is not included in the district/school designation.

Newtown school district met adequate yearly progress on the CMT and CAPT results. AYP results for students with disabilities in the middle school showed that they did not meet the math proficiency target but made enough progress to be categorized in safe harbor. At Reed School, AYP results for students with disabilities did not meet the reading proficiency target but they did meet the math target. Thus, Reed did not achieve AYP.

Mrs. Bittman asked how many years we made safe harbor and why this was happening. She suggested it was two years and Dr. Gejda agreed with her. We looked at students records in third, fourth and fifth grades which allows us to see if there has been growth which there has been. 90% of our students have to be at the proficient level. The Reed staff will develop an improvement plan.

Dr. Robinson cited that 82 students was a large number to work with.

Mrs. Bittman asked if we have the right staff in place for these students.

Dr. Robinson said the need was for strong reading certified instruction.

Mr. Hart asked if we could generate an aggregate elementary level and start working with them and create our own report to be sure we pay attention to each student.

Dr. Gejda said we will continue to focus on writing through work in the district PLCs on the early release days, highlight editing and revising strands, continue the *Language* program for identified students, increase nonfiction reading, and use the parent resource guide to literacy.

Mr. Dumais gave a presentation on the high school testing. Regarding the SAT in mathematics, Newtown over the last five years has seen an increase. Critical reading has been relatively flat compared to the DRG. SAT scores in writing are relatively the same and we are in the same place in the DRG. ACT is a college readiness test that

sets benchmarks for the test. The number of our students taking this test increases each year.

Mrs. Bittman asked if there was any way to bring earth science to eighth grade.

Dr. Gejda said we have discussed that but there isn't much room for that course. We are working on concept-based curriculum in the science area.

Mr. Dumais said that regarding AP exam scores, we had an increase in the average number of students taking the exams. The percentage of students enrolled in the courses and actually taking the test increased. We are above the DRG in the percentage who pass the exams.

Item 6 – Old Business

Middle School Roof Update:

Dr. Robinson expects this work to be finished in the next couple of weeks. They are very thorough.

School Calendar Make-up Days:

Mr. Nanavaty feels we should see what happens with the weather and leave the calendar as is.

Mr. Hart said the teachers feel the same way.

Mrs. Bittman stated that many teachers spoke to her about considering removing the February break but she feels we should not change the calendar and see what happens.

Mr. Buzzi heard from parents who have encouraged us to take days from the February break. He thinks we should take two days out of the middle of that week and leave Monday and Friday to have two long weekends.

Mrs. Leidlein said we have a calendar parents feel we should follow. If we make a change in February we should leave the PLC day, have Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday as school days, and leave June 14 for the last day of school as a half day. Dr. Robinson felt it would be better to have the three days together.

Mr. Gaines suggested having Thursday and Friday in February as school days and add two days in June.

Mr. Alexander said he thought it more sensible to use three days in February.

Mr. Hart suggested using Monday and Tuesday of the February break for a long weekend and the rest of the week as school days.

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved that the Board of Education modify the calendar to make February 22, 23 and 24 school days and make the projected last day of school a half day. Mrs. Bittman seconded. Vote: 6 ayes, 1 nay (Mr. Nanavaty)

Item 7 – New Business

MOTION: Debbie moved that the Board of Education adopt the 2012-2013 budget development calendar. Mr. Nanavaty seconded.

Mr. Hart moved to amend the motion to modify the calendar by moving items 10 to 14 to start a week earlier.

Mr. Bienkowski stated we moved everything up administratively to have Dr. Robinson present her budget on January 24 which gives us time to get the information we needed. He was not in favor of changing the dates.

Mr. Buzzi seconded the amendment.

Mrs. Leidlein said hearing Mr. Bienkowski's comments she was concerned to give him the time to prepare the budget. She doesn't want them to have to rush to put it together.

Mrs. Bittman said the Board was rushed also last year.

Vote on the amendment: 7 ayes

Vote on motion: 7 ayes

Bullying Legislation:

Dr. Robinson said we have to pay attention to the bullying issue. The legislation also speaks to time the students are outside of school but doesn't tell us how to remedy the situation.

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to go into executive session for the purpose of discussing the contracts for the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent and Director of Business and invited Dr. Robinson. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 8 – Executive Session

Executive session began at 10:17 p.m.

Item 9 – Public Session for Vote

MOTION: Mr. Buzzi moved that the Board of Education renew the contract for Dr. Janet Robinson for the period of July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2014 with a 2.5% increase in salary and retirement contributions. Mrs. Bittman seconded. Vote: 6 ayes, 1 nay (Mrs. Leidlein)

MOTION: Mr. Buzzi moved that the Board of Education renew the contract for Dr. Linda Gejda for the period of July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2014 with a 2% increase in salary and retirement contributions. Mr. Nanavaty seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

MOTION: Mr. Buzzi moved that the Board of Education renew the contract for Ronald Bienkowski, for the period of July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2014 with a 1% increase in salary and retirement contribution. Mr. Nanavaty seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

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

Item 10 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Andrew Buzzi, Jr.
Secretary