

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

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting held on January 30, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers 3 Primrose Street.

A. Plante, Chair	C. Melillo
J. Vouros, Vice Chair	A. Uberti
D. Ramsey, Secretary	T. Vadas
T. Higgins	16 Staff
S. Tomai	1 Public
C. Gilson	1 Press
D. Linnetz	

Mrs. Plante called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 2 – Public Hearing on the 2024-2025 Budget - none

Item 3 – Budget Discussion and Adoption

Mrs. Tomai requested an adjustment for the Head O'Meadow roof to install solar panels and we need to spend 5% of the amount in the first year. She doesn't want us to lose the Eversource grant.

Mrs. Vadas said the solar panels will happen but we have to address the roof repair first but she doesn't have the details on that grant.

Mr. Vouros said in speaking with Fred Hurley if we act on it and don't get the product we've put it in motion and met the deadline.

Mrs. Vadas would find out more information.

Mr. Ramsey had inquired about having a full-time position for Project Adventure at the middle school.

Mr. Ross thought about that and was thinking about having a dean who had multiple responsibilities. Having someone dedicated to handling behavior issues would allow he and Assistant Principal Walsh to be in the classrooms. Regarding Project Adventure and speaking to our staff member his concern is the high elements and student safety. Having the dean help with students behaviors and also be part of Project Adventure would be very powerful. Looking at attendance and having someone looking at data and engaging families to collaborate in promoting attendance would go a long way also.

Mr. Higgins asked about behavior interventions in the middle school and who has been engaged in them.

Mr. Ross stated that the counselors provide the interventions. We have leadership and cluster meetings where we identify students. From there the counselors will be the case manager and we would move to a tier two intervention and find out why the student has these behaviors. We would review in six weeks to see how they are doing. Sometimes we move them to tier three and work with teachers on what they are seeing. We engage the families also.

Mr. Higgins asked what the potential explanations were for the increase in major incidents and why he believe the addition of a dean of students will address the causes.

Mr. Ross believed another person engaged with those students would make a big difference.

Mrs. Uberti clarified that the counselors don't get involved in discipline. Interventions are conducted by counselors regarding things like work production or self-esteem.  
Mrs. Vadas said the dean position salary is \$72,510.

Mr. Higgins asked what he would do if the Board asked him to reallocate items from his budget to allow for this position.

Mr. Ross said there are a couple of ways to look at adding a staff position but he didn't think he could do that as he would have to look at some items to reduce.

Mr. Vouros thought the dean could also do the high elements in Project Adventure. A good compromise is to find someone who can do both and asked how much the para was paid. That amount is \$21,654.

Mr. Vouros proposed adding a dean of students at the high school.

Dr. Longobuco said when we reduced an assistant principal position it greatly increased the work of the remaining two. There are over 172 letters being sent to parents regarding their child being absent for ten days. The assistant principals call down each student because they are losing credit which leads to not graduating. The dean will take care of these issues and also be involved in low level discipline.

Mrs. Vadas said the salary cost is \$73,853 for that position.

Mr. Higgins asked if she is able to fill that position by reallocating existing resources.

Dr. Longobucco would not be able to do that. Her budget is lean but necessary.

Mr. Higgins asked if she's done benchmarking of her staffing compared to the number of students and how the staff cross functions.

Dr. Longobucco noted that she has a higher percentage of support people than surrounding districts. They are busy with have heavy caseloads and having them is critical to our school's success. Mr. Higgins gave some comparisons between Newtown and Cheshire.

Mr. Melillo said it was hard to compare district to district. We have a higher security guard cost. Regarding central office administrators, we have those on the academic side, security, human resources, health, and special education. We are focusing on academics to ensure we get the best from our students. We spend a lot of time on attendance and students having lower level behaviors. We are looking at better outcomes from students and having a dean of students allows the administration to observe in the classrooms.

Mr. Higgins agrees with this position and was just calling attention to the overall staffing compared to other district and how we allocate resources to put people where they should be.

Mr. Ramsey said absenteeism is about a student who doesn't feel connected and asked how the high school culture was overall.

Dr. Longobucco said we have a very good environment at the high and is very welcoming. High school is hard for some students but there are a lot of other issues that cause students to not come to school.

Mr. Ramsey asked if this position would improve the school culture and free up here and the assistant principals.

Dr. Longobucco said it needs someone who can build relationships. Some students don't have an adult to go to at home.

Mrs. Tomai considered increasing the paras in the elementary school libraries from 20 to 27 hours.

Mr. Napolitano responded noting they need a lot of support in the libraries and he would like that increase.

Mrs. Vadas said the total about to increase to 27 hours if \$5,433.

Mr. Gilson spoke about the compensation for security staff and would support an adjustment for our resource officers to put them in line with other districts.

Mrs. Vadas spoke about increasing the high school rates and there is also a lead person at the high school and suggested the following increases:

- increases at the high school for unarmed guards to \$24.50 and armed guards at the high school to \$27.50 and the lead guard at the high school to \$28.75
- unarmed guards to \$24.00
- armed guards to \$27.00

We have over \$14,000 set aside so the increase would be \$49,784.

The option with a lesser increase at about a 50-cent difference for approximately \$37,000.

Mr. Vouros said there has been talk of needing positions like counselors, social workers, interventionists etc. and asked someone to address what the elementary schools to see what positions would look like that could be shared.

Mr. Melillo spoke about the BCBA in Hawley to help us address regular education. Teachers are not trained on certain classroom behaviors. This person is allowing students to be in the classrooms providing strategies to teachers, paras, and counselors to deal with these students. There is one person between the three buildings.

Mr. Higgins asked the difference between a behavior intervention coach and BCBA.. Chris Geissler spoke about his experience with behavior intervention which is in each elementary school. The BCBA has a greater understanding of behaviors and how to address them.

Mrs. Uberti said the BCBA does not work with the students. The behavior interventionist is a para. The BCBA works with teachers to implement a plan to further instruct our behavior interventionists and how to monitor the plan. That person would move around and provide her expertise.

Mr. Higgins asked if the need would be satisfied by the second BCBA.

Mr. Moretti was comfortable with two between the four buildings.

Mrs. Vadas noted the cost for one BCBA was \$75,000.

Mr. Vouros asked if we were to add another BCBA immediately if funds would have to be transferred to pay for the position.

Mrs. Vadas said that was a possibility but we will have also to add it to next year's budget.

Mr. Gilson asked if it would be a benefit to have a dedicated data analytics person to help understand our data or if we can invest in staff training on how to analyze data.

Mr. Melillo stated that we invested in the eduClimber program to pull data to help drive instruction and last year we started to upload that data. He had not considered having an analytics position.

Mr. Ramsey asked if eduClimber had capabilities we weren't using.

Mrs. Uberti reported that the capabilities are endless. eduClimber takes our data and changes it into easy visualizations and has the capability for us to create dashboards. She doesn't believe we need a data position. It's all generated by automatic uploads when students test and all PowerSchool data uploads into eduClimber. Beth Anne Krupa is our Database Administrator in the tech department and helps with any issues we have. The system is easy to use and we track our interventions also. She is very knowledgeable about databases.

Mr. Higgins asked if there was the capability to utilize data for informed decision making and secondly, it comes down to what the questions are we want to have answered and are the questions being asked.

Mrs. Linnetz referred to the facilities study and asked if we feel we have enough contingency to manage those items if they need immediate action.

Mr. Melillo said we have enough in contingency to bandaid the high school roof until the capital improvement plan comes through for that. The middle school boiler is in progress right now but there are discussions about warranty and to see if any of it is covered by our insurance. John Barlow has been very attentive to building projects and feels the money in the budget will take care of things until the projects come to light on the town side.

Mrs. Plante spoke about the adjustment for the part-time athletic trainer at the high school for \$29,428.

Mrs. Tomai asked the Board to consider adding \$25,000 for the continuing education summer school program to be sure we aren't turning anyone away.

Mrs. Vadas referred to the possible restoration of the \$200,000 in the new allowance account this year for para positions and wanted to be sure the Board understood what it does to the budget. She thinks they are valuable positions but isn't sure we will fill them.

Mr. Higgins felt if we don't fill positions by December we can discuss what to do with it.

MOTION: Mr. Vouros moved to adopt the Superintendent's recommended budget for \$89,318,042. Mrs. Linnetz seconded.

MOTION: Mr. Vouros moved to reduce the budget by \$15,707 based on the technical adjustments provided our Director of Business. Mrs. Linnetz seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Mrs. Vadas spoke about the technical adjustments and the Board of Education adjustments.

MOTION: Mr. Gilson moved to adjust the budget by \$508,714 to reflect the adjustments as discussed. Mrs. Tomai seconded.

Mr. Higgins stated that he would like to see us make this budget neutral and adjust it in a logical way. In addition to the \$200,000, we have \$450,000 in the budget for capital improvements and the Town has historically paid for these things.

MOTION: Mr. Higgins moved to amend the motion to make the impact budget neutral and reduce spending by \$508,000. Mrs. Tomai seconded.

Mrs. Vadas said the budgets are built from the ground up and are need based.

Mr. Higgins added that we don't have quantitative analysis around where we are now with students and staffing. If we did that across the entirety of the budget we would hit the needs and wants.

Mr. Melillo said there's an assumption we took last year's number and adjusted it. He had tough conversations with principals and directors around class sizes and student to teacher ratios. We made a conscious effort to keep class sizes low because of the behaviors and student needs. They have their needs but they also have some wants. To say you want to add half a million dollars to the budget but I have to cut a half a million dollars, I will pose the question to my leadership and ask what they want or need. I think they would come back to you and say they'd rather keep the \$500,000 in the original budget and not add the adjustments.

Mr. Higgins said we didn't look at data in this process and make comparisons. We should be ready to reallocate resources and ask about what is needed.

Mr. Ramsey said Mr. Higgins brought up a lot of good points but many are retroactive which is counterproductive. The principals came to us with a budget that was originally sound. For them to go back now and try to reduce other areas is we were presupposing the idea they weren't entirely thorough in preparing it and he is not willing to accept that as a premise. We could take his suggestions for the next budget round. He would not vote for this amendment.

Mr. Vouros said you have to maintain and enhance. To say to the principals that they prepared a budget for us but we want you to cut \$500,000 is saying they weren't originally telling us the truth. It would not be easy for them to find this money but they may have to do it because it depends what the Legislative Council wants us to do. He was not in agreement with the amendment.

Mr. Higgins stated that nothing about the amendment suggests the principals have to make any of those cuts. The issue is how you allocate resources. He is trying to make the point you have to start the budget process and look at where we want to invest. If it's the same year after year and you allocate the same, it's just doing the same thing again and again. He is encouraging this as a planning process that leads to bigger investments in our schools.

Mr. Higgins withdrew the motion.

Mrs. Plante asked for a vote on the motion to amend the budget by a total amount of \$508,714. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mrs. Tomai moved to adopt the Superintendent's budget as modified by the technical adjustments and further adjustments totaling \$508,714. Mr. Gilson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

The budget was adopted in the amount of \$89,826,756 for a 5.59% increase.

MOTION: Mr. Vouros moved that the Board of Education direct the business office to prepare the final budget and authorize the Director of Business to make any technical and arithmetical changes. Mr. Ramsey seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 4 – Public Participation - None

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

Item 5 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Donald Ramsey  
Secretary

		Cumulative Adjustment	Percent of Change	Total Budget Balance	Percent Change	Budget Increase
<b>2023-24 Current Approved BOE Budget</b>	<b>85,069,651</b>					
<b>2024-25 Superintendent's Request</b>	<b>89,318,042</b>	<b>4,248,391</b>			4.99%	
<b><i>Technical Adjustments</i></b>						
1 Pension (defined benefit)	(43,097)	(43,097)	-0.05%	89,274,945	4.94%	4,205,294
2 Unemployment	10,000	(33,097)	-0.04%	89,284,945	4.96%	4,215,294
3 Gasoline (Budget \$3.45 vs. contract \$2.58 3,000 Gallons)	(2,610)	(35,707)	-0.04%	89,282,335	4.95%	4,212,684
4 Tech Contracted Services (object code 500)	(10,000)	(45,707)	-0.05%	89,272,335	4.94%	4,202,684
5 Tech Extra Work (object code 100)	10,000	(35,707)	-0.04%	89,282,335	4.95%	4,212,684
6 Teen Talk Counselor - NHS (partially grant funded)	20,000	(15,707)	-0.02%	89,302,335	4.98%	4,232,684
<b>2024-25 SUPERINTENDENT'S REQUESTED OPERATIONAL PLAN</b>	<b>(15,707)</b>			<b>89,302,335</b>	<b>4.98%</b>	<b>4,232,684</b>
Total Adjustments		(15,707)				
Percent Adjustment			-0.02%			
<b>Requested Superintendent's Operational Plan</b>				<b>89,302,335</b>		
<b>Requested Budget % Increase</b>					<b>4.98%</b>	
<b>Requested Budget \$ Increase</b>						<b>4,232,684</b>