

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

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting held on January 19, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 3 Primrose Street.

D. Zukowski, Chair	C. Melillo
J. Vouros, Vice Chair	A. Uberti
D. Ramsey, Secretary	T. Vadas
D. Cruson	25 Staff
J. Kuzma	
J. Larkin	
A. Plante	
K. Kunzweiler (absent)	
D. Godino (absent)	

Ms. Zukowski called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 2 – Elementary School Budgets

Mr. Geissler, Dr. Gombos, Mr. Napolitano and Mr. Moretti spoke about the elementary budgets.

Mr. Vouros asked for feedback on how the library media centers in the elementary schools will operate under the new plan without paraprofessionals. He also questioned the adjustments under Project Challenge.

Mr. Melillo said one of the enrichment teachers is going to remain in one of elementary schools and still be working with teachers to enrich within the classroom. The only change is there will be one person instead of two. They will continue to identify gifted students.

Mr. Cruson said with the proposed cut with the library paraprofessionals and now asking the librarians to take care of Project Challenge, it seems like there will be a lot more work for them.

Mr. Napolitano said it will add to their responsibilities but we will support them and use volunteers. We will work with them in each building to make this work. He supports our library teachers and will reach out to families for volunteers.

Dr. Gombos said over the past 10 years we cut all of our specialists in our buildings. We've shared teachers because of the amount of classes taught. To keep these specialists whole we had to make these decisions. This change has the least impact on students.

Mrs. Kuzma said that during Covid volunteers were not allowed in schools and asked if they had enough volunteers now.

Dr. Gombos said we have more volunteers than ever before at Sandy Hook School and turn people away. We will have a system for training volunteers.

Mr. Geissler said the paras are the backbone of our schools and we have a good staff because of good hiring followed by good training.

Mr. Vouros was having difficulty supporting this reduction. The enrichment model in grades three and four is extensive.

Dr. Gombos stated there will be a gifted teacher each week.

Mr. Vouros said the enrichment challenges the teachers do now is a separate program. The library media teacher won't have time to do the work involved. That can't suffer and we need to think about how we are going to find money.

Mr. Napolitano said regarding the enrichment piece we will be reaching more students with bigger groups of students

Mrs. Uberti stated that not all 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders are getting enrichment.

Mrs. Larkin asked for an explanation if what maker spaces were.

Mr. Moretti explained that the librarians brought it to us and it's exposing children to a variety of technologies, stem activities, robots, decoding, and the like.

Dr. Gombos said it started 10 years or so and media specialists use it as one of their resources. It's imbedded in our media program for all students.

Mr. Cruson said regarding para cuts, we would be foolish to believe all of them would move to a special education position. What will be done to fill the open positions?

Mr. Moretti stated we post positions on various websites, college campuses and journals.

Central office continues to look at ways to fill them.

Mr. Melillo said we look at what is mandated in a special education student's PPT and decide what the various responsibilities are for teachers and paras. None of the cuts have anything to do with the performance of paras or teachers. We had to come up with a solution to a problem and recognizes this will put a load on media specialists. Others have been covering special education student needs. We have landing spots for those who will lose their position so they will still have a job. We are faced with pulling supports from classrooms and making classes larger. We are making decisions in the best interest of the students.

Ms. Zukowski inquired about elementary enrollment projections and classroom space.

Dr. Gombos said their budgets are based on projections and we don't plan for extra students.

Mr. Melillo said we will make adjustments if needed. It's not uncommon to add classes at the beginning of the school year. We opened kindergarten enrollment early with 60 students enrolled at this time.

Mr. Cruson felt the enrollment and classroom space should be a discussion the Board should have in the future and have maps with what each room is used for.

Dr. Gombos said you could look at the maps but you have to also look at the room dimensions because many are too small to be used for classrooms.

Ms. Zukowski noted we need to make sure the school fields are ADA accessible.

Mr. Vouros asked what we would do if the SRBI and library paras being cut don't want special education positions.

Mr. Melillo said when we pass the budget we will have a better idea of who goes where. If we have a dearth of applicants we may have to leverage some of our MTSS tutors to help our special education students or see how we can support the library media specialists. Those special education positions are tied to IEPs. It was a plan to try to ensure our staff have a landing spot. There are 13 open special education positions and he is hopeful that everyone impacted by these cuts will take a position in the district.

Mrs. Uberti said we made a decision to keep the additional math interventionists. We have an additional certified person because of the pandemic. It serves the students well to have a certified teacher working with them.

Mrs. Larkin said we put so much additional programming in but there is only so much time in the day. We have to teach the core subjects and give them the time they need. These maker spaces sound great. Maybe we streamline some things.

#### Item 3 – Reed Intermediate School

Dr. Correia spoke about his budget. Office and classroom referrals are down. Enrollment continues to grow with a prediction of 577 students but we are now expecting 600.

Mr. Ramsey asked if they had a reduction in referrals.

Dr. Correia didn't have that information but feels this has happened because teachers are handling things more in their classrooms and the students are getting diversion lessons in both grades. Some days we see none.

Mrs. Larkin asked about ELA and if he has any requests.

Dr. Correia has no request right now. He spoke about curriculum needing to grow with the students and that we are missing some things that should be in the core classes.

Mrs. Uberti said when we present curriculum for next year they would meet the needs discussed.

Mrs. Plante asked if he was worried about class size given the increased enrollment.

Dr. Correia was not worried at this time as he expects to be under the class size guidelines.

Ms. Zukowski noted that she is setting up a committee to look at clubs. She asked about removing a science position listed on page 83.

Dr. Correia said that is our science instructional coach to address teachers needing NGSS training. The teacher instruction is no longer needed so we can eliminate this position.

#### Item 4 – Newtown Middle School

Jim Ross spoke about his budget and was joined by Terri Greenfield.

Mr. Cruson asked if the Reed 600 students number was close to the grade 7 enrollment.

Mr. Ross said that number was pretty close. The middle school schedule has flexibility. If a grade level is 75 students over then there would be concern.

Mr. Ramsey asked if there was a plan to offer any other after school clubs.

Mr. Ross said it depended on the following for additional clubs. This year we piloted a singing program. We are always looking to enhance.

Mr. Vouros heard great reports coming from your school. He asked with the new schedule if there was anything he needed that will enhance it.

Mr. Ross said they were in a great spot right now. They started to think about the essential skills about time management, learning how to learn, and social emotional curriculum pieces.

Mr. Vouros acknowledged Mr. Walsh and his work with the students. His identifying with them the way he does is working.

Mr. Ramsey asked how the middle school was working with student referrals.

Item 5 – Public Participation

Beth Murphy, 6 Miya Lane, Head O'Meadow School Library

Erika Carlson, Library Hawley Library

Andrew San Angelo, Middle School Library

Katie Mauro, Sandy Hook Library

Suzanne Hurley, Middle Gate School

Alison Smith, 30 Taunton Hill Road, library para at Head O'Meadow School

Beth Murphy said with the removal of a para she will have to absorb 20 hours of work. She has volunteers but they don't do the work of her para.

Suzanne Hurley spoke about her duties and that the high school, middle school and Reed have paras. The elimination of these will impact students in the elementary schools. They have very few volunteers. This will be a devastating loss.

Andrew SanAngelo felt that this loss will hinder the library program. It's impossible to add 20 hours and a program for these teachers. He asked to reinstate the paras.

Alison Smith said one person alone cannot manage a library. It will break the specialists.

Julie Morey, 17 Saddle Ridge Road, is a former library volunteer and para at Middle Gate School and is now a library clerk at the middle school. She spoke about the importance of additional help in libraries.

Jessica Galterio, 8 Surrey Trail, was concerned about cutting paras from the libraries. She volunteers in the Middle Gate School library and asked to reconsider this decision.

Motion: Mr. Vouros moved to adjourn. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 6 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Donald Ramsey  
Secretary