

**Please Note: These minutes are pending Board approval.
Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, April 2, 2013 at 7:30 p.m. in the council chambers at 3 Primrose Street.

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| D. Leidlein, Chair | L. Gejda |
| L. Roche, Vice Chair | R. Bienkowski |
| C. McCubbin, Secretary | 2 Staff |
| R. Gaines | 3 Public |
| W. Hart | 2 Press |
| K. Alexander (8:30 p.m.) | |
| J. Vouros | |

Mrs. Leidlein called the meeting to order at 7:45 p.m.

Item 1 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Hart moved that the Board of Education approve the consent agenda which included the minutes of March 19, 2013, the high school Junior State Club field trip, the \$500 grant for books for the Hawley School book club, the donation of \$500 to the Newtown High School baseball team from Newtown Babe Ruth, Alex Konneker as assistant girls track coach, the child-rearing leave of absence for Liza Eleoff, teacher at Head O'Meadow School, the child-rearing leave of absence for Melissa Cacioppo, teacher at Newtown High School, the children rearing leave of absence for Joanna English, teacher at Newtown High School, and the resignation of Nancy Benzing, nurse at Middle Gate School. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 6 ayes

Item 2 – Public Participation - none

Item 5 – New Business

Dr. Gejda spoke about the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the State Department of Education providing a practice test to help districts better determine their readiness. We would like to participate in this online practice assessment in math, reading and writing this April through May. The administrators are also interested. The benefits of this testing is to help monitor the progress of the Common Core State Standards at the district level, students will be exposed to the common core material, and it allows the district to conduct an online trail run of the computer-based assessment. She introduced Dr. Dianna Roberge-Wentzell, Chief Academic Officer of the Connecticut State Department of Education, who was there to answer questions.

Mrs. Roche asked what type of preparation was involved and how students would be picked to take the tests.

Dr. Roberge-Wentzell said students are not expected to prepare for the test. The district will receive feedback on how students do. For most students this will be the first time taking a Smarter Balanced assessment and taking a test on a computer. The choice is full district participation for grades 3 through 11. If there are students where participation is not advisable we will remove them from the sample. Newtown has large middle and high schools so it wouldn't be necessary for all students to take the test.

Mr. Gaines asked if we had enough computers for the testing and if they fit within our standard platform.

Dr. Gejda said we have been using MIST for 4 years. The only issue is that all students in the same grade level can't take the test at one time.

Dr. Roberge-Wentzell said grades 3 through 5 take one test for 60 minutes, grades 6, 7 and 8 take one test for 60 minutes and one for 90 minutes. For grade 11 both tests are 90 minutes. We need between 100 and 200 students to be tested.

Mr. Hart asked how Smarter Balanced differed from other tests.

Dr. Roberge-Wentzell stated it's a computer adaptive test and students will achieve in 3 hours what they achieved in days with other tests. Students with special needs will get more precise results regarding their abilities. The content is aligned to common core so it will assess what the standards teach. The practice assessments are timed but the new assessments will be untimed.

Mr. Vouros was concerned about students running out of time before they were finished.

Dr. Roberge-Wentzell said the pilots have shown that it takes students less time that is given to complete the tests.

Mrs. Leidlein said the window starts in 20 days to May 17. She is concerned about asking students and teachers to go through this testing because we don't know if they are psychologically ready and questioned the validity of the results. She wanted to know if the teacher feels the students are ready to take the test and how the administrators feel about testing at this time. She wants to know school by school if the principals feel their students are ready to take these tests.

Dr. Gejda said she became aware of interest in this at an administrators meeting. One concern is in the middle school where projects are due at the same time as well as being able to maintain activities during that time period. We worked with the state and were assured of getting a sample size for the middle school. If this will not be a positive experience for certain students they can be excused. Her expectation that was one elementary school would not participate which was fine with the state. She sees this as an opportunity for us but we will also be sensitive to see how people respond. As a district it will provide us information on our implementation of the math program and literacy piece. Technology is being looked at as the students need to be able to navigate on the screen. Keyboarding was a concern also. Grades 2 through 8 have an online keyboarding program to practice at home.

Dr. Roberge-Wentzell said they needed to let the vendor know if we will participate but we can reverse our decision to test.

Mrs. Leidlein was concerned about the validity of the results and if it would cause additional stress in the lower grades.

Dr. Roberge-Wentzell stated the testing is on track for 2015. We are working to support our districts to be ready. The practice assessment will only provide feedback to the individual districts.

Mrs. Roche asked if test monitors will help students who are struggling with the computer.

Dr. Roberge-Wentzell said the purpose for this test is to get practice. In 2015 we won't need to worry about test security because each student will have different questions. Help will be available if needed.

Mrs. Roche asked if this should first be offered to teachers to see if they are able at this time.

Dr. Gejda said that based on conversations we felt this was something we would do. She feels staff puts confidence in their leadership. One school will not test. The state would let us know

the smallest number of students to be tested at each grade level if we would like a smaller number tested.

Mr. Vouros asked what would happen if a child was not chosen for the test but the parent wanted them to participate.

Dr. Roberge-Wentzell said the state would allow additional students if that's what the district wanted.

Mrs. Leidlein sees the value of these tests for students and teachers and wants to be sure teachers and administrators are comfortable with the testing. She also wants them to be able to recommend removing certain students if necessary.

Mrs. Amodeo said we were ready for this practice assessment but will need to do the testing over several days to get all students.

MOTION: Mrs. Roche moved that the Board of Education support district participation in the practice assessment as presented. Mr. Hart seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Tool for Technology Readiness for Assessments:

Dr. Gejda said the testing window in 2015 is 3 months. We looked at the possibility of decreasing the testing window but the building principals have to be part of the conversation.

Mrs. Amodeo provided an analysis of possibilities for reducing the testing window. The question is how to administer the test. Using Ipads or laptops would have 2 sessions per day for 10 days.

Dr. Gejda is looking at what the shortest window would be. She assumed the state or Smarter Balanced would set a limit on testing per day. We have to speak with principals.

Mrs. Leidlein asked what we would need to purchase for the testing to which Mrs. Amodeo responded that we are limited for wireless in our buildings. We need to maintain the technology in place to keep it functioning well for the testing. We also have to look at building out.

Dr. Gejda mentioned that the testing will now allow tablets to be used.

Mrs. Leidlein asked about technology costs for this testing.

Mrs. Amodeo said she has what she needed but we can't make any cuts which will allow us to fall behind. We need to maintain where we are for this testing.

Item 3 – Reports

Correspondence: Mr. McCubbin received a total of 11 emails with 3 regarding security, 3 condolences and 5 miscellaneous.

There was no chair or superintendent's report. Dr. Robinson was not at the meeting to attend a speaking engagement.

Item 4 – Old Business

Teacher Growth Plan Update:

Our district committee has been working over 3 years on our district plan. The state model is called SEED. We will submit a plan to the state for approval to meet legislation mandates. This plan will take effect July 1 and has to be submitted by April 15. Mr. Dumais will be at the next meeting to answer any questions and asked the Board to send any to her or Mr. Dumais.

Mrs. Leidlein spoke about the Legislative Council subcommittee which met the night before. They voted 4 to 2 to pass forward to the full council the Board of Education budget brought forward to them by the Board of Finance. There was an amendment to reduce it by \$350,000

but that failed. Tomorrow night is the full Legislative Council meeting with a possible vote on the full budget.

Mrs. Roche mentioned that the PTAs wrote a letter asking the public to speak on behalf of the education budget. By Charter the budget has to be adopted by April 10.

Approval of January 23, 2013 Minutes:

Mrs. Leidlein stated that the Board believed there was a majority vote to go into executive session but discovered that a 2/3 vote was necessary so minutes need to be added for that portion of the meeting.

MOTION: Mrs. Roche moved that the Board of Education approved the minutes of January 23, 2013 as amended by Mr. Alexander. Mr. Alexander seconded.

Mr. Alexander said notes were not taken during that time and felt it best for the Board to agree on the items that were discussed as it was hard to recreate the actual discussion from that night.

Mr. Gaines said we were aware of the discussion. He doesn't think this amendment lends any information to the nature of those conversations so it is a disservice to the public to not provide as much information as we can. This amendment is not adequate.

Vote: 6 ayes, 1 nay (Mr. Gaines)

Item 6 – Public Participation

Karyn Holden, 68 Berkshire Road, asked if there were any updates in the Serv Grant and to have it on the agenda next Tuesday.

Mrs. Leidlein said they would provide more information as soon as they had a finalized document as they are working on some revisions.

Michelle Asante, 16 Wendover Road, said the Serv Grant was being revised because 2 private schools wanted to take part in it. This will be a huge concern for the referendum because we have no information on grants and private donations. The public will ask why certain things will not be covered. She asked why 1 private school didn't want to participate, if the grant covered security guards that were in the budget, and if the Yale services were not covered by the Serv Grant would the Board of Education cover the costs.

Mr. Gaines said we have security guards in the budget that was reduced by one guard.

Between our budget and the Serv Grant we would have enough for security of the schools.

Mr. Hart asked if the Serv Grant displaced what we have in the budget.

Mrs. Leidlein said it would not and that what is on the town side for security is different than what the Board of Education needs.

MOTION: Mrs. Roche moved to adjourn. Mr. Alexander seconded.

Vote: 7 ayes

Item 7 - Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Cody McCubbin
Secretary