

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

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting held on January 18, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. in the Reed Intermediate School library, 3 Trades Lane.

A. Plante, Chair	C. Melillo
J. Vouros, Vice Chair	A. Uberti
D. Ramsey, Secretary	T. Vadas
T. Higgins	12 Staff
S. Tomai	2 Public
C. Gilson	
D. Linnetz	

MOTION: Mrs. Linnetz moved that the Board of Education go into executive session to discuss the Superintendent's mid-year evaluation. Mr. Higgins seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 1 – Executive Session

Executive session began at 6:00 p.m. and ended at 7:05 p.m.

Mrs. Plante called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

Item 2 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 3 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Higgins moved that the Board of Education Move that the Board of Education approve the consent agenda which includes the donation to Newtown High School, the Newtown High School April 2025 ACIS trip, and the correspondence report. Mr. Ramsey seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 4 – Second Read of Policy 1700 Possession of Deadly Firearms or Deadly Weapons

MOTION: Mr. Higgins moved that the Board of Education approve Policy 1700 Possession of Deadly Firearms or Deadly Weapons. Mrs. Linnetz seconded.

Mr. Higgins reported this policy was discussed at the last Board meeting. We received a comment from Mr. Gilson regarding the possible inclusion of “electronic weapons” in this policy but when we conferred with counsel they told us we couldn't include that because it was not part of the State Statute.

Motion passes unanimously.

Item 5 – Superintendent's Overview of the 2024-2025 Budget

Mr. Melillo presented his 2024-2025 budget.

Mrs. Plante thanked everyone who worked to prepare this presentation and welcomed questions from the Board.

Mr. Higgins asked for information on how the budget makes allocations tied to the strategic plan and if it represents incremental spending, reallocation of resources, or are we already doing that.

Mr. Melillo noted that when the elementary schools added the math specialists and the ESSR money ended, we worked with principals to see if we should allocate those positions. We have an investment in the K-5 program, there's an investment in textbooks for AP courses at the high school and Spanish courses at the middle school, and a grant investment in career pathways. We are also looking at investing in professional development opportunities for teachers to look

at the instructional core which include student engagement, strong curriculum or content, and practice. Instructional rounds and investing in curriculum and instruction and professional development will improve student outcomes.

Mr. Higgins asked if he could quantify into dollars the incremental investment in activities that are new and tied to concrete objectives.

Mr. Mellilo would get him numbers on that and break it out.

Mr. Ramsey referred to expendable and non-expendable supplies and asked if the principal in each school can transfer monies from one area to areas in greater need of expendable materials.

Mrs. Vadas said we did that during Covid and she can go back and look at any transfers which we bring to the Board.

Mrs. Plante referred to unfunded mandates and how it might impact our budget.

Mr. Melillo said in the current budget year we had the Right to Read legislation that came out so we are sitting on the K-5 reading program. Elementary amounts are higher because they are expendables that go along with the programs. We are not mandated but it makes sense to look at the middle school programs so we have continuity from grade five through eighth grade. The unfunded mandates pushed us through that. Last year he provided a list of State unfunded mandates to the Board, which is over one hundred.

Mr. Higgins noted that on June 27 Mr. Melillo explained the strategic plan and discussed the lack of granularity in the plan in identifying concrete objectives, where we were, where we wanted to go and how we were going to assess whether we were making progress. He explained this was the first step and it would be developed over the summer. The beginning of September we talked about the status of that plan. He said work was going on and it would be coming. He repeated that on September 19. We still have not seen any updates or articulation of the objectives and if we are getting there. Can the Board expect to see an update to the strategic plan and the incremental investment we are making for each objectives and what we are trying to achieve? It's hard to see where he is making strategic investments and if we are doing enough. He wants to know if that will include the amplification of the strategic plan we have been discussing.

Mr. Melillo spoke to the Chair about presenting the strategic plan to the Board. We are scheduled to have a mid-year update with our administrators in February. Once we tie down that update we will come to the Board and update school by school.

Mr. Higgins asked for the articulation of the district goals which is what he's looking for in the budget and is part of annual goals.

Mr. Melillo would get the information and speak about that in policy.

#### Item 6 – Elementary School Budgets

Mr. Napolitano began by speaking about the success of the new programs and they were thankful for the Board's continued support.

Mr. Ramsey asked if there was flexibility in transferring money within your buildings and how teachers felt about their instructional supplies.

Mr. Moretti said that because Hawley was split between Sandy Hook School and Reed Intermediate School they were able to use supplies at these location but next year will be a restocking year for us. The teachers fill out a budget and ask for what they need. He feels the line items are accurate.

Dr. Gombos said her classroom teachers are very supportive of their supplies. She asked that they ask before they buy anything.

Mr. Napolitano noted that each budget is a little different each year. Our music, art and Spanish teachers work in two buildings.

Mr. Geissler agreed with Mr. Moretti and Mr. Napolitano that teachers feel they are very supported. We also have very generous PTAs.

Mr. Vouros asked how things were in the library media specialist areas.

Mr. Moretti noted that they picked up our enrichment and students are excited and collaborative with each other on lessons. The request for opting out of books has been very minor.

Mr. Geissler feels our media centers are wonderful and the hub of the school.

Mr. Vouros asked if there was enough staffing in that area.

Mr. Geissler said there was.

Mr. Higgins said that in looking at performance gaps, early intervention strategies come up again and again. Regarding the math specialists and being able to keep them he asked if that was part of keeping the level of support. Are we doing enough to support the intervention strategies and are you resourced enough to make an impact? Do you have the resources regarding interventions?

Mr. Napolitano said we do have the staff to support interventions for students. We have reading, math, and behavior support and are having successes. Regarding people to support the program and the money, we are fortunate to have the staff we have right from kindergarten. We analyze data during the year.

Mr. Higgins asked if you were satisfied and if you are tracking the students. Would more resources enable us to move faster?

Mr. Napolitano said we have seen excellent student growth but we will look at information to see if we need more resources.

Mr. Moretti agreed with Mr. Napolitano. What we are learning is that it is best for students to be in a classroom. We would like the teachers to supply more Tier 1 support on how to analyze data and interventions. We are very grateful to have the regular education BCBA's in our buildings to help with classroom behaviors. We started the dialogue of a social worker at the elementary level to help with needs in the community.

Dr. Gombos noted that it was impactful for her interventionists to go in the classroom. We are getting better at data which helps us support them but there are still behavior concerns. Our math scores are going in the right direction.

Mr. Moretti said that regarding addressing the strategic plan, we are writing goals about student improvement and move students if necessary. It is helpful to share data between schools.

Mrs. Plante noted that Middle Gate School will have 12 new students next year and asked if there was enough space.

Mr. Geissler said they have limited capacity to provide classrooms. The reading department has one classroom for four teachers. He has the possibility to reconfigure one room for a classroom if necessary.

#### Item 7 – Reed Intermediate School

Dr. Correia spoke about the Reed budget.

Mr. Ramsey commented on the atmosphere in the Reed office and the warmth of the secretaries to the people coming in. He asked if they are meeting the needs of the students dealing with English as a second language.

Dr. Correia said it's challenging but you see the improvement because we have excellent resources in our ELL department.

Mr. Gilson asked about computer education at Reed and if he had enough funding with changing technology.

Dr. Correia said the fifth and sixth grade technology curriculum is being rewritten and he is fine where he is.

#### Item 8 – Newtown Middle School Budget

Mr. Ross thanked the Board for their commitment to our schools and spoke about the middle school budget.

Mr. Ramsey complimented Mr. Ross and Mr. Walsh as the school has grown tremendously the last two years. There have been huge results in student achievement. Regarding Project Adventure, he asked if there was value in having two certified teachers, which would enhance the program.

Mr. Ross noted that Project Adventure has a profound impact on social emotional learning. He feels we are in a good place with one certified teacher and para for our program. The resources we have are adequate and effective.

Mr. Higgins said that from 2017 to now there has been about a 15% decline in enrollment and asked what kind of effect it has made in the middle school. He also asked if there was anywhere he had needs.

Mr. Ross stated that declining enrollment comes with challenges and it impacts staff morale. Also, educators have to deal with issues if positions are eliminated such as having to teach in other areas which might be difficult and will affect students. There is a gap at the middle school so we have two supports for ELA and a math and language arts interventionist. There were growing pains but it lead to opportunities.

Regarding middle school needs, ELA is a need we are addressing and he expects to see students with grade level opportunities. We want to be sure we are giving her staff the necessary tools to help the students. They are reviewing the scores and feel more work needs to be done. We have to improve in our practices.

Mr. Vouros asked the cost of removing the para from Project Adventure and putting in a teacher.

Mr. Ross said it would be about \$45,000.

Mr. Vouros commented that Mr. Walsh has been an amazing addition in helping us move teaching and learning forward in the middle school. He has a great commitment to students and families.

Item 9 – Technology Budget

Mr. Colclough presented the technology budget.

Item 10 – Public Participation

MOTION: Mr. Higgins moved to adjourn. Mrs. Linnetz seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 11 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Donald Ramsey  
Secretary

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Secretary