

**Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, May 4, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. in the board room at 3 Primrose Street.

Present:	L. Bittman, Chair	J. Robinson
	K. Fetchick, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
	D. Leidlein, Secretary	D. Raymo
	D. Nanavaty (8:20 p.m.)	3 Staff
	R. Gaines	23 Public
	W. Hart	3 Press
	C. Lagana	

Mrs. Bittman called the meeting to order at 7:36 p.m.

Item 1 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to approve the consent agenda which included the minutes of April 6 and 13, 2010, the donations to Newtown High School and Hawley School, the child rearing leave of absence for Sarah Woods to begin on or about August 5, 2010 until December 10, 2010, and the child rearing leave of absence for Christen Cowden to begin on or about September 11, 2010 through January 2, 1011. Mrs. Fetchick asked that the donation to Hawley School be removed. Vote: 6 ayes

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved that the donation to Hawley School be removed from the consent agenda. Mr. Lagana seconded. Vote: 6 ayes

Mrs. Fetchick asked if the four kindles that were donated to Hawley School would fit into our technology plan.

Dr. Robinson said there has been some discussion regarding using kindles. They thought the donation was an excellent opportunity to try them.

MOTION: Mrs. Fetchick moved to accept the donation to Hawley School. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 6 ayes

Item 2 – Public Participation

Carey Shierloh, 6 Shady Rest Blvd., referred to the bus negotiations item on the agenda and questioned if it was going to be discussed in public session.

Mrs. Bittman said it will be discussed in a non-meeting which is a private meeting because they are still in negotiations. It was listed in error.

Robin Fitzgerald, 24 Old Farm Hill Road, referred to Dr. Robinson's email regarding the referendum. The \$375,000 savings from health insurance is good for the budget but was it not part of the Board of Finance requirement to cut the \$2.5M? It lets people think something was not counted in the original cuts. When Dr. Robinson stated that

additional cuts would be made if the referendum was defeated she should have said possible cuts. We don't know what the Legislative Council will do if it is defeated. When Dr. Robinson stated that Pat Llodra said additional cuts couldn't be made from the Town side she should only say they can make a recommendation. The Legislative Council is the only authority who can pose that to voters. Regarding the statement about the risk in voting no there is a risk all the way around. Mrs. Fitzgerald said she wanted to know when something was cut from the budget if it was ever put back. Why would you trust them to reinstate programs that have been cut? She is voting no on this referendum and if the Legislative Council cuts more she will continue to vote no. Finally, people will not believe anything the Legislative Council says if they keep cutting. Dr. Robinson has been forced to take risks. Taxpayers are tired of it and are willing to fight for it.

Item 3 – Reports

Correspondence: Mrs. Leidlein said we received correspondence from Kinga Walsh and Alyssa Farley for information, email from Fran Maturo and Lori Roherbacher regarding the next steps, Jane Porter, Charles Hepp, Joanne Bisonette and Po Murray regarding votes for the referendum and reasons why they voted no. We received correspondence from Sally Lynn McDonald and Claire Callen, and an email from Karen Pierce regarding the PTA's correspondence with parents in the community. This afternoon we received an email from all PTA presidents with a request for a question and answer session with the Board before the referendum.

Chair Report: Mrs. Bittman mentioned the joint meeting with the Legislative Council, Board of Finance and Board of Selectman. The Policy Subcommittee has been working to revise the Board bylaws. She is deeply grateful for all of the support we have gotten from the public for education.

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Robinson said that today Head O'Meadow lost some power and water due to a possible lightening strike. There was no email or internet service for most of the day because of an equipment burnout at the middle school. Late today there was a bus accident at Buttonshop Road with one Reed student who was not hurt.

Dr. Robinson thanked everyone who has been emailing her regarding the budget and appreciates the support.

The State of Connecticut is submitting their Race To The Top Race grant proposal and has reallocated the fund increasing the amount that would come to Newtown. Our original allocation was \$64,000 and Newtown did not sign on because of all the requirements. It is now \$140,000 more for a total of \$204,670. She is more inclined that we take a look this time. It's a long shot that Connecticut will get anything. This money is over four years.

So far eight teachers have opted for the retirement incentive. We still need 12 before May 15 to be able to offer it.

We have 85 completed applications for the principal positions. Dr. Gejda and Joan Libby have screened those down to 10 candidates will be interviewed by teams next week. Then 4 or 5 will be at the next level of interviews.

Tools for Schools training began today with Ken Foscue from the State Department of Health. Teams include custodians, nurses, teachers and an administrator in each building. They will look at unsafe issues as well as air quality.

Dr. Robinson spoke about the China trip with a slide presentation.

Mr. Hart asked how the trip was funded.

Dr. Robinson said each of the 25 teachers and administrators paid their own way on their spring break and worked at the school. She complimented our teachers on making the trip. We have the support of the foreign affairs office there who is looking to do a sister city project with Newtown.

Pupil Personnel Report: Dr. Michael Regan, Director of Pupil Personnel Services, spoke about his department. Special education is a system of special instruction that individual students need to meet goals. We deal with multiple types of disabilities and are mandated to provide services for them. We employ our special education teachers for regular education classrooms and resource rooms and related services people which include occupational and physical therapists, nurses, guidance counselors and school psychologists. We write individual education plans for each identified student which serves as a contract between the district and parents of the student. PPTs have to include special education personnel to help plan the programs. We tie everything we do back to the curriculum and are in a full progress monitoring routine with these students to make sure our instruction is effective.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if when we speak of special education students that refers to those with PPTs or does it include those who are just taken out of class for extra help.

Dr. Regan said we are required to seek out students with disabilities. We go through a process of evaluation to determine the disability and type of instruction. Those who just need accommodations are under a different act for 504 accommodations. After we identify the need we have to determine how much and what type of instruction and if the service will be in the regular classroom, resource room, special education class or placed out of district. Every move we make is tied into data.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if these students are sent out of district because we don't have self-contained classrooms.

Dr. Regan said we don't have self-contained classrooms because a student would never leave a self-contained classroom. He would rather make substantial efforts to educate students in the regular classroom environment. We meet with teachers every month and re-evaluate the programs.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if we were going to implement programs to keep our students in district.

Dr. Regan said there are certain placements we have no control over such as DCF placements. Some have needs that are too burdensome on staff to take care of and some are too disruptive to the other students.

Mr. Nanavaty said there have been situations where Dr. Regan has been able to make program for students to stay indistrict.

Dr. Regan said that many autistic students are outplaced but we do provide complete services for many of these students with our trained staff.

Mr. Nanavaty asked how increased class sizes would affect our special education population.

Dr. Regan said it would probably have an impact on the regular education side but we would still provide services in the IEP.

Mr. Hart asked where parents would go to learn about the special education programs. Dr. Regan said we have held workshops for parents to educate them on the special education programs. The state also provides documents for parents with special education students.

Mr. Hart suggested having that information on our web site.

Mrs. Fetchick agreed with Mr. Hart. She suggested to Dr. Regan that the communications committee could help facilitate getting information on our district website. Other districts have information to help guide parents through the process.

Mrs. Bittman asked that as children age up, what percentage of the autistic group may be able to exist without our services.

Dr. Regan said that every three years we have a re-evaluation to see if specialized instruction is needed. We find our exit rate the greatest at the high school. Many times special education students leave the program as juniors and have a 504 plan.

Mr. Nanavaty said that talking to people in other school districts many parents have to fight to get their child recognized. That is where Newtown shines. We help children at the pre-K level. We as a Board should recognize how special our program is.

Financial Report:

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the financial report for the month ending March 31, 2010. Mr. Lagana seconded.

Mr. Hart asked if we had a matrix on what it costs us to process invoices and how we purchase supplies.

Mrs. Raymo said we have been pushing state consortium bidding and having one vendor for prices. Ed Arum was very involved in preparing consortium bids. We are pushing bulk purchasing.

Mrs. Bittman said that would be an issue for the Finance Subcommittee.

Mrs. Fetchick questioned whether the items under line 212 medical and dental insurance were what we expected to pay.

Mrs. Raymo said that was correct.

Mrs. Fetchick said when we received POs at the last meeting she noticed schools were purchasing Smartboards from different vendors with different prices. We could see a cost savings on purchasing at the same time.

Mrs. Raymo would check on that.

Mr. Lagana asked when we would get the rest of the school generated fees. The report showed we only received 60%.

Mrs. Raymo said they are deposited to the town. We will be contacting the schools to get the rest.

Mrs. Leidlein said we had discussed purchasing materials for next year because of this year's cost savings.

Dr. Robinson said we are not buying ahead right now.

Vote: 7 ayes

Item 5 – New Business

Applied Science Research Course: Dr. Gejda said this course was not offered the past couple of years. It teaches students how to apply what they are learning in the real world.

Tim DeJulio teaches this course and gave the Board an overview. He taught this when he was a student teacher at the high school. We only have 5 students this year but expect 25 next year. It is designed around 21st century skills and gives the students the ability to find their own answers.

Mrs. Bittman suggested these projects be filmed and shown on Channel 17.

Item 4 – Old Business

High School Expansion Project Update: Mr. Faiella said the project is two weeks behind schedule. The HVAC contractor is making up a lot of time. The gym is on schedule, stadium work starts on May 22, the masons are close to completion on the main building addition which is 75-80% done. 80% of the glass has been installed and it should be closed up the end of May. The chiller will be back and put on the roof on Monday. The roof is complete except for the lobby. They will start prepping the new parking lots next week.

Mrs. Bittman asked if those lots would be ready before the start of school.

Mr. Faiella said he thought they would.

Mrs. Bittman asked if the parent pick up area would be changing.

Mr. Faiella said the lot at the end of the stadium will be enlarged and the main lot made smaller.

Mrs. Leidlein asked how many additional parking spaces there would be.

Dr. Robinson said we will be able to increase number of parking permits but was not sure of the number.

Mr. Nanavaty asked what the anticipated action was regarding removing the portables. Mr. Faiella said the new portables were 40 feet off the edge of the new driveway. They will be moved when needed.

Bid for Hawley School Roof Replacement:

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved that the Board of Education award the Hawley School Roof Replacement Project to Mastri Builders, LLS at a price of \$80,300.00. Mr. Gaines seconded.

Mr. Faiella said Mastri was the lowest bid.

Mr. Lagana asked why Quality Improvements didn't bid.

Mr. Faiella said they were involved in too many projects and were unable to commit. He has worked with all three contractors.

Mrs. Fetchick asked the time frame.

Mr. Faiella said it was 60 days and would start after school is out.

Vote: 7 ayes

Bid for Hawley School Boiler Replacement:

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved that the Board of Education award the Hawley School Boiler Replacement Project Option 1 to replace the boiler and burner to McKenney Mechanical at a price of \$26,600.00. Mr. Gaines seconded.

Mr. Faiella said they want to get started next week. It's best to replace the boiler because repairing it would give us no warrantee. The new one can go for 40 or 50 years.

Vote: 7 ayes

Bid for Hawley School Boiler Replacement:

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved that the Board of Education, in accordance with the Town of Newtown's Charter Section (6-30), a) & b), request a special appropriation of \$4,257,690 for the Newtown Middle School roof replacement project. This amount is included in the currently approved CIP for the Town for the 2010-2011 fiscal year and should come from bonding. Mr. Lagana seconded.

Mr. Faiella said three firms bid. We will be getting a state grant for the funds. This goes to the Public Building & Site Commission to determine the architect.

Mrs. Leidlein asked about the reimbursable money for the project.

Mrs. Raymo said we will apply for the money and draw down for money for the architect. We are 31% for reimbursement for eligible costs.

Vote: 7 ayes

Budget Update:

Dr. Robinson spoke about budget Options A and B infrastructure costs. Electricity savings is \$108,631, diesel gas is \$64,807, #2 heating fuel is \$50,758, excess cost at 75% is \$478,808, and the medical insurance cost savings are \$569,909. Since the Legislative Council meeting she learned we have received health care costs at 2.05% as self funding. These total \$1,272,913. Now we can add \$375,000 to that.

Mr. Nanavaty asked if we could include that \$375,000 because we don't know if the Legislative Council or Board of Finance will allow us to self-fund.

Dr. Robinson said there are steps that must precede self-funding. We have to be assured that money will be there when we need it. We need the MOU. Mrs. Raymo and Mr. Tait have to be comfortable that the 2.05% will be there to develop the fund.

Mrs. Raymo said we have to get the real numbers. She went back and looked at 2001 to 2009 premiums. A consultant is needed to help and make a recommendation. If we self fund then we are the insurance company. Mr. Tait is in the process of setting up the account.

Mr. Nanavaty said once the program starts Mr. Tait wants a three to four month reserve in place.

Mr. Hart asked if we know we can co-mingle the Town and Board of Education money and what if the Town takes more.

Mrs. Raymo said it's a Town reserve and there should be a good faith policy on how it is handled. We need a true understanding of how the reserve is used. If we have 30% in the reserve can you reduce your budget the following year because you have a reserve left over? Mr. Tait believes that's okay. There are times we may use their money or they may use ours.

Dr. Robinson said the 2.05% came from T. R. Paul.

Mr. Nanavaty said we've put in \$569,909 and wants to know if that is real savings. If not, we are looking at infrastructure costs for \$1.5M. We don't know at this point that we will be self-funded.

The Board discussed the timeline for changing to a self-insured program and if there was enough time to have it in place by July 1st. It was suggested to ask Anthem for both quotes. To be binding the MOU needs to be signed by all boards. A suggestion was to look at the following year so there was time to learn how self insurance works and the risks involved.

Mrs. Leidlein requested a sample MOU they could review. Mrs. Fetchick asked for an update at the next meeting.

Mr. Gaines asked about the excess cost grant at 75%.

Dr. Robinson said she took the word of the Bureau of Special Education to anticipate 70% this year and 50% next year. She took it up to 75%. There is no new information to indicate a change in the percentage.

Mr. Gaines said we will have to make up money if it comes in less.

Dr. Robinson said she asked the Legislative Council if we take a riskier number and in February it comes in lower would they help us. She would feel better if we had support if it comes in lower. No one knows what that number will be.

Mrs. Raymo said excess cost is driven by the number of students and the cost. There are variables. If everything stays as this year you can expect the same percentage. We don't know about next year's cost or the number of students. Excess cost was there to help if you had students move into your district.

Mr. Nanavaty said the number we are looking at is \$1.2M. If excess cost goes into place we have only found \$700,000 in savings which we can take out of the \$2.5M.

Dr. Robinson said beyond Option A we need to find something to compensate for not getting a savings from the owner/operators' contract. We talked about afterschool activities for \$112,000. We could do deferred maintenance to save money which puts the costs out a little further. The only other choice is staffing.

Mrs. Fetchick asked to review all the class sizes and try to stay as close as possible to our class size guidelines. Look at the high school class enrollments. We could see up to \$200,000 in early retirements.

Dr. Robinson said unless we get more retirements coming forward next week we won't have that.

Mrs. Fetchick suggested having some members meet with Dr. Robinson, Dr. Gejda and the principals to brainstorm. Classroom teachers are our most important assets. We need appropriate class sizes.

Dr. Robinson agreed but said there was no way not to take teachers out with a \$2.5M cut. Class sizes for grade five will be 24 students, grade 6 will be 27 students, grade 7 will be 27 students and grade eight will be 23 students per class. The high school needs NEASC accreditation. The variety and availability of classes is more important than class size.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if she was looking at high school pay to play fees.

Dr. Robinson said those funds go to the Town. To change that it would require restructuring and there is no way to get around it.

Mrs. Fetchick said the Town could create an account on their side so we could use those monies.

Mrs. Raymo said this is a revenue so they put it on that side of their budget. We can't spend against it. High school parking money also goes to the Town. In every other town it stays with the school.

Mr. Nanavaty said that years ago the Legislative Council cut the Board of Education budget. Mr. Rosenthal entered into an agreement with the Town that if the Town gave them an amount of money the schools would return that money to the Town to offset the money received from the Legislative Council. That was paid back tenfold and we should now be free to keep that money. The previous Board of Education said we wouldn't charge parks and rec for using the pool. This Board may decide to keep those monies in the school. That is a policy decision with possible ramifications from the other Boards in town. He feels we have more than paid back the original amount of \$175,000 to \$300,000. Mr. Hart said it was \$300,000. Mr. Nanavaty said we have to decide to re-look at school generated fees.

Dr. Robinson asked if it was an ordinance.
Mr. Nanavaty said it was a verbal agreement.
Mr. Hart said it was in 2004.

Mrs. Bittman said it was her understanding there was a struggle with the stipend for teachers. Is there any scenario where we can fund the sport and teacher stipends?

Mrs. Raymo said it would be an accounting issue for student activities. We would have to look at the legal issue before we set up these funds.

Mrs. Bittman said at the high school level we would fund transportation and other materials for bigger dollars. The other side is the amount the parents have to fund would be higher.

Mr. Hart felt that was a far better choice than laying off teachers.

Mrs. Bittman asked for more information on how to facilitate this.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if we should invite Gregg Simon to speak to this.
Dr. Robinson said Mr. Simon would welcome that.

Mr. Nanavaty said previous Board members have considered all these possibilities. We did put in higher fees but then decided to reduce them. As a result that decreased the money returned to the Town. You have to keep in mind the ramifications of the increases. We helped with the middle school seats and blue and gold stadium when more funds were needed. He is concerned about saying parent organizations have to take over. Middle school and Reed jazz band are held after school. The reason we reduced pay for play was because at the State Legislature there was a movement to eliminate that. We wanted to try to reduce it to eventually eliminate it.

Mr. Gaines said a lot of the money doesn't come back to fund the activities. Where do parking fees show up in our budget? Doesn't the Board of Education benefit from the pay for play fees?

Mrs. Raymo said we are not gaining any benefit. We are filling an obligation. We need to communicate to the Town to not depend on this as a revenue.

Mr. Hart said that right now we can't use that money to help with the reduction.

Mrs. Raymo said we will talk to the Town on Thursday. For some towns it is becoming difficult to collect the money from the parents.

Mrs. Bittman said she wanted to offer a question and answer session with Dr. Robinson prior to the referendum.

Mrs. Fetchick said we need to advocate voting yes.

Mr. Nanavaty said he will advocate voting no to send a message until the powers that be understand they can't continue to decrease funds for education. People come here for education. They have to put money back.

Mrs. Leidlein said she advocates a yes vote to move forward.

Mr. Gaines agreed that we need a budget but this one moves the Town backward. The highway grant was \$300,000. The action taken to reduce our budget was unconscionable. He will vote no.

Mr. Hart said the budget is not adequate to run the schools. We have one of the lowest funded school systems. The budget process makes people afraid that by voting no there will be more cuts. We need to restructure the voting process with the questions. The Legislative Council is not being vindictive. They truly want to do what is best for the Town. If we have cuts year after year it will hurt everyone. We have to end it by voting no. He advocates adding money back.

Mr. Lagana said he will reluctantly vote yes. He doesn't see the money going back.

Dr. Robinson said we are very divided with school supporters. We can count on 2400 no votes. We want 3000 yes votes. This year at least 50% were no votes because there isn't enough money. They are angry. She can't see the school district making more cuts.

Mrs. Bittman said we have school supporters fighting each other over how much risk each of the two sides will take. She was convinced that we would see a cut that would reflect the \$300,000 savings in health insurance. At this point she can't see 8 members of the Legislative Council vote to put money back. She feels we gained \$375,000 and cannot take the risk of making a no vote. It is not an adequate budget but we have to manage it the best we can. She wants everyone in town to know what a passed budget will do to the town. She is advocating yes to move beyond this.

Mr. Nanavaty disagreed. The budget doesn't get passed without the support of school supporters. This is the wrong message to send.

Mrs. Bittman said there was a low voter turnout.

Mr. Nanavaty said a lot didn't vote because they did not support a budget they could not accept. They have to get out to be heard. We will see the numbers drastically increase. The agencies for bonding want budgets to pass quickly. If the referendum goes down numerous times the fiscal body will have to give a budget that will support education.

Mrs. Bittman said if the next one goes down and we are cut more it is a risk scenario. She is taking a lower risk road. People in town should have this discussion.

Mrs. Fetchick said when the Legislative Council learned about our \$300,000 savings they could have easily cut that too. She agrees that it is too much of a risk to try to endure more cuts. People lose their stamina to keep going out to vote.

Mr. Gaines said if we had the \$1.3M that was passed up in March the budget would have passed. If we get a large no vote this time it would send the Legislative Council a message. The risk of another cut is worth the reward of people telling what they want.

Mrs. Bittman asked how much is enough? If the \$100,000 would have passed would people be advocating yes?

Mr. Gaines said the \$300,000 highway grant should not be counted as revenue. There are opportunities to keep the mil rate low, restore funding to education and everyone walks away satisfied.

Mrs. Bittman said the owner/operator negotiations would be discussed in a non-meeting after the conclusion of the board meeting.

Item 5 – New Business (continued)

First Reading of the Acceptable Use of Technology Guidelines Policy: Dr. Gejda said they would like to have this policy available the beginning of next school year. The attached documents are part of the regulations piece. We currently have a consent form for parents to sign but it had not been part of a policy.

Mrs. Leidlein asked the reasoning for only having parents of students in grades 5 through 12 sign off every other year instead of each year.

Dr. Gejda said most people felt it was sufficient to be done those years and also for clerical reasons. Grades K through 4 will be done every year.

Mr. Nanavaty said if students bring computers to school you can't set up a policy telling them how to use their own technology.

Mrs. Bittman said we have to define use which refers to inappropriate websites in a district facility. We want to give the administration the ability to stop a child even if it's their own technology. The school day also means when they are on field trips.

Item 6 – Public Participation

Carla Kron, 4 Clapboard Ridge Road, said that after the Legislative Council meeting she understood the cut was \$800,000 for the Board of Education. She doesn't know what the number is anymore. We should be conservative in self funding insurance and get the right number for savings. The question and answer session would be good. The Legislative Council should do the same. It would have been good for other Legislative Council members besides Mr. Fitzgerald to be here tonight.

Kinga Walsh, 21 Horseshow Ridge Road, asked the Board to re-evaluate the discipline policies. Students at Reed say they cannot have an iPod. Students have things taken away and there are issues in the lunchroom. Regarding the budget, as elected officials you need to fight. You can't be afraid we won't win. They need to realize we are sick and tired.

Robin Fitzgerald, 24 Old Farm Hill Road, addressed the stamina issue. The year there were 3 or 4 referenda the voter turnout went up. The question what's enough is a ridiculous comment. You should ask what is enough to cut from this budget. When are you going to take a stand? Next year will be the same if you don't take a stand. People don't know how to vote. Education is the target for everything. Now nobody knows what the number is. If it passes it will be a miracle.

Carla Kron said the Board of Education is at a disadvantage without a Financial Director.
MOTION: Mrs. Fetchick moved to adjourn. Mr. Hart seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 7 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m.

Questions raised: Purchase of Smartboards with different vendors and prices
Sample MOU for medical self insurance
Information regarding funding sports and student activities

Respectfully submitted:

Debbie Leidlein
Secretary