

**These minutes are pending BOE approval.**

**Board of Education  
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, November 15, 2011 in the board room at 3 Primrose Street.

W. Hart, Chair	J. Robinson
D. Leidlein, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
A. Buzzi, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
D. Nanavaty	6 Staff
L. Bittman	11 Public
R. Gaines	3 Press
K. Alexander	

Mr. Hart called the meeting to order at 7:39 p.m.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to modify the agenda to include an amendment to the Newtown Board of Education meeting minutes of April 6, 2010. Mrs. Bittman seconded.

Vote: 7 ayes

Item 1 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to modify the agenda for a discussion and possible action on the 2011-2012 calendar to make December 2 a full day. Mr. Alexander seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to approve the consent agenda. Mr. Alexander seconded. Mr. Nanavaty clarified that the field trip request was to include the trips in December, January and February. Vote: 7 ayes

Mr. Hart spoke about the three retiring Board members and thanks them for serving. Dr. Robinson also acknowledged them and presented each with a gift on behalf of the children in Newtown for their countless hours of service.

Item 2 – Public Participation - none

Mr. Hart introduced the three new Board members.

Item 3 - Reports

Correspondence:

Mr. Buzzi said the Board received correspondence from the following: Laura Roche, Laura Main, Kathy Fetchick, and Debra Pollack,

Mrs. Leidlein read Representative Chris Lyddy's letter regarding burden of proof. She also mentioned that everyone received a letter from Debra Lee Hovey about not being included in the special education meeting.

Dr. Robinson responded to the letter after she spoke to the special education secretaries. There were numerous times the meeting was tried to be scheduled. The secretary took ownership on neglecting to include them.

Chair report:

Mr. Hart sat in on the EOC meetings with the Town regarding the roads and opening the schools. A very productive meeting was held with Anne Louise Thompson of the State Department, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Gaines, Dr. Robinson, Dr. Regan and Dr. Colón.

Item 5 – New Business

Discussion/possible vote on new gymnastics program at Newtown High School: Gregg Simon, Athletic Director, spoke about the program which would be funded by the parents, follow the Oxford High School schedule, and compete in the Southwest Conference. We will also use their facility at no cost. The fee is \$1,200 per student.

Mrs. Bittman asked if there was a way to help a child without funds.

Mr. Simon said if any students join after the six begin they will be part of the team without having to pay. There will also be fundraising for the team.

The season begins November 28 and we will be practicing at Vazzi's. Jenna Rettstadt will coach this year and be paid by the parents. Transportation will also be paid by the parents.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved that the Board of Education approve the new gymnastics program at Newtown High School and Jenna Rettstadt as the coach. Mrs. Bittman seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Robinson spoke about the schools' recognition of Veteran's Day. She also discussed the Newtown District Theory of Action statements that ensure intentional organizational coherence and alignment with Newtown's strategic improvement process. We have been working to become one of the top-functioning districts. .

Mandarin is being offered before school at Sandy Hook School as a component to the school's commitment to global awareness. Dr. Leu was here for our professional development and spoke about 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies. Laura Swanson, special education teacher at Sandy Hook School was nominated by a parent and named special education teacher of the year.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if the notification was sent to parents regarding contacting transportation if there is a bus problem. She hadn't gotten one from Reed.

Dr. Robinson said parents had been notified and the information about who to contact has not been problematic in the school system. This was an additional notice.

Financial Report:

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the financial report for the month ending October 31, 2011. Mr. Gaines seconded.

Mr. Bienkowski spoke about the financial report. In the salary area we expect an additional need for \$341,000 for EAs, nurses and special education salaries. EAs will be offset by the excess cost grant. Professional services needs approximately \$173,000 for an unbudgeted professional transition student approaching the age of 21 who needs to attend a specialized facility. In speech and hearing we have a deficit of \$70,000 for additional students and \$48,000 for psychiatric, medical, health and legal fees.

Other purchased services needs are approximately \$1,020,000 for transportation services, property and liability insurance and out of district tuition. We anticipate additional expenses of \$1.4M and the excess cost grant is expected to be \$1.4M.

Vote: 7 ayes

Item 4 – Old Business

Policy 3-202 Budget Procedures & Major Object Code Transfers:

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the revisions to Policy 3-202 Budget Procedures & Major Object Code Transfers. Mr. Gaines seconded.

Mrs. Leidlein was not in favor of this policy because there was no ceiling placed on the object code transfers that many other districts in our DRG have.

Mr. Buzzi said the value of homes in Newtown is supported by the school system and town. It's our responsibility to ensure we maintain the quality of the school system. Our staff does a good job for less. What we have works for us.

Mr. Alexander agreed that our administration is paying attention to the numbers. Not having a number at all means we are looking at it after its been done. We should have a number up front. Mrs. Leidlein agreed.

Mr. Nanavaty feels this is an improved policy and meets our objectives. You see the money spent in each financial report.

Mr. Gaines said we have also seen a change in the way we report our finances and was in favor of this policy.

Vote: 5 ayes, 2 nays (Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Alexander)

Approve Minutes of Special Meeting:

MOTION: Mr. Buzzi moved that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the special meeting on November 3, 2011. Mrs. Leidlein seconded.

Vote: 4 ayes, 3 abstained (Mr. Nanavaty, Mrs. Bittman, Mr. Gaines)

Policy on Student Representative to the Board:

Dr. Robinson asked for ideas of what the Board wanted in this policy.

Mrs. Bittman would like to see the student elected in the school not appointed by the administration. A time limit should also be set for attending the meeting.

This discussion will be held with the new Board.

Board of Education Goals:

Mrs. Leidlein asked to forward these to the next board as recommendations and let them adopt them.

Mrs. Bittman felt they should be approved by the board that created it.

Mr. Nanavaty said this was a fluid document. Last year we passed goals. The new goals are putting forward what the community put together in our strategic plan. The new board can act on them for 2012-2013. In April or May you will also have the teacher evaluation plan which will follow along with these goals.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved that the Board of Education approve the Board of Education goals for 2011-2012. Mrs. Bittman seconded.

Mrs. Leidlein is concerned about having full-day kindergarten as a goal before the facilities ad hoc committee has looked at it.

Mr. Gaines said full-day kindergarten is one of the options developed by that committee.

Mrs. Bittman said this is a goal not an action plan.

Mr. Hart said the mission of the committee is to see our options to reduce the district costs. We want to do what is right educationally. The state mandated requirements about what we have to teach our kindergarten students which cannot be done in a half day.

Mr. Alexander stated this goal is valuable as what we would like to do. We have decided it's the educational route.

Mrs. Leidlein suggested that improving special education should be one of the goals.

MOTION: Mrs. Bittman moved to modify the list of goals to add

“Develop a plan for the continuous and rigorous improvement of our special education program and support 504 qualified students.”

Mr. Gaines seconded.

Vote on the amendment: 7 ayes

Vote on the original motion: 7 ayes

Burden of Proof:

Dr. Robinson said Connecticut always puts the burden of proof on the district.

Unwarranted special education suits cost the district legal fees. The movement is to have the legislature look at this to have the burden of proof fall on the person filing the suit.

Mr. Hart stated that CABE and the School Board are very concerned about no control over suits. The legislature looked at this but no action was taken. The Connecticut State Department of Education is collecting these letters for the committee to review.

Dr. Robinson wants our students to have the best possible services. Sometimes the parents don't always agree with our recommendation.

Mr. Nanavaty said if the person bringing the suit has to pay they may try another way to get results. He would support the letter to the state that the burden is on the moving party. It will make the parents be a little more realistic.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved that the Board of education support the change in the burden of proof in Connecticut to be consistent with the Supreme Court decision.

Mr. Gaines seconded.

Mrs. Leidlein felt the parents don't consider them to be frivolous cases.

Mr. Nanavaty said the burden is on the district to prove to the hearing officer that the accommodations are in line with the PPT. It becomes costly for us with no cost to the parent. The district has to provide witnesses that they are accommodating the student accurately. We have to hire an attorney, hearing officer, and court reporter. Parents are not charged. In a civil court, the parent has to state why child is not being taken care of. The school district has to defend the actions taken by the school.

Mr. Buzzi stated this is very emotional for the parents. We work hard to identify the student need. This may provide some relief for the parents and taxpayers. He supports this change.

Mrs. Leidlein said this is removing a safeguard the parents have. They won't have the ability to challenge the school if the child's needs are not being met. This was brought to the education commission three times. The only state that has this is Vermont.

Mr. Alexander asked if there were other things parents could do prior to this level. Dr. Robinson said mediation is an option which will help them decide how to help the student.

Vote: 6 ayes, 1 nay (Mrs. Leidlein)

Approve Modified Minutes of April 6, 2010:

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved that the Board of Education amend the minutes of the April 6, 2010 Board of Education meeting to include the following under executive session:

Discussion centered on Board members speaking to the press before being vested by the entire Board. The practice had been for the Board to speak publicly as a single voice through the chair. No motions were made or votes taken.

Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

2011-2012 Calendar:

Mrs. Leidlein was concerned with the number of days missed and early dismissals for conferences and recommended making December 2 a full day instead of an early release day.

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved that the Board of Education make December 2 a full day of school. Mr. Buzzi seconded.

Mrs. Bittman asked how this would affect the district.

Dr. Robinson said it will not allow us to complete the programs we scheduled through the end of the year. The two hours devoted to the teachers is valuable to teachers' instruction. The professional development days are too valuable so she would not support that.

Mr. Nanavaty stated we already reduced the number of PLC days and moved them to Fridays. The students are still going to school the required amount of days. We shouldn't keep losing the PLC days.

Mr. Gaines said we've already adjusted the calendar. Our professionals need this time to better support them. He is opposed to cutting PLC days.

Mr. Alexander agreed.

Mrs. Leidlein suggested moving it to a different date.

Mr. Hart feels teacher professional development is the most cost effective expense a district can have. We should be talking about the five days we have to make up.

Vote: 1 aye, 6 nays (Mr. Hart, Mr. Buzzi, Mr. Nanavaty, Mrs. Bittman, Mr. Gaines, Mr. Alexander)

Mrs. Bittman thanked public and staff for their help as a Board member. It's been an honor. The staff is the best in Connecticut.

Mr. Nanavaty said these eight years he received the most education in his life. It's been an honor to serve the best school system in Connecticut. The bottom line is we are here for the students.

Mr. Buzzi thanked everyone and also felt it was an honor to serve.

Item 6 – Public Participation – none

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

Item 7 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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William Hart  
Chair