

**Board of Education  
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting held on September 21, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chamber, 3 Primrose Street.

M. Ku, Chair	L. Rodrigue
D. Delia, Vice Chair	A. Uberti
D. Cruson, Secretary	8 Staff
D. Leidlein	6 Public
J. Vouros (absent)	1 Press
R. Harriman (absent)	
D. Zukowski	

Mrs. Ku called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The meeting could be accessed by phone and was being live-streamed.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 2 – Celebration of Excellence

Dr. Rodrigue congratulated the Paraeducator of the Year, Dorothy Kelly on an outstanding and deserving award. Dr. Rodrigue continued by stating that Dorothy is simply a kind and caring para who makes connections with students and staff. Dorothy is an integral member of the Hawley family and brings a level of compassion to her work.

Dr. Rodrigue continued by congratulating the Teacher of the Year, Jill Gonski. Jill is a beloved member at Newtown High School and has grown her program into what it is today. Dr. Rodrigue noted that anyone that visits Jill's classroom feels the positivity. We could not be prouder of Jill. Congratulations!

Item 3 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the consent agenda which includes the donation to Middle Gate School and the correspondence report. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 4 – Public Participation

Don Lococo, 27 Hi Barlow Road, Newtown, expressed his support for the discussion and consideration of the free speech policy that will be discussed. He stated that it is important for the Board to set some perimeters on what is appropriate.

Item 5 – Reports

Chair Report: Dr. Ku reported that after surveying the Board for possible dates for the new Board Member Workshop, it looks like December 16<sup>th</sup> is the best date. The workshop will be from 6 pm – 8 pm. Dr. Ku said that the Legislative Council did approve the roughly \$27,000 deposit into the education non-lapsing account. Dr. Ku would be participating in a press conference with CABE/CAPPSS on Thursday regarding school ventilation projects.

Superintendent's Report: Dr. Rodrigue welcomed the new student representatives, Christina Savo and Matthew Irving. Dr. Rodrigue stated that they are continuing to work on implementing the vaccination mandates for all of the staff based on the Governor's Executive Order. It includes some exemptions including getting tested weekly. The data is being collected through the Human Resource Department. Dr. Rodrigue suggested that everyone check out the new renovated turf and bleachers at Newtown High School. She thanked Mr. Gerbert for an incredible job and it looks fabulous!

The second round of interviews for the new Coordinator of Diversity and Inclusion position will be held on Friday. There are two finalists that will be meeting with the committee which consists of Dr. Rodrigue, three students, and a parent. The salary was posted at \$90,000, based on review of salaries in other districts. This is a 10 month position and will be grant funded for two years.

#### Committee Reports:

Mr. Cruson reported that the Communications Committee met on Monday, September 13. The committee discussed the upcoming student success newsletter. The committee is aiming to have this newsletter to the Board late October and released in November. This newsletter will focus on ways that we help students succeed beyond high school and will include scholarship opportunities. The next one will be in January and focus on the curriculum budget.

Mr. Cruson also reported that the Policy Committee met on Wednesday, September 15. In addition to bringing back the two policies for second read tonight, the committee discussed the Public Participation for Board Meetings policy and decided not to move forward with this policy at this time. Shipman and Goodwin sent the committee a Covid Vaccine policy and we will continue to look at that with feedback from legal counsel.

Dr. Ku reported that the Curriculum and Instruction Committee met this morning. Mrs. Uberti updated the committee on the Kitchen Science and Project Adventure Beyond courses that were incorporated in the new Middle School schedule. There is discussion to modify the Project Lead the Way course at the High School because it is difficult for students to schedule the lab portion of the class. The committee also received an update on the new Bridges Math Program for K-5.

Mr. Delia reported that Ed Advance is having their annual meeting on October 7<sup>th</sup> in Litchfield and Board members are invited to attend.

Student Representative Report: Ms. Savo thanked the Board of Education for this opportunity and noted that Matt Irving will be at the next meeting. Ms. Savo gave an update on the Fall sports games and their outcomes.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the financial report for the month ending August 31, 2021. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Financial Report: Mrs. Vadas reported that information available for the second financial report in fiscal year 2021-22 continues to be limited. All salaries are typically fully encumbered in September after teacher and staff re-assignments and other salary adjustments have been made. Our account-by-account analysis has not begun as this typically take place in September as well. During the month of August, the district spent approximately \$3.1M for operations. The largest area of expenditures occurred in Salaries and Other Purchased Services; expending \$1.7M in salaries and encumbering \$2.2M on out-of-district tuition. All accounts appear to be normal for this time of year. The budget will be monitored closely with important and/or significant issues identified as quickly as we become aware of them.

Dr. Ku asked if the transportation cost will change because of the reduced buses. Mrs. Vadas said that All-Star will send a credit.

Motion passes unanimously.

Item 6 – Presentations

Dr. Ku introduced Dr. Longobucco who will provide an update on NEASC process after it has come to a close after 8 years. Dr. Longobucco provided next steps for NEASC which include reviewing new standards, review and revise core values, beliefs, and vision of a graduate based on research.

Mr. Delia congratulated Dr. Longobucco and Dr. Rodrigue on a job well done.

Mr. Gerbert provided an update on summer 2021 Maintenance activity. Mr. Gerbert mentioned that it was a busy summer and the maintenance crew and summer helpers worked tirelessly to get the jobs finished before school started.

Ms. Zukowski thanked Mr. Gerbert for their hard work and asked if any projects were done in other months, not just over the summer.

Mr. Gerbert replied that summer is the best time because of the large window of time but other projects can be done in winter if possible. For example, the flooring at Reed will hopefully be done in the winter.

Ms. Zukowski asked if the work with Public Works and Park & Rec is an expansion of the collaboration we have with Town services.

Mr. Gerbert said they have a great relationship with all of the Town offices and we all team up for various projects.

Mr. Delia thanked Mr. Gerbert for his hard work which is noticed and very much appreciated. Mr. Gerbert said his staff deserves all the credit. They worked very hard over the summer.

Item 7 – Old Business

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the board of Education approve Policy 4118.237/4218.237/5141.8 Face Masks/Coverings. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve Policy 4118.12 Freedom of Speech. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 8 – New Business

Dr. Rodrigue stated that during the renovation of the Newtown High School track, it was brought to her attention that there will be an additional cost that equaled \$55,000 beyond what was anticipated. The issue started with how the previous track was installed in 2009. The undercoat sealant was improperly implemented at the time. Dr. Rodrigue requested that Mr. Spreyer get involved with the issue. The process was already underway so it was decided to continue with the work.

Mr. Gerbert agreed that the issue was not discovered until the work had already started.

In a Northeast track, an unsealed track will cause a lot of problems.

Dr. Rodrigue said that after consideration, she is requesting funds from the Non-lapsing funds

Mr. Delia commented that this is an unexpected educational expense which is what the fund is meant for.

Ms. Zukowski asked the original cost.

Mr. Gerbert said \$795,000.

Ms. Zukowski asked if we are using the same company and Mr. Gerbert answered we were not as they weren't in business anymore.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education request of the Legislative Council to spend \$55,000 from the Non-Lapsing account for the purpose of payment on unexpected additional costs to the replacement of the High School stadium track, and notify the Board of Finance of the request. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the Newtown High School Band trip to the Memorial Day Parade in Washington, D.C. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Dr. Longobucco and Ms. Hiscavich shared a presentation on the upcoming Band trip to Washington, D.C. for the Memorial Day Parade.

Dr. Longobucco stated that Johana Hayes nominated Newtown to play in the 2022 National Memorial Day Parade. The potential itinerary shows that the Band would leave on May 28 and come back home on May 31.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if there is enough room on the coach bus with the equipment.

Dr. Longobucco said she does not anticipate needing another bus because of the equipment but she is looking at all of the options that are cost effective.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if there will be any school nurses on the trip.

Dr. Longobucco said school nurses only go if there is need and as of right now there is no need.

Mr. Delia asked if students wanted a premium insurance plan, are they able to privately obtain that. Dr. Longobucco said they could.

Ms. Zukowski asked the number of chaperones per student.

Dr. Longobucco said the groups per chaperone are around 10 students. The District only pays for the deposit and the parents cover the cost because this is not in the school budget.

Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the 2022-2023 Budget Calendar. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mr. Cruson pointed out an error on the calendar. It currently says the same date for two items which are Public Hearing and Adoption of Budget.

Ms. Zukowski said that she is not comfortable adopting the budget the same day as the public hearing.

Mrs. Leidlein suggested that Mrs. Vadas bring back the proposed calendar to the Board after making any necessary edits. Mrs. Vadas agreed.

MOTION Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education postpone approving the 2022-2023 Budget Calendar until next meeting. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the substitute pay increase to \$100 per day for full-time building substitutes and \$95 per day for general per diem substitutes. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Dr. Rodrigue stated that they are requesting a substitute pay increase of \$100 per day for full-time building substitutes and \$95 per day for general per diem substitutes. There is a shortage of substitutes across the state and Newtown needs to remain as competitive as possible. We are hoping to have this start November 1.

Mrs. Vadas confirmed that the increase would be around \$18,000 per year. There are numerous openings in the para union as well as unfilled intern positions.

Dr. Ku noted that there are unfilled positions in multiple categories.

Ms. Zukowski is concerned that it may put other positions at risk.

Mrs. Vadas noted that at this point, there is no indication that the unfilled intern positions will be filled this year.

Motion passes unanimously.

#### Budget Assumptions and Priorities 2022-2023:

There was no motion for this item as there were no questions or edits.

MOTION: Mr. Delia move that the Board of Education approve the minutes of September 8, 2021. 3 ayes, 2 abstained (Mr. Delia and Mrs. Leidlein). Motion passes.

#### Item 9- Public Participation

Melissa Mottola, 51 Charter Ridge Drive, Sandy Hook, stated that she is having an extremely hard time understanding the Board during the meeting because of the masks. She asked the Board to think about how the children feel at school for 7+ hours. She hopes the Governor's emergency mandate is removed soon.

Anthony Dilorenzo, 18 Flat Swamp Road, Newtown, is requesting that the children have more mask break time. It is 8 hours during the day with masks on. It is hard for them to hear and understand their teachers wearing the masks.

Stephen Maddox, 14 Night Hawk Lane, Sandy Hook, noted that he is a pediatrician and is sympathetic towards children who have developed anxiety, however, he has seen that children are extremely adaptable and has had no children have any medical issues due to wearing a mask.

Nerlande Foote, 14 Bear Hills Road, Newtown would like to thank the Board and contribute to the mask conversation. She is in support of the mask mandate and feels it is everyone's responsibility to keep their children safe and healthy. Not liking masks is minimal in the great scheme of things dealing with Covid. Ms. Foote is a mother of a 4 and 5 year old and knows that they do take mask breaks at Middle Gate.

Christopher Mottola, 51 Charter Ridge Drive, Sandy Hook asked where he could find the policies on the website. Mr. Motola also noted that it would be beneficial to find a middle ground with masks. He understands that this is a public school system and has to adhere to the State, however, more mask breaks would be beneficial.

Carrie Grummons, 5 Black Walnut Drive, Newtown, works in the school system and wants to assure everyone that the children get plenty of mask breaks.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved to adjourn. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

#### Item 10 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Daniel J. Cruson, Jr.  
Secretary