

These minutes are pending Board approval.

**Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, July 12, 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 (absent)
A. Buzzi, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
D. Nanavaty	50 Public
L. Bittman	4 Press
R. Gaines	
K. Alexander	

Mr. Hart called the meeting to order at 7:38 p.m.

Item 1 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to approve the consent agenda which included the minutes of June 21, 2011, the donation of a car to the Newtown High School automotive repair classes, the leave of absence for Kristi Regan, educational assistant at Head O'Meadow School, and the resignation of Lisa Sweet, teacher at Reed Intermediate School.

Mrs. Leidlein seconded and requested a change on page 6 of the minutes. The third motion vote should state Mrs. Leidlein voted nay and Mr. Hart voted aye. Vote: 6 ayes

Item 2 – Public Participation

Mr. Hart introduced State Representatives DebraLee Hovey and Christopher Lyddy who read their letters regarding special education concerns.

Dennis Bloom 25 Philo Curtis Road, spoke in favor of keeping the owner/operators who care about our children.

Susan McGuinness-Getzinger, 31 Little Brook Lane, spoke about the owner/operators, special education obligations and meeting the needs of the students.

Louis Socci, 5 Fir Tree Lane, is the parent of a special needs child and a teacher in Norwalk. We have to do what is best for the children. We have a special transportation system that makes Newtown unique and should be kept.

Helen Miller, 35 Orchard Hill Road, is a retired teacher who spoke in favor of the owner/operators. They have a deep commitment to each child and their family.

Karen Viska, 30 Mile Hill South Road, is in favor of the owner/operators.

Marilyn Alexander, 8 Taunton Lake Drive, agreed with what was said about the owner/operators. The worst decision would be to stop using them.

Barbara Bloom, 25 Philo Curtis Road, said the owner/operators have a rich history in town and are part of our community. We don't want a bus company. The taxpayers have the right to keep them.

Elizabeth Gaier, 18 Button Ball Drive, said as a parent she gets comfort and security knowing the person who drives her children will keep them safe. As a taxpayer she feels the cost is inconsequential compared to having the owner/operators and the impact they have on the children they transport is positive as her children still speak about the drivers they've had.

Paul Mangiafico, 15 Kent Road, worked on the owner/operator contract five years ago. They are proud to work in town. He referred to Jim Gaston's letter supporting them. Joe Borst, Herb Rosenthal and Jo Bojnowski also had positive letters. If you discontinue their service it will never come back again. Continue with the system we have and negotiate with them to be competitive.

Jim Guy, 17A Nonnewauk Meadows, questioned if owner/operators were given a fair opportunity to put a bid together in the time allotted.

Mitch Bolinski, 3 Wiley Lane, thanked the State Representatives for caring. He agreed with Mr. Mangiafico that we need the owner/operators to be competitive.

Ron Revere, 18 Bryan Lane, regarding special education, 15 complaints wasn't enough.

Alan Miller, 35 Orchard Hill Road, agreed with the comments about the owner/operators and asked where these buses were located. They pay taxes on their buses. Where will an outside company house their buses and can we have an agreement that they will be housed here?

Inga Roswell, 25 Osborne Hill Road, agreed with the comments on the owner/operators and didn't understand why they wanted to get rid of them which the people don't want.

Sharon Dougherty, 7 Fir Tree Lane, was in favor of keeping the owner/operators.

Joe Borst, 10 Beechwood Drive, requested that the Board put in a second public participation at the end of the agenda so people can comment on what was discussed. The buses must be garaged maintained and housed in Newtown. Dr. Robinson told him that Mr. Bienkowski was going to be putting information out and given to a nonpolitical group. He went to New Milford where bus tires were slashed. There was no fence where they were kept by All Star. The owner/operators keep their buses at home. People want peace of mind. It's worth the additional taxes to have the owner/operators.

Gertrude Beiers, Yogananda Street, supports the owner/operators. When they are driven out of business the new ones will raise their prices.

Wendy Leon-Gambetta, 18 Saw Mill Ridge Road, doesn't want the owner/operator system to change. They are also neighbors and friends.

Lynn Buttner, 28 Lake Road, agreed with comments on the owner/operators and everyone is appalled at losing them.

Item 3 – Reports

Correspondence:

Mrs. Leidlein said there was correspondence from Kinga Walsh regarding the budget and calendar and Martin Margolies, Lisa Pruner and Ann Brennan regarding the owner/operators. She read a letter from Jim Gaston also supporting the owner/operators and potential liability of they are not selected.

Chair report: Mr. Hart was attending the CABA leadership conference on June 27th.

Superintendent's Report: Dr. Robinson reported that a high school student was one of 23 in Connecticut to win a National Merit Scholarship financed by a university. Matthew Jensen received a Rutgers scholarship.

CAPT scores were released today. In all areas Newtown is above the state percentage. There will be a more in-depth analysis when the CMT scores are received.

Dr. Robinson spoke about the district's continuous improvement and common formative assessments which will be implemented next year.

Business Director's Report:

Mr. Bienkowski spoke about the transportation bid process and presented statistics regarding the interview along with a comparison of the companies over a five-year period. The committee is doing a further evaluation which will be forwarded to the Board.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if records were requested for employee driver reprimands, accidents, violations, etc over the last ten years.

Mr. Bienkowski said that information was not requested. Some do not exist as they did 10 years ago. One of the intents of the bid document was to transfer risk to benefit the Town. Currently we hold all the risk for anything that happens in the system. It's our policy, not the bus company's policy. Putting it on the company will save the Town money.

Mrs. Leidlein said according to the General Statute, we will have that risk. She doesn't trust another company to oversee that.

Mr. Bienkowski said the number one concern is the safety of our children. Companies service many communities. We don't have records for our owner/operators so the information would be skewed. First Student and Durham are national companies. We haven't kept that information because our insurance company has not asked for it.

Mr. Hart suggested checking with our attorney.

Mr. Nanavaty said Mr. Gaston's letter deals with rights of individuals in civil courts. Whether owner/operator or a company we still maintain the liability. This is not really relevant to what we are looking for in transporting our children.

Mrs. Leidlein felt very uncomfortable making a decision without having the records for each company for the last 10 years.

Mr. Gaines stated we should pull that information for the owner/operators also.

Mr. Bienkowski said we can get the bus inspection rates from the DMV.

Mr. Hart asked that each of the finalists make a presentation. He wants to see the financial analysis.

Mr. Bienkowski said we have 60 days from June 23 for the bids to remain valid.

Facilities Committee:

Mrs. Leidlein said the committee met and discussed the CIP and repairs to the schools next year. We will meet again for re-evaluation of the priorities.

Pat Llodra spoke about the CIP process. The Board of Selectman is the only referring agent to the Public Building and Site Commission. The Board of Selectman is the owner of the building. A member of the Board of Selectman or Bob Tait should be present for project discussions. The process has begun to formulate the CIP. Looking at 2013, there needs to be reductions. In fiscal 2012 there is the Hawley HVAC design money for \$250,000. She hopes the costs projected in fiscal year 2013 can be done for less.

Mr. Bienkowski said the engineering for Hawley is in the current budget.

Mr. Nanavaty said limiting our debt cap sets us up to not be able to do anything. Hawley has been delayed for 8 years. How much longer we will have to wait?

Mrs. Llodra stated we have to invest in our community and how much our residents can bear. We have to be careful not to take on too much debt.

Middle School Roof Update:

Mrs. Llodra said the scaffolding is up. First impressions are positive for a September 15 completion date.

Mrs. Leidlein said the Facilities Ad Hoc Committee recommended to the Board of Education that we look to possibly closing the middle school, moving the fifth grade to the four elementary schools and consolidating the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades at Reed School. They did not recommend closing an elementary school. This would not take place for 5 to 7 years.

Dr. Robinson said her prime concern would be to keep Reed with a 2 or 4-person team.

Policy Committee: There was no meeting.

Item 4 – Old Business

MOTION: Mrs. Bittman moved that the Board of Education approve the Educational Technology Curriculum for grades K-8. Mr. Nanavaty seconded.

Mr. Alexander said his children are almost ahead of this curriculum. He doesn't see the curriculum showing moving information down to the lower grades.

Mr. Gaines said technology should be integrated into all curricula. A technology curriculum should not exist.

Vote 6 ayes

Item 5 – New Business**State Response Regarding Special Education:**

Dr. Robinson brought these concerns to her administrative team. We want to be sure parents understood and were comfortable with the process. She met with the Pac again with the same concerns. We set up a website for parent information and started having information sessions for parents. In March a meeting was arranged with Mrs. Llodra, Mr. Bienkowski, and Representatives Hovey and Lyddy. Representative Lyddy did not attend and Representative Hovey asked Mr. Bienkowski to leave the meeting as she

wanted to meet about special education parent concerns. Dr. Robinson was not prepared to speak to that issue. Representatives Hovey and Lyddy met with Mr. Hart. Dr. Robinson does not know when a complaint was made. She understands there were 15 complaints but not all were regarding special education. Some didn't even have children in the system. Our goal is to improve partnerships with parents. The action plan we developed is an internal task force which included Sherry Earle. It will have a member of each school PPT team and will work to make the process better. There will be an external consultant to survey the staff. We are also doing a study on the scheduling process for PPTs.

Mrs. Bittman suggested having a task force member benchmark with someone. She was upset as a Board member when they only talked to Dr. Robinson and Mr. Hart. She commended Representative Lyddy.

Mr. Hart asked for specifics in the statement from Representative Lyddy that records were falsified.

Dr. Robinson said we can look into the software but needs specific information to know what to look for.

Mrs. Leidlein asked when they could expect updates on the action plan.

Dr. Robinson said the survey and the task force will begin in the fall.

Mr. Hart asked for a presentation at the September 6 meeting with Mike Regan providing a status report. He was concerned about the charges from the Representatives and proposed to set up a subcommittee which he would chair and included Mr. Gaines as a member.

Mr. Nanavaty suggested Education Connection be a neutral party. Dr. Robinson was planning on that also.

MOTION: Mrs. Bittman moved to go into executive session regarding the Superintendent's evaluation. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 6 ayes

Item 6 – Executive Session

Item 7 – Possible Votes – none taken

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

Item 8 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:06 a.m.

Respectfully submitted:

William Hart
Chair