

Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, August 17, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. in the board room at 3 Primrose Street.

L. Bittman, Chair	J. Robinson
K. Fetchick, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
D. Leidlein, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
D. Nanavaty	7 Staff
R. Gaines	4 Public
W. Hart	3 Press
C. Lagana	

Mrs. Bittman called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. and said there were two changes to the agenda which required motions.

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved that the election of a new chair be moved to the start of the meeting. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to add to Item 5 discussion and possible action on the use of Hawley School for the award ceremony for a presiding State official. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Mrs. Bittman referred to her letter of resignation as chair and her reasons for doing so but still looked forward to being on the Board.

Mrs. Fetchick moved to accept Mrs. Bittman's resignation as chair. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Mrs. Leidlein nominated Kathy Fetchick as the new chair. Mr. Lagana seconded.

Mr. Lagana supported Mrs. Fetchick for this position. She has a lot of experience and will help to increase our collaboration with other Town boards.

Mrs. Leidlein said that Mrs. Fetchick has shown her passion and desire to make education in Newtown the best we can provide. She has tirelessly worked for education and the students of Newtown.

Mr. Gaines disagreed and did not feel Mrs. Fetchick would be the best choice. On several occasions she has disregarded discussions and decisions made by the Board.

Mrs. Fetchick said she has been trying to improve the Board policies to be a more effective Board and has spent three years trying to understand how the Town boards operated. She is adamant about not cutting teachers.

VOTE: Mr. Lagana – yes
Mr. Hart – no
Mr. Gaines – no
Mr. Nanavaty – no
Mrs. Leidlein – yes
Mrs. Bittman – no

The nomination was defeated.

Mr. Gaines said he thought of nominating Mr. Nanavaty but as President of Education Connection he is already obligated to that position and would not have the time to devote to the chair position. He has had much experience on the Board and has a spirit of volunteerism and passion for helping our community.

Mr. Gaines nominated Bill Hart as chair. Mr. Nanavaty seconded.

Mr. Nanavaty said that in Mr. Hart's short time on the Board he has impressed him with his ability especially on subcommittees. He has been instrumental on the facilities committee and has experience in organizing budgets. We need someone who will stay more than one term.

Mrs. Leidlein said she has enjoyed working with Mr. Hart but she is looking for a chair with a history with the Board of Education and is working with other boards in the community. That's the key piece that is missing.

Mr. Hart said it was unfortunate that Mrs. Bittman could not continue as chair and he hoped to continue what she started. He has the time to focus on this job. He encourages the debate of different opinions and wants to continue our relationship between the Board of Education members, school staff and other Town boards.

Mrs. Bittman said Mr. Hart helped a great deal to develop a budget system and is chair of the facilities committee. His business background will let him make a difference as chair.

Vote: Mr. Lagana – no
Mr. Hart – yes
Mr. Gaines – yes
Mr. Nanavaty – yes
Mrs. Leidlein – no
Mrs. Fetchick – no
Mrs. Bittman – yes

Mr. Hart was elected chair.

Mrs. Bittman thanked everyone who voted for her. Her greatest hope is that this Board will focus on education and is concerned that if we don't keep that in our forefront we will forget why we are here.

Item 1 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the consent agenda which included the minutes of July 13, 2010, the appointment of Jennifer Sinal as the new assistant principal of Sandy Hook School, and the roster of Newtown High School fall coaches. Mrs. Bittman seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 2 – Public Participation - none

Item 3 – Reports

H. C. Planning Consultants Report:

Dr. Chung spoke about his report with some discussion with the Board. There was a concern about the number of Newtown students attending non-public schools and a member requested a list of those schools with the number of students attending.

There was no correspondence or chair report.

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Robinson introduced Dawn Hochsprung, who announced that Jennifer Sinal was appointed assistant principal of Sandy Hook School. Ms. Sinal said she has been very happy as a language arts teacher at the middle school for the last six years and appreciated being given this opportunity.

Dr. Robinson referred to the NEASC letter and believed we would meet the required deadlines as a result of introducing the Professional Learning Communities in the schools. The next status letter will be sent in December.

A representative of the Unity Project met with Dr. Robinson regarding the Kohl's Care for Kids voting contest that awards \$500,000 each to the 20 top finishing schools. We registered Newtown High School, Newtown Middle School, Reed Intermediate School, and Sandy Hook School. The community needs to go online and make five votes per school for each school.

Dr. Robinson will attend the Commissioner's Back-to-School meeting on Wednesday with the focus on common standards and the Educational Transformation Project.

Next week starts the new teacher orientation. Board members are invited to attend lunch on Monday at 11:30 a.m. in the Reed library. We are happy to report that all of our schools met AYP for the first time in a few years.

Dr. Robinson asked the Board to attend the back-to-school convocation on Monday, August 30 in the Reed School cafetorium.

Mrs. Fetchick asked for a report at the next meeting on what was planned for the staff on the Wednesday early dismissal days.

Dr. Robinson said we will have Professional Learning Community agendas and they will be devoted to writing. We will also talk about working with Education Connection for after-school care.

Item 4 – Old Business**Newtown High School Expansion Project Update:**

Mr. Dumais said the building will not be completed by September 1 and thanked Bill Knight for his decision on not opening. The paving and parking will be substantially complete by Sept 1. The stairwell to be expanded had to be gutted so authorities have been in there and they want it completed to open the school. The Fire Marshal is looking at alternatives to doing this. It should be substantially complete by the Friday before school opens. Our facilities department has been wonderful with custodians clearing areas in the building. We are looking at an October or November move.

The Board spoke about options such as waiting until winter break to move or moving things into the building piece meal. Mr. Dumais said it would be better to make the entire move overnight because there is still renovation work to be done in the main building.

Middle School Roof Update:

Mr. Faiella said there have been no changes. The Public Building and Site Commission will interview and pick the architect.

Mrs. Fetchick said Bob Edwards and Tom Catalina have been invited to attend the combined CIP/Facilities Committee meetings. Mr. Edwards seemed hopeful to work a schedule with a start date of April 1. They will meet with the three architects this Friday and then on the 31st to make a selection. A former middle school teacher and Donna Culbert attended a meeting for information on the middle school roof and thought a letter should be sent to staff and parents to inform them on what we plan to do and the Superintendent has agreed to do so.

Item 5 – Old Business**CIP Discussion and Possible Action:**

Mrs. Fetchick went over the CIP.

Mr. Nanavaty said we may get a more favorable price on the HVAC work for Hawley, Middle Gate and Sandy Hook if we bid for all three projects. He asked if the Board would consider amending this in the future if we get a favorable bid price.

Mrs. Fetchick said that would be left up to the business office to decide. Mrs. Raymo recommended bidding the boiler phase 1 and 2 together and phase 3 separately.

Dr. Robinson said the middle school numbers were from Fletcher Thompson. There are upgrades for the cafeteria but old estimates would have to be re-estimated. She would like the science rooms updated and some work done in the media center.

MOTION: Mrs. Bittman moved to accept the CIP dated August 13, 2010 as presented. Mr. Nanavaty seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the year-end financial report dated June 30, 2010. Mrs. Bittman seconded.

Mr. Nanavaty asked if we purchased Enos for the high school for \$55,762.

Mr. Bienkowski said the motion at the June meeting was to purchase SmartBoards for Reed and Enos for the high school.

Mr. Nanavaty asked if we returned \$100,000 to the Town and kept the rest.

Mr. Bienkowski said we will return \$155,762 and will take the \$100,000 into a reserve for the Board of Education.

The Board agreed on having a report on this year's budget before work begins on next year's budget which would include each line item.

Mr. Bienkowski said that when we start to work on the 2011-2012 budget we will have all the expenditures from the previous budget. The budget in the book includes transfers made up to Dec. 31st.

Vote: 7 ayes

Item 3 – Reports (continued)

The Strategic Plan Update was postponed until the next meeting.

Judy Blanchard spoke about the Character Education Committee work to identify character attributes for the school and community. Whatever we do is grounded in perseverance with good citizenship at the core. We will bring this into our curriculum and programs and then into the community.

Dr. Gejda congratulated Mrs. Blanchard who stepped in for Donna Denniston who was the chairperson. The committee also surveyed groups in the community.

Item 4 – Old Business (continued)

Procedure for Non-union Salaries:

Mrs. Fethick wanted this on the agenda because we did not handle these salaries the way we did in past. Currently there is no policy on non-union salary increases.

Mrs. Bittman asked Dr. Robinson for the number of people involved, the total dollar amount and how they were applied this year.

Dr. Robinson said the total amount was \$22,000. ABA tutors are in a separate category because their increase is decided on if they pass a test. A lot of districts establish comparable positions when setting salary increases. A non-union employee would get what the comparable union person would get. Other districts base it on a group. Last year we had more non-union people which included the technology department that has now joined the union. Part of what has to be looked at also is you want to retain people. They needed comparable raises. Owner/operators are getting a 3.5% increase.

Dr. Robinson said we lost two positions in central office so we looked at some employees who would be taking on more responsibility and had to be trained. The Board authorized the 3% that was in the budget. The issue is how you want to set the raises which would require human resources to establish comparable job roles.

Mrs. Bittman said she would rather see these based on merit because they are private employees.

Mr. Gaines said we should use the union target range. Merit increases should not exceed the budget amount.

Mr. Nanavaty said he takes issue that this was a change of policy because this may have not been what other boards have done. There were many times that we looked to the Superintendent to give us an idea of what was fair and took that recommendation. He has no problem with the Superintendent setting the increases. Basing it on cost of living or union increases is appropriate. We should not substitute our judgment for hers. The position this Board took is appropriate for this budget year and should be our policy from this point on.

Mrs. Fetchick said the Board never took a vote so did not take a position. The Board should be responsible for decisions.

Mrs. Bittman did not understand why we should take a vote on a \$22,000 line item.

Mr. Hart said we voted to approve the total budget and this was one of the line items. In business he was handed a criteria during budget time and divided it up on merit. Maybe we should say the non-union payroll should be a certain amount and give the choice to the Superintendent.

Mrs. Fetchick said non-union personnel contribute less to insurance than the union people.

Mr. Bienkowski said their contribution is 12.5%. There are a lot of things the unions get that the non-union employees don't get such as additional bereavement days and personal days.

Mr. Nanavaty said Town employees complain about what education employees get when they only spend 7% for insurance. We have non-union people who do their job like union people and continue doing their job without the same benefits. The Superintendent should decide their compensation. Tech and other individuals have unionized to be certain of their benefits. He'd like to see us move away from the number of unions we negotiate with.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved that future salary decisions for non-union employees be left to the discretion of the Superintendent based upon merit but capped by a total amount for this group not to exceed the total amount for equivalent Newtown School District union positions or the budget line item for these non-union personnel. Mr. Nanavaty seconded.

Mrs. Fetchick moved to table Mr. Gaines' motion in order to do more research. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 5 – New Business (continued)

First Reading of Series 9000 Board Bylaws Policies:

Mrs. Fetchick asked the Board to go through the bylaws and email her with any questions or objections.

Mr. Nanavaty questioned what was necessary to have in the Board minutes. Other groups summarize and include a listing of votes which is what we should have in our minutes. He referred to Robert's Rules which gives guidelines for meeting minutes.

Discussion and Possible Action on Use of Hawley School for Award Ceremony for Presiding State Official:

Mrs. Bittman said Mrs. Fetchick brought up this concern because this is an election year and Rep. Lyddy was receiving an award from ConnCAN in Hawley School.

Mrs. Fetchick said schools should stay out of anything political.

Dr. Robinson said she didn't know if they had found another venue. Kathy June spoke to Rep. Lyddy about the concern and possibly finding another location.

Mr. Gaines asked if there was any mention of reimbursement from ConnCAN if fees were involved.

Dr. Robinson said we only charge fees if we don't have custodial staff in the building but this ceremony is at 9:30 a.m. so that isn't a concern.

Mr. Gaines doesn't understand the issue. There is no endorsement by the Board of Education that he receives this award. It is a venue to receive an educational award.

Mrs. Bittman said our policy lets anyone use our schools. If we are following policy how do we say he cannot use the school. If this was a controversial group we could say no.

Dr. Robinson said we invite sitting officials to visit our schools. She needs guidelines if we are going to do something different.

Mr. Nanavaty believed that Chris Laroque and Linda McMahon were at the middle school but we didn't hear anything about that. Rep. Lyddy is our elected representative and he would be more embarrassed to have to call and say we cannot have the ceremony.

Mrs. Fetchick said she has always been sensitive to this issue. Schools should stay out of anything political. It doesn't matter which political party. It isn't appropriate.

Mr. Gaines said we are in a worse position if we don't allow it especially since it's an education award.

Mrs. Leidlein would like to confirm if Chris Laroque used the middle school. What was the purpose of those visits by Jodi Rell?

Dr. Robinson said Governor Rell spoke about State government and several State senators came. Susan Byciewicz spoke about voting and Mike Fidele represented Governor Rell at the China reception. Sitting officials also read to kindergartners.

Mrs. Bittman said the buildings are owned by the Town. It's a public facility and she doesn't see how we can say no.

Mr. Hart said he saw a picture and caption on line with Linda McMahon at the middle school.

Hoa Nguyen of Patch.com said Linda McMahon was outside the middle school during the primary. Chris Laroque had a stand outside and she was on the sidewalk.

Item 6 – Public Participation – none

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to adjourn. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 7 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Debbie Leidlein
Secretary