

**Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, January 28, 2014 at 7:30 p.m. in the council chambers at 3 Primrose Street.

D. Leidlein, Chair	J. Reed
L. Roche, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
K. Hamilton, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
K. Alexander	5 Staff
J. Vouros	5 Public
D. Freedman	2 Press
M. Ku	

Mrs. Leidlein called the meeting order at 7:33 p.m.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 2 – Approve Minutes of January 17, 2014

MOTION: Mrs. Roche moved to approve the minutes of January 17, 2014. Mr. Alexander seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 3 – Pupil Personnel, Special Education and Health Budgets

Julie Haggard gave an overview of the areas she supervises.

Ms. Hamilton asked for information on the IDEA Grant.

Mrs. Haggard explained the grant.

Mr. Freedman referred to the out of district tuition increases and asked if there have been studies to see if we can provide services in our district.

Mrs. Haggard said there are times students have needs we can't meet. What we budget for does not always meet the number of students we have to provide for who are identified during the next year or move into Newtown.

Ms. Hamilton asked the status of the preschool program and cost.

Ms. Haggard said that there is one class at Head O'Meadow School and two were moved to the high school last year. Currently we haven't made any definite decisions on moving the program. She would get the cost information.

Ms. Hamilton felt it would be best to have the program in one location.

Dr. Reed said the new Sandy Hook School is being designed to house the preschool program.

Mrs. Ku asked if special ed costs are beyond what is projected would the excess cost grant go up.

Mrs. Haggard said it is uncertain but we generally receive the same amount of reimbursement. Mrs. Ku asked if it came back directly to the district.

Dr. Reed said we get the money back the year we are incurring the cost and is applied against costs.

Mr. Bienkowski said the State has capped the amount. We've estimated 75% for the current and the next year.

Ms. Hamilton asked about the STARR Program enrollment and cost.

Mrs. Haggard said this program meets the needs of the more medically fragile population. We have one tuition student and two Newtown students. The cost has a lot to do with the excess cost grant. She will project the cost and provide that to the Board. All placements are decided by PPTs.

Mr. Vouros said the GATES committee is still in the process of meeting.

Item 4 – Middle School Budget

Tom Einhorn spoke about middle school goals with safety and security a priority. He asked for continued support for the Readers Workshop program and the technology needed for testing. Regarding the declining enrollment we will reduce the clusters from ten to nine with a reduction of four teachers. Classes are expected to have 23 students. The ninth cluster would have four teachers with 50% seventh grade and 50% eighth grade.

Ms. Hamilton asked how students in both grades would be grouped in the same class.

Mr. Einhorn said there would be consideration about the students placed in those classes. It has been done effectively in the past.

Mr. Vouros asked about the technology at the middle school, virtual desktop and the impact on the three computer labs as well as the status of the 11 Smartboards from Sandy Hook School.

Dr. Reed said we have a thin client solution at the middle school with 106 computers involved. We thought we solved some computer challenges last March. We did upgrades over the summer but have had some challenges emerge. Dell doesn't have the answers. Citrix will be at the school on February 3 to see if they can resolve the issue. If not, we will move away from these older models. If we have to discard those computers we will look at the proposed distribution of replacement computers. We also have a situation where we received a \$100,000 grant from the State but we have to spend \$200,000 on technology to get the grant. A portion of the grant funds will be used to replace 32 laptops on carts at the middle school and we will be increasing a larger number next year.

Mr. Freedman asked if we have sufficient technology in this budget to handle what we need for testing.

Mr. Einhorn said part of our request was to add 50 laptops to support the testing. We also look to create more mobile labs.

Ms. Hamilton asked where we stood regarding the testing.

Mr. Einhorn said that once students are logged in, they are functioning. It's more of an initial network connection problem in the beginning. He's confident we will be okay and doesn't think it's a bandwidth problem. The IT department is coming over each morning to take care of any issues.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if there was a solution.

Dr. Reed said there is a plan to resolve the issues with the thin client solution within a prescribed amount of time.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if students brought their own devices and if that was welcomed in the classroom.

Mr. Einhorn said there was a lot of Smartphone usage along with tablets. We encourage students to bring them in as they are an effective learning tool.

Mr. Vouros asked about the Smartboards from Sandy Hook School. Dr. Gejda said there was some installation over the break which was done free of charge. Some equipment had to be ordered with additional installation within the next two weeks. Staff members are using them who can help train when the additional ones are installed.

Item 5 –Newtown High School

Mr. Dumais said they have a couple of small increases which are for a gymnastics coach and an additional 12 work days for the director of guidance. There has been a decrease in the reduction of requests for art classes. We had a retirement in that department and decided to not replace that position at this time.

Mrs. Ku asked about the decline in course registrations in art.

Mr. Dumais said at the end of summer we've tried to run some art elective classes by combining sections of classes.

Ms. Hamilton requested a list of every class offered with the teacher, department and enrollment.

Mrs. Leidlein asked the enrollment requirement to be able to keep a course running.

Mr. Dumais said there is no Board policy on minimum enrollment.

Mrs. Leidlein stated that the past seven years has remained relatively flat and staffing in other grades has declined while staffing at the high school has increased with 9 FTEs since 2007. She asked why staffing was increased and for what positions.

Mr. Dumais said it has more to do with programs that have changes in staffing. Regarding NEASC, it was to catch up because we were deficient. Also, in 2010, the graduation requirements increased by two credits.

Mrs. Leidlein asked for a summary of what facilitated the changes in staffing.

Dr. Reed said we also have students who want to maximize what courses they want to take which becomes a scheduling challenge.

Ms. Hamilton said the high school expenses have gone up by \$2M and asked why.

Mr. Dumais said we have a great number of programs compared to the other Newtown schools which gives the high school the largest increase.

Mr. Freedman asked for a list of the responsibilities of the assistant principal.

Dr. Reed said that for the next few years we have to be attuned to the needs of the students of Newtown because of what happened a year ago. The work responsibility for staff is labor intensive. We have a commitment to the parents of Newtown to be proactive in working with students and families. We've seen the needs growing. The number of special education referrals is increasing.

Ms. Hamilton asked for a document identifying every line item in the budget by department area.

Mr. Bienkowski stated that what Ms. Hamilton shared had been prepared in that format by Bob Tait and currently doesn't exist.

Item 6 – Continuing Education

Mrs. Ku asked how much the Smart Program enrollment has increased.

Mrs. Gellis said we started with 75 students and at times it has gone to 210 and back down to 150 students.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if there were any additional students from Sandy Hook needing the booster program.

Mrs. Gellis said we would be having the booster program again this summer. A number of Sandy Hook students went to both programs last summer.

Mrs. Roche thanked Mr. Alexander for preparing the budget newsletter which was a goal of the Communications Subcommittee.

Mrs. Leidlein thanked Mr. Dumais for his leadership at the high school over the years and especially after December 14.

Item 7 – Public Participation – none

MOTION: Mr. Alexander moved to adjourn. Mrs. Roche seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 8 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Kathy Hamilton
Secretary