

**Board of Education  
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, January 19, 2012, in the lecture hall at Newtown High School.

D. Leidlein, Chair	J. Robinson
L. Roche, Vic Chair	L. Gejda
C. McCubbin, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
R. Gaines (absent)	24 Staff
W. Hart	30 Public
K. Alexander	1 Press
J. Vouros	

Mrs. Leidlein called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. A presentation regarding full day kindergarten would be first. The Board also agreed to add public participation to the end of the meeting.

Dawn Hochsprung, principal of Sandy Hook School, stated that many of our kindergarten teachers worked on this presentation. (attached)  
They studied Ridgefield, Woodbridge and Easton who have full day kindergarten. 100% of the districts in DRG A offer more kindergarten than Newtown and 55% in DRG B offer more kindergarten than Newtown. 83% of the towns in Fairfield County offer more kindergarten instruction than Newtown does. In our 2-3/4 hour program we cannot provide the instructional hours needed to teach the Common Core State Standards for language arts and mathematics.

Mrs. Roche asked how the pre-k program would fit into the schools.

Dr. Robinson said one would move and two would stay.

Mrs. Gasparine said there are four classrooms for pre-k at Head O'Meadow with one of those rooms used for PPTs and other student services.

Mrs. Leidlein was concerned with some classes being too large. There is only room at Sandy Hook and Head O'Meadow for pre K students.

Mrs. Peters said the challenge at Hawley is the multiple levels.

Mr. Vorous asked how the pre-k teachers felt about some of their students going to their home schools.

Mrs. Gasparine said the teacher felt they are part of a team and look at their program as a whole.

Mrs. Roche stated that the ad hoc facilities committee was doing a study.

Mrs. Leidlein said there were several scenarios looked at but there are roadblocks. They hope to have a decision soon.

Item 1 – Newtown High School

Mr. Dumais spoke about the high school budget requests. NEASC has changed its standards. The visit is in 2015 but we have to be ready by 2014 to get an acceptable rating. Our placement in the DRG regarding administrators per student and guidance counselors per student we don't rank any higher than 17. We have 249 students per

counselor. The average is 215 students. Our number one priority at the high school is a support position. NEASC said we have insufficient support staff. The Governor wrote a letter to the legislature regarding things he wanted changed. There are expectations for greater supervision.

Mr. Hart asked about the number of students per administrator.  
Mr. Dumais said there are 435 students per administrator.

Mrs. Roche asked the difference between a vice principal and a head master.  
Mr. Dumais said Trumbull has a principal and three house principals. Their high school is set up in houses. A dean would not have supervisory responsibilities.

Mr. Vouros asked for clarification on how Mr. Hiruo is utilized with his administrative duties and his relationship facilitating the N.I.C.E. program.

Mr. Dumais said each assistant principal has certain responsibilities. Someone has to be in charge of scheduling, overseeing clubs and activities, student issues, stolen items, drugs which are all student discipline. All of them have equal responsibilities for personnel issues, 504,, etc. Mr. Clayton is involved in Safe School Climate, Mr. Hiruo oversees clubs and activities and Mr. Rivera takes care of scheduling. Mr. Hiruo also runs CAPT.

Mrs. Leidlein asked Mr. Dumais to prioritize his positions. He stated that a lot of positions are connected. Taking one off changes the list. The number one includes the clerical position and the assistant principal. Math is also a great need right now.

Mrs. Leidlein requested the the classroom enrollment report.  
Mr. Dumais said the list would be teacher period enrollments.  
Mrs. Leidlein asked to highlight classes that included different levels and asked about the need for an afterschool study hall supervisor.

Mr. Dumais said we are paying close attention to how students are doing. If not doing well we have interventions that go into place. A gap we have is providing time in school for help.

Mr. Vouros asked for information on NEASC.

Mr. Dumais said they have a number of standards ranging from curriculum to resources. They speak to students, parents, and teachers and look at student work. The rating guide is used. Based on the way we are scored would decide if we are put on warning. They look at recommendations and revisit to see if they have been implemented. They also publicize our status. If by 2014 we don't have a formal that connects adults to students other than through guidance counselors we will fail.

Mr. Vouros said it seems the high gets everything that's needed because of accreditation.

Mr. Dumais work through the grade levels culminates at the high school. He supports full day kindergarten because it will help the students through the other levels.

Mrs. Roche said we were told there would be no money needed for the gymnastics program.

Mr. Dumais said the parents support the program now. We also don't support the ice hockey program.

Mrs. Leidlein asked about the out of district tuition which is an additional \$9,200 this year.

Mr. Bienkowski stated we have 3 at Nonnewaug, 9 at ACES and 4 at CES to which Mrs. Leidlein asked which school we provided transportation to one-way.

Dr. Robinson said it was for the Regional Center for the Arts in Trumbull which meets from 1 PM to 5 PM. The law says even if we are not members of the groups we have to pay the tuition.

Mrs. Leidlein asked for a report on the cost of transportation and tuition for those two programs.

Mr. Hart said the high school has diverse programs and doesn't view the budget as competition between the schools.

#### Item 2 – Newtown Middle School

Mrs. Sherlock explained the structure of the middle school. We've requested an additional guidance counselor for the last 5 years which is the number one request. We also requested additional math time. We consider the full day kindergarten program to be a necessary and important program in the district.

Mr. Vouros congratulated Mrs. Sherlock on the achievements in reading and math scores. Mrs. Boettner said the time we've been given the last two years on our early release days has been a key factor in teacher collaboration to examine student work and writing. It has made an incredible difference.

Mrs. Sherlock said the guidance counselor would be on a mobile cart. Each student will create a student success plan through the Naviance program.

Mr. Vouros asked about the lack of technology.

Mrs. Sherlock said we are wireless now which will give us all kinds of possibilities. We are looking to allow students to bring their devices from home to maximize technology usage. We are getting Kindles in the library for students that don't have computers at home.

Mr. Vouros is concerned about the gifted students in the middle school and Reed School and how we are addressing their needs.

Mrs. Sherlock said our 43 gifted students are a significant part of our 900 students. We do the most we can to accommodate their needs along with those of the other students. Mrs. Roche asked if those students could be clustered.

Mrs. Sherlock said they are. Ms. Bradley groups the students according to like interests and how they work with each other.

Mrs. Roche suggested them being on one cluster. Mrs. Sherlock said we try to have them together as much as possible because they learn from each other.

Item 3 – Reed Intermediate School

Dr. Epple supports the full day kindergarten. Reed needs additional reading and math teacher time. She asked for reinstatement of the PE teacher we lost two years ago. Our writing teacher is teaching project adventure two half-day per week. We would like a full-time writing teacher. We would also like the Chinese music course to be continued for the sixth grade students. Plan B is to get a Chinese teacher using the Hanban grant.

Mrs. Roche asked if the schedule would allow a foreign language program at Reed. Dr. Epple said with the financial reality and other priorities we didn't try to fit it in.

Mrs Leidlein said a phase-in program would be worth hearing about and requested more information.

Mr. Hart said we need to understand why we need to fund it.

Mr. Vouros said transition from Reed to the middle school is vital. He was not in favor of the Chinese music course because not every child in the middle school is eligible for a foreign language.

Item 4 - Elementary Schools

The principals agreed with having a full-day kindergarten program and answered questions from the Board.

Mrs. Roche asked if the schools were having problems without EAs. Mrs. Hochsprung had some problems at Sandy Hook. Mr. Geissler said he would like more staff but we would love to provide more enrichment services. Mrs. Gasparine would also like to see an increase in professional development opportunities. Mrs. Peters would not like to see anymore EAs cut

Mrs. Roche was concerned about instructional time.

Mrs. Leidlein was concerned about the number of teachers being taken out of class for professional development.

Item 5 – Plant

Mr. Hart noticed the substantial decrease in energy costs.

Mr. Bienkowski said we have seven months with a new contract and new supplier and we have a new provider for next year. Different schools have different rates.

Mr. Vouros asked the cost for the middle school boilers.

Mr. Faiella said it's in the million dollar range to take them out which includes asbestos abatement.

Mrs. Leidlein asked for a prioritized list of projects and a detailed description of the STARR Program and costs for this year and previous years. She also requested more information on consultants that worked in district last year and this year, why they were hired and the cost. She requested to see the actual money spent in 2009-2010 and also what was budgeted. An additional request was for the actual increase in the budget if we were only meeting the contractual obligations for the same services.

Item 6 – Public Participation

Amber Mason, 29 Taunton Ridge Road, was in favor of the full day kindergarten which would benefit her daughter.

Kristen Marshall, 23 Rose Lane, was in favor of full day kindergarten. She had put her child in private school for kindergarten who is now behind in reading in first grade. Her other child is in the half day program at Sandy Hook but the time is rushed.

MOTION: Mr. Hart moved to adjourn. Mr. Vouros seconded. Vote: 6 ayes

Item 7 - Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Cody McCubbin  
Secretary

# Full Day Kindergarten

What You Need to Know  
About Kindergarten in Newtown

# Meet the Kindergarten Team!

## ● Hawley

- Kindergarten Teachers
  - Donna Albano
  - Deborah Lubin
- Reading Teachers
  - Brandi Oatis
  - Patti Vitarelli

## ● Middle Gate

- Kindergarten Teacher
  - Dorothy Schmidt
  - Tanya LaBonia
  - Kristen Delgado
  - Julie Yorty
- Reading Teacher
  - Peggy Kennedy

## ● Head O' Meadow

- Kindergarten Teachers
  - Gail Diminico
  - Miryam Kuligowski
- Reading Teacher
  - Elaine Sullivan

## ● Sandy Hook

- Kindergarten Teachers
  - Lisa Dievert
  - Sue Perry
  - Janet Vollmer
- Reading Teacher
  - Diane Dennis

# Full Day Kindergarten and The Newtown Public School Strategic Plan

- **Strategy: Teaching and Learning**

We will develop and implement plans to ensure all staff use effective instructional tools, best practices, assessment data, and intervention resources to improve academic standing, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and inspire students to excel.

- **Specific Results**

- Focus K-12 teaching and learning on the 21st century skills of communication and collaboration, creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, and research and information fluency.
- Inspire students and staff to excel through a broad range of programs that encourage, excite and ignite student achievement.
- Demonstrate a standard of excellence as evidenced by the consistent implementation of professional practices.
- Utilize differentiated instruction as a fundamental means of providing appropriate interventions for students.



# Our Research

- Kindergarten and Early Intervention Teachers held a planning meeting in the fall of 2011
  - Developed list of guiding questions for their FDK inquiry
  - Researched similar and local districts to find out which offer FDK
  - Planned visits and phone interviews to schools with FDK
- Kindergarten and Early Intervention Teachers shared their learning throughout the fall of 2011
  - Visit observations and information collected
  - Phone interview feedback
- Kindergarten and Early Intervention Teachers compiled their data in the winter of 2012
  - Here we are!

# Who We Studied... and Why

- Ridgefield
- Woodbridge
- Easton

## **Know your competition!**

Of the top two Demographic Reference Groups in Connecticut

- 100% of districts in DRG A offer more kindergarten instruction than Newtown does.
- 55% of districts in DRG B offer more kindergarten instruction than Newtown does.

We are and will continue to be compared to districts in the top DRGs in Connecticut.

# Who We Studied... and Why

- Ridgefield
- Easton
- Bethel

## **Know your neighborhood!**

### In Fairfield County

- 11 of 23 towns offer full day kindergarten
- 4 of 23 towns offer extended day kindergarten to all students
- 4 of 23 towns offer full day for some students

83% of towns in Fairfield County offer more kindergarten instruction than Newtown does.

School programs are a factor in many home buyers' decisions; we are at a disadvantage with young families home-shopping in Fairfield County.

# Our Guiding Questions

- What does full day enable you to do that ½ day did not?
- Did your standards increase? What did you add to the curriculum?
- Did you see any changes in scores and assessments? What have the first grade teachers observed?
- What does your daily and weekly schedule look like? Specials, computer time, rest period?
- Do you still have blocks, home living, art, creative centers?
- What kind of remedial or enrichment support do you have?

# What We Learned

- In our 2-3/4 hour program, we provide our young learners with many experiences similar to those provided in full day programs, BUT
  - at a much quicker pace
  - with far less depth

# What We Learned

In our 2-3/4 hour program, our teachers are compelled to make daily decisions about which required lessons to teach and which to leave out.

This leads to inconsistency of our kindergarten students' academic experience across classrooms and across the district.

# What We Learned

- Kindergarten is often students' first formal opportunity to learn and apply the social skills vital to successful integration into a peer group, but we are limited by
  - Inadequate time for recess
  - Highly structured, academically-driven center time

# What We Learned

- In our 2-3/4 hour program, students have limited time for practice of fine motor skills.
  - If students are asked to color their responses, there is not enough time to teach or encourage neatness.
  - Much student work involving cutting or coloring must be sent home incomplete; some families choose to work with their children to complete it and others do not.



# What We Learned

- Our 2-3/4 hour program does not allow time for our youngest students to participate in recess every day as per state statute:

CT P.A. 04-224, S. 1. Sec. 10-221o.  
Lunch periods. Recess.

# What We Learned

- Our 2-3/4 hour program impedes a smooth transition to first grade.
  - Students' period of adjustment to full day of school occurs in first grade instead of in kindergarten.
  - Academic expectations for first grade have increased as dramatically as they have for kindergarten; limited instructional time will have a domino effect throughout the grades.

# What We Learned

- In our 2-3/4 hour program, students are rushed from one learning task to the next, impeding the development of stamina in
  - Reading
  - Writing
  - Independent work

The impact on the K-12 program is significant, as stamina for academic tasks is necessary for success as an independent learner.

# What We Learned

- In 2-3/4 hours, there is not enough time to focus on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills necessary to prepare students for college and career.
  - Student discourse is limited by time constraints.
  - Teachers lack the time needed to probe for deeper understanding and students have little to no opportunity to respond to higher order questioning.
  - Students' practice in computer skills such as keyboarding is severely limited.

All of this has significant implications for Newtown's K-12 instructional program. Students' preparation to be college- and career-ready 21<sup>st</sup> Century learners must start early if we are to build a quality K-12 instructional program in Newtown.

# What We Learned

- In our 2-3/4 hour program, we cannot provide the number of instructional hours needed to teach the Common Core State Standards.
  - Newtown currently offers 137.25-183 hours per year of language arts instruction in kindergarten. The CSDE pacing guide for CCSS requires 355 hours.
  - Newtown currently offers 45.75-61 hours per year of mathematics instruction to students in kindergarten. The CSDE pacing guide for CCSS kindergarten mathematics requires 155 hours.

# The Bottom Line

Our kindergarten teachers are very talented educators and have historically provided our youngest learners with a solid foundation for their academic careers.

However, the playing field has changed, and we need to adjust our game in order to remain competitive.

# Resources

- Connecticut State Department of Education student census data
- CSDE Position Statement on English Language Arts Education, 12/3/08
- CSDE Mathematics Specialist, Charlene Tate-Nichols
- CT Statute P.A. 04-224, S. 1. Sec. 10-221o. Lunch periods. Recess.
- CSDE pacing guides
- Common Core State Standards, [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)
- Recent newspaper articles
- Research on the efficacy of full-day kindergarten

# NEWTOWN KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN VISITS & INTERVIEWS

## Guiding questions for observations and interviews

- What does full day enable you to do that ½ day did not?
- Did your standards increase? What did you add to the curriculum?
- Did you see any changes in scores and assessments? What have the first grade teachers observed?
- What does your daily and weekly schedule look like? Specials, computer time, rest period?
- Do you still have blocks, home living, art, creative centers?
- What kind of remedial or enrichment support do you have?

### Districts we visited to observe full-day kindergarten:

Ridgefield (DRG A)      Woodbridge (DRG B)      Easton (DRG A)

### Districts we interviewed to learn about full-day kindergarten:

Bethel (DRG D)      New Milford (DRG D )      Kent (DRG E)

COMPONENTS OF FULL-DAY PROGRAMS...	WE WILL INCORPORATE THIS INTO OUR 2-3/4 HOUR PROGRAM	WE WILL INCORPORATE THIS INTO OUR FULL-DAY PROGRAM	IMPACT ON OUR 2-3/4 HOUR PROGRAM
Longer morning meeting/Responsive Classroom		X	Greetings and share time are often rushed; our K implementation does not honor Responsive Classroom model
Full read aloud with discussion, retelling, higher order questioning		X	Inadequate time to probe for deeper understanding; students responses are not fully developed
Math every day		X	Direct instruction in mathematics typically occurs only 2-3 times per week, and never for a full hour
Math lesson with integrated concepts		X	Math concepts are reinforced in centers, but students are not consistently exposed to the relationships among math concepts or between math concepts and other curriculum areas



COMPONENTS OF FULL-DAY PROGRAMS...	WE WILL INCORPORATE THIS INTO OUR 2-3/4 HOUR PROGRAM	WE WILL INCORPORATE THIS INTO OUR FULL-DAY PROGRAM	IMPACT ON OUR 2-3/4 HOUR PROGRAM
Increased opportunities for writing across the curriculum	X Via learning centers	X	Direct instruction in writing is very brief; students do not have time to develop their ideas or to explore how their ideas relate to learning in other content areas
Independent reading/readers' workshop	X Inconsistent	X	Loss of opportunity to develop reading stamina and understanding of themselves as readers
Developmentally appropriate pace		X	Lessons are rushed and can seem disjointed; opportunities for student discourse are extremely limited
Opportunities for fine motor development embedded in academics	X Primarily via centers	X	Work is often sent home for completion; limited opportunity for students who need additional practice in fine motor development
Increased opportunities for intervention for struggling learners	X Extended day program	X	Extended day program offered to very few struggling learners; no time during the school days for other informal interventions
Increased enrichment for advanced learners	X Individual, independent	X	2-3/4 hour day does not provide schedule flexibility to bring together groups of advanced learners
Social skill building through academically grounded play	X Via centers	X	Center time is brief, very structured, and academically driven; students do not have the opportunity to practice age-appropriate social interactions
Increase opportunities for student discourse		X	Loss of opportunity to exercise 21st century skills or to apply higher-order thinking; 4, 5, and 6 year olds require more time to process and practice those skills
Opportunities to question at a deeper level and to ask follow up questions to check for understanding and probe for deeper thinking		X	Reduced opportunities to build the foundation needed to meet expectations in higher grades
Art, computer lab more than once per month	X Inconsistent	X	Students are not consistently offered exposure to fine arts or the opportunity to learn and practice keyboarding and other computer skills
Time to reinforce and practice self-help skills		X	Students who would benefit from prompting for independence have tasks done for them by teachers

COMPONENTS OF FULL-DAY PROGRAMS...	WE WILL INCORPORATE THIS INTO OUR 2-3/4 HOUR PROGRAM	WE WILL INCORPORATE THIS INTO OUR FULL-DAY PROGRAM	IMPACT ON OUR 2-3/4 HOUR PROGRAM
More time for guided reading		X	More modeling and initiation of early reading strategies with increased opportunities to practice these critical steps
More comprehensive writers' workshop		X	More flexibility to differentiate, incorporating related skills such as illustration and oral language to develop a personal narrative
Recess every day		X	Limits opportunities for social and physical development
Inquiry-based science activities	X Inconsistent	X	Students are not offered the opportunity to explore, investigate, and collaborate in order to maximize the learning embedded in scientific problems
More meaningful curriculum-related field trips	X Inconsistent	X	2-3/4 hour day limits choice of venue due to travel time
Participation in school-based assemblies	X Inconsistent	X	Students whose sessions are not in school during a school-wide assembly can participate only if their parents are able to drive them in and stay with them; they do not participate with their class
Smoother, more consistent transition from kindergarten to first grade		X	Students' period of adjustment to full day of school occurs in first grade instead of in kindergarten. Also, the academic expectations for first grade have increased as dramatically as they have for kindergarten; limited instructional time will have a domino effect.

**COMPARISON OF 2-3/4 HOUR vs. FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS**

<b>CONTENT AREA</b>	<b>DAILY MINUTES IN 2-3/4 HOUR PROGRAM</b>	<b>DAILY MINUTES IN FULL-DAY PROGRAM</b>	<b>CONNECTICUT MINIMUM MINUTES</b>
LANGUAGE ARTS	45-60	150	120 As per CSDE Position Statement on English Language Arts Education, 12/3/08
MATHEMATICS	15-20	60	60 As per CSDE Mathematics Specialist
SCIENCE, SOCIAL STUDIES, HEALTH	10-15	30	
MORNING MEETING/CALENDAR	10-15	30	
HANDWRITING	5	15	
COMPUTER LAB	>5	5-10	
UNIFIED ARTS (Music, Art, Physical Education, Library-Media)	20-25	40	
CENTERS	0-15	(included in academics)	
SNACK/LUNCH	10-15	40-50	
RECESS	0-5	25	Daily As per CT P.A. 04-224, S. 1. Sec. 10-221o. Lunch periods. Recess.
NPS AVAILABLE INSTRUCTIONAL TIME (includes transitions not noted above)	169 minutes	387 Minutes*	INSUFFICIENT As per the State of Connecticut

\*Some full day program observed/interviewed had longer instructional days than NPS.

## How Will the Common Core State Standards Really Impact Our Students?

- Current kindergarten students will be the first to take the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium's test to assess their mastery of the Common Core State Standards
- Academic expectations for students have increased at every grade level; limited instructional time in kindergarten will impact our students throughout their experience in Newtown Public Schools.

### Mathematics

- The CSDE pacing guide for CCSS kindergarten mathematics requires 155 hours of instruction in mathematics per year. Newtown offers 45.75-61 hours per year of mathematics instruction to students in the 2-3/4 hour kindergarten program.
- Common Core State Standards require instructional time in kindergarten mathematics to focus on:
  - Representing, relating, and operating on whole numbers, initially with sets of objects
  - Describing shapes and space

### Language Arts

- The CSDE pacing guide for CCSS kindergarten language arts requires 355 hours of instruction in language arts per year. Newtown offers 137.25-183 hours per year of language instruction to students in the 2-3/4 hour kindergarten program.
- Common Core State Standards require instructional time in kindergarten language arts to focus on:
  - Reading: Students comprehend and respond in literal, critical, and evaluative ways to various texts that are read, viewed, and heard.
  - Oral Language: Students will listen and speak to communicate ideas clearly.
  - Writing: Students will express, develop, and substantiate ideas and experiences through their own writing and artistic and technical presentations

## THE KINDERGARTEN TEAM:

### Hawley

- Kindergarten Teachers
  - Donna Albano
  - Deborah Lubin
- Reading Teachers
  - Brandi Oatis
  - Patti Vitarelli

### Middle Gate

- Kindergarten Teacher
  - Dorothy Schmidt
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