

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

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, March 1, 2011 at 6:30 p.m. in the board room at 3 Primrose Street.

W. Hart, Chair	J. Robinson
D. Leidlein, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
A. Buzzi, Secretary (absent)	R. Bienkowski
D. Nanavaty	8 Staff
L. Bittman	5 Public
R. Gaines	4 Press
K. Alexander	

Mr. Hart called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m. and introduced Tom Hennick of the Freedom of Information Commission.

Item 1 – Freedom of Information Discussion with Tom Hennick

Mr. Hennick is the Public Education Officer for the Freedom of Information Commission. He began by stating that the law is to ensure that the public has access to their government which includes specific documents and records.

Meetings must be noticed, they must be open to the public, and minutes must be available. The law applies to public agencies in Connecticut including any board committee created. These committees follow the same rules. You can still have a meeting without a quorum. The three kinds of meetings are regular, special, and emergency. A regular meeting is a scheduled meeting that as posted with the Town Clerk in December. Special meetings are those which aren't scheduled. Both need an agenda posted 24 hours prior to the meeting. It is important to be specific on listing agenda items. The difference between these two meetings is that at a regular meeting you can add items. At a special meeting you can only talk about what is on the agenda. However, the public can speak on other items but the board cannot comment. Old business, new business or any other business don't belong on a special meeting agenda. A 2/3 vote is necessary to add agenda items. For a regular meeting agendas do not have to be posted on a web site. The third kind of meeting is an emergency meeting which is unnoticed. Minutes must be ready within 72 hours. These meetings are held for things such as natural disasters, flooding and the like. It is important to get the word out prior to the meeting so as not to appear to be hiding anything. Be sure they are all open to the public. Mr. Hennick cautioned to avoid these meetings. Anyone can audio or videotape a meeting but you can set ground rules on where they are placed in the room. Nothing in FOI gives anyone the right to speak at a meeting.

Mrs. Bittman asked if the public could speak on non-agenda items. Mr. Hennick said that was up to the Board.

Regarding executive session there has to be a 2/3 vote to close the meeting to the public with that motion indicating more than just the subject for the executive session such as personnel or a legal matter. You have to be specific and names should not be given. There are five reasons for an executive session. Those are personnel, pending litigation, security, sale, lease or purchase of property, or contents of documents regarding students. For a personnel matter you need to notify the person who can

request to have it held in open session. The individual does not have to be included in the executive session. The Board can invite whoever they want into executive session. Meetings where the public is excluded involve collective bargaining sessions. They are not noticed, not open to the public and there are no minutes. Another non-meeting is an executive level search committee meeting or strategy for collective bargaining. Others are at social gatherings and chance meetings like at a restaurant.

The law says that minutes must record who voted and the Board members in attendance. The Board should avoid deliberation via email. It is fine to disseminate information but do not discuss it outside of a meeting. An email is a public record if you are doing board minutes. Public records are anything connected to the Board. Personnel records are public records but you have to determine if it would be an invasion of the person's privacy. It would have been highly offensive to the person. It's not the employee's job to defend the decision, it is the Board. The complaint would be filed against the Superintendent and the Board of Education for the non-release of the records. He strongly urged us to look at the records to decide. The employee and the union must be notified for approval to release their file. If it is an attendance issue, the number of days would be given. Any medical issue should be redacted. We don't have to research or create a document requested. We are not obligated to scan a document. To make copies the charge is 50 cents per page. The law says if the public best interest is being served you don't have to charge it. If the document is only available electronically you should email it. Many boards have built the 50 cent fee into their budget. If the records are electronic and you have to redact, you have to send them electronically.

Dr. Robinson asked if there was any relief when a citizen asks for a large document which needs to be redacted.

Mr. Hennick said you have to respond promptly. He urged us to go to the requester to see if you can narrow the scope of what is requested. If not, and you are in the middle of budget season, you don't have to drop everything to do it. If you ever feel you are being harassed, just tell them how long it will take. There are many exemptions for releasing information. It has to be within 30 days to appeal a request.

Dr. Robinson asked if two Board members were traveling could they attend a meeting by phone.

Mr. Hennick said they could by using a speaker phone. They could also vote.

Item 2 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the consent agenda which included the minutes of February 15, 2011, the resignations for retirement for Jeanetta Miller and Linda Buonagurio, teachers at Newtown High School, and the spring coaches for Newtown High School. Mrs. Bittman seconded. Vote: 6 ayes

Item 3 – Public Participation - none

Item 4 – Reports

Correspondence:

Mr. Hart received a CIP document from John Kortze which he would distribute to the Board.

Chair Report:

Mr. Hart spoke about the Board of Finance budget presentation. We have been working with the Town on the medical self-insurance program. The proposal we made was to reduce the amount going into the fund. We will save on electricity but fuel oil came in 20 cents over what we budgeted. We can reduce our budget by \$497,590.

Reed Intermediate School Report:

Dr. Epple introduced Reed staff members Tony Salvatore, Pam Kohn, Carla Tischio, Jill Beaudry, Patrice Devanno, and Valerie Hepburn. There was a video presentation which showed classroom demonstrations with comments by teachers. Items addressed were Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS), the visit from Liaocheng Lower Middle School staff and students, and videos from a health and math class, and various web-based programs.

Mrs. Leidlein asked to what degree did the teachers adhere to the Board of Education curriculum and how was it monitored.

Dr. Epple said the teachers are responsible for implementing the Board of Education curriculum. PLCs have discussions and information is shared. She and Dr. Salvatore conduct observations throughout the classrooms.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if clusters were monitored regarding pacing guides.

Dr. Epple said they follow the scope and sequence of teaching and the curriculum.

Mrs. Leidlein said there are some concerns about students having similar experiences in Reed such as exposure to learning lab. Are teachers able to use their discretion or is it guided by the administration?

Dr. Epple said we had a realignment of our schedules this year. The teachers use their judgment in the alignment of time spent on the different subject areas. Every cluster schedule is a little different and have their own schedules.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if there were set guidelines such as using learning lab.

Dr. Epple said there were guidelines and that the learning lab block was put into the schedule from the time Reed opened. This year we put our independent reading block into learning lab. There are times when teachers allow games which are course oriented. It depends on the cluster as to if that is offered.

Mrs. Leidlein asked about the consultants brought into Reed.

Dr. Epple said we brought in a scheduling consultant last spring that worked in all of the schools. Losing some positions caused our schedule to change. He was brought back to work with our scheduling committee. Donna Pagé has been involved in our school improvement plan.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if the school improvement plan would be brought to the Board. Dr. Robinson responded it could.

Mr. Hart understood that the consultant was there for team building.

Dr. Epple stated that the Reed School is not a common model. There are different trains of thought on how to run the building. She feels there should be a few more activities for students.

Mr. Hart asked what the Board could do to improve the education in Reed. Dr. Epple felt restoring a lost position would allow them to be able to have longer blocks of time for instruction. The project adventure program is very important also.

Superintendent's Report:

March is Board of Education recognition month which is the time for each community to acknowledge the work of the members. Dr. Robinson thanked them on behalf of the community.

Karen King, teacher at Head O'Meadow School, was the winner in the AFT Everyday Hero program. Congratulations to Karen for her unselfish efforts to improve conditions for the less fortunate.

Newtown is at the top of the list of low DRG prevalence rates of special education. This is a credit to our staff using the SRBI interventions to help students succeed even without special ed identification.

Two of our senior English teachers at the high school are retiring, including the department chair.

Facilities Committee – no report

Item 5 – Old Business

Newtown High School Project Update:

Dr. Robinson was unable to attend the Thursday owner's meeting or the Public Building and Site Commission meeting but she understood that the architect has added the knee wall so there may be more costs.

Mr. Nanavaty said they indicated that even with the knee wall they are still in the budgeted amount. They have ordered the materials and structure for the greenhouse. The renovations are moving along as anticipated.

Mrs. Leidlein asked why the knee wall was back.

Mr. Nanavaty said that according to the architect it is part of the intrinsic design of the greenhouse. The material has to be durable.

Middle School Roof Update:

Dr. Robinson called Kaestle Boos and spoke to Mr. Boos who will be in charge of the middle school roof project. She questioned if we would need a meeting at the state. He felt we would not. Bob Edwards has been keeping her informed.

Mr. Nanavaty feels Bob Edwards should make a presentation to the Board of Education this month to move this on. There is a specific timeline on when this should be bid. The plan is to start in May and finish in August. They will first start in areas unoccupied by children. They also outlined areas for solar panels. Right now there are no present

grant programs that will offset the cost of solar energy. They could set up areas in case there is grant money in the future.

Mr. Hart had concerns about cleaning snow off the solar panels.

Mr. Nanavaty said there are 47 new drains proposed. There will also be water soffits that will remove the excess water off the side of the building.

Mr. Gaines was concerned about keeping to the schedule.

Dr. Robinson said Mr. Boos was going to get local approval and it would be expedited by the state. We can use local controls instead of waiting for the state to come in.

Mr. Alexander noted that he went to the middle school and praised the work that was done to drain the roof water.

Dr. Robinson said Mr. Faiella and his crew have been very creative in dealing with the roof leaks.

Item 6 – New Business – none

Item 7 – Public Participation – none

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to adjourn. Mr. Alexander seconded. Vote: 6 ayes

Item 8 - Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Andrew Buzzi, Jr.
Secretary