

**Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, October 2, 2012, at 7:30 p.m. in the board room at 3 Primrose Street.

D. Leidlein, Chair	J. Robinson
L. Roche, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
C. McCubbin, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
R. Gaines	3 Staff
W. Hart (absent)	50 Public
K. Alexander	2 Press
J. Vouros (absent)	

Mrs. Leidlein called the meeting to order at 7:38 p.m.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to add a possible vote on the executive session item. Mrs. Roche seconded. Vote: 5 ayes

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to add the approval of the CIP Subcommittee meeting minutes from September 5, 2012 to Old Business. Mr. McCubbin seconded. Vote: 5 ayes

Item 1 – Consent Agenda

Mr. Alexander asked to move the personnel items to the next meeting under executive session to be discussed.

MOTION: Mr. Alexander moved that the Board of Education approve the donation to Newtown Middle School. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 5 ayes

Mrs. Leidlein said this was an anonymous donation of \$10,000 to help fund the 8th grade trip to Washington, D.C.

Mrs. Leidlein stated that at a recent meeting she asked for information regarding elementary schools to see if we are using our facilities for the greatest benefit of our district. This was just a request for information and they are in the early stages of investigation. Since 2006 we saw a decline in the K-4 population. We have a responsibility to investigate this. This has caused some uncertainty in the district but there has been no decision. The only decision is whether we will hire a consultant to look at how we are using our facilities. A lot more information and public input is needed. She wants the parents to feel they have a voice.

Item 2 – Public Participation

Joe Borst, 10 Beechwood Drive, thanked the Board and administration for their quick resolve regarding the students going to the Children's Adventure Center. He noticed there were two buses dropping the students off. One was from Hawley and the other was an MTM van. He spoke about taking the bus with 21 students and using a smaller bus for them.

Karen Visca, 30 Mile Hill South Road, spoke about closing Head O'Meadow and questioned having enough room in the other schools.

Mrs. Leidlein responded that we would get answers as part of our investigation.

Kurt Hazard, 10 Arthur's Court asked why Head O'Meadow was chosen. If there has been a steady decline in enrollment we should look into the reasons for the decline.

Mrs. Leidlein said Head O'Meadow School is the smallest and has the fewest number of classrooms. It could easily be reopened if necessary because it is ADA compliant. The town

would decide what to do with the building. Pat Llodra asked the Board of Selectman to come to one of our future meetings to have a more district-wide discussion on this.

Lynn Marino, 26 Bentagrass Lane, said there have been several consultants in the past. Schools were explored in the enrollment reports.

Mrs. Leidlein said the ad hoc facilities committee said to close Reed. She brought up the elementary schools because of the reduced enrollment.

Michele Hankin, 16 Greenleaf Farms Road, wants the Board to protect the educational quality and environment in Newtown. There is no proof it is necessary to close a school. Besides the loss of flexibility of space and large class sizes we would lose talented staff. The report should include the quality of the inside of the Head O'Meadow and Reed which have good air quality, new HVAC systems and a good learning environment. All schools should be ADA compliant. Parents should be involved in the decision.

Carla Varzetti, Beaver Dam Road, said the real problem could be salaries or reposturing for the budget. Poll the staff to see how the school could be run better to save time, money and resources. Class size is a concern.

Kathy Osterman, 6 Jangling Plain, asked if we close a school where will those funds be used. She was concerned where the money would go.

Dawn Graves, 31 Pleasant Hill, commended them on hiring a consultant. Parents need to understand the criteria for closing a school and moving grade levels to other schools. Will the process be made public?

Mrs. Leidlein said it would and that Dr. Robinson would share information.

Sally Martinelli, 11 Ridge Road, asked about redistricting. If full day kindergarten is reinstated would we have to close?

Mrs. Leidlein said we would get that information through this process.

Laura Terry, 64 Robin Hill Road, wants to better understand the timing of the study. Could it possibly be closed in September?

Mrs. Leidlein didn't know how long the process would take.

Julia Conlin, Old Castle Drive, asked if there were consultants in mind.

Mrs. Leidlein stated Dr. Robinson was researching that.

Amber Mason, 29 Taunton Ridge, was frustrated in not having a timeline. We have to plan for fundraising for the school.

Joanna Rosen, 60 Sugar Lane, said information is being disseminated poorly through social networking. Regarding a consultant we need to look at all information involving closing a school. A town meeting would be better suited for this issue.

Robert Kriauciunas, 5 Daniels Hill Road, said his daughter started kindergarten at Hawley School. Her day care is out of district and she is privately bused. He asked why there was an exception to the rule for the Children's Adventure Center.

Michelle Assante, 16 Wendover Road, heard about this at the August meeting. A committee was suggested at that time. She's pleased to have a consultant. Doesn't think the savings will be leveraged by the Board of Education. We had a \$1.3M surplus and none came to education.

Item 3 – Reports

Chair Report: Mrs. Leidlein reported that Mrs. Llodra sent her a letter stating that the Board of Selectman want to have a joint discussion regarding the town facilities in November or December. She received a communication from Jeff Capeci. They endorsed a joint meeting with the Board of Selectman, Legislative Council, Board of Finance and Board of Education regarding the budget season. October 17 and November 7 are possible dates. The Board agreed.

Mrs. Leidlein organized a meeting with All Star, Dr. Robinson, Mr. Bienkowski, Mrs. Maloney, Mae Schmidle and Joe Borst and discussed several topics on communications received from the community. They discussed communication, arrival times at Reed and St. Rose on tier 2, the transportation to the Children's Adventure Center and protocol for parents if children were not home when expected. All Star is working to improve communication. They will give parents a weeks notice before making routing changes. The are working to add more buses to Tier 2 and students can leave the buses earlier at Reed. All Star donated a van for the Children's Adventure Center at no cost to the district.

Mrs. Roche asked how we've been transporting to that location from Hawley for so many years. Dr. Robinson had not been aware of this arrangement.

Mrs. Leidlein said we need to look into this and follow correct procedures.

Mrs. Roche feels it has to be fair for everyone.

Item 4 – Old Business

Reed School Schedule:

Assistant Principal Jenn Sinal presented a report on the Reed schedule which was developed by a committee consisting of teachers, Laura Roche, John Vouros, Dr. Smith and herself. Part of developing the schedule was to get feedback from our PLC groups and teachers. See attached report.

Mrs. Roche asked how the media specialist position is different from last year.

Ms. Sinal said that person now has a fixed teaching schedule so we are looking for additional staff to support her.

Dr. Smith stated we have an EA in the media center who is not full time. There's a gap of about 6.5 hours per week and we are looking to possibly increase her time to help.

Mr. Gaines asked what challenge she would like to address the coming year.

Ms. Sinal said that would be ensuring that our faculty has the support they need, the professional development they need and to help them best structure the time they've been given. There is also the complexity of the locked part of our schedule.

Dr. Smith said that based on his work before coming here, the complexity of the teacher evaluation program is profound. There will be a great deal of learning that will come up over the course of this year regarding the Newtown professional growth plan. We need to help our colleagues to understand the program.

Mrs. Leidlein mentioned that this year's homeroom is much longer and asked what the difference was from last year to this year.

Dr. Smith said this new schedule has built homeroom time into the day with their cluster teachers. This has the potential for much greater learning and to build and amplify the connections between the teachers and students. The students also build connections with each other.

Is it imperative that the students be in their seats at 8:05 a.m.?

Dr. Smith said we'd like them there at 8:05 because they need a few minutes to settle in. We want to have them in homeroom as soon as they come in instead of holding them.

Mrs. Roche asked if teachers have been trained in the new reader's workshop program.

Ms. Sinal said we were working with the elementary teachers this year to share with our 5th grade teams. Some were trained over the summer.

Mrs. Roche asked if there were enough reading materials to support this program.

Ms. Sinal responded that we need to balance our fiction and non-fiction but needed more non-fiction texts.

School Facilities Study:

Dr. Robinson went back to the ad hoc facilities committee's process and options considered.

Our elementary enrollment currently is 1,657 students. She took Head O'Meadow School out of the classroom count which leaves 65 classes with the 3 remaining schools. That is 25.9 students per classroom without considering grade levels. Mr. Faiella met with each principal and updated the old school diagrams.

Mrs. Leidlein asked for copies for the Board.

Dr. Robinson said we have to look at the grade levels and where students live. She spoke to colleagues around the state. The average length of time for a study is 2 years. She also called NESDEC out of Massachusetts who sent a sample proposal. They recommended we put out an RFP. She asked the Board to consider doing that to get the best value for the price. There is a community value of neighborhood schools that has to be considered.

Mr. Alexander asked what our projected enrollment was for next year. In April the Board voted to accept the recommendation of the ad hoc facilities committee that recommended Reed to be closed. Mr. Alexander read the motion:

- *The committee recommends that the Board of Education commission an enrollment study in **2013**. The committee further recommends that when the budgeted* student enrollment is projected to be **1,500 or less** for the pre-kindergarten to fourth grade (**PK-4**) group, the Board of Education begin the process of closing a school; and*
- *It is further recommended that, subject to the outcome of a feasibility study at the time the school closing process is undertaken, Reed Intermediate School be closed.*

*enrollment used for District budget preparation (not actual enrollment)

He said the vote was unanimous. The numbers aren't 1,500 or less and he is not sure we need to redo the work that we just finished.

Mr. Gaines said we need fresh enrollment projections to make a better decision. The Chung data will be old by the time we do this study.

Mrs. Leidlein state that in reading these RFPs one of the services they provide is updating enrollment projections. It behooves us to start this process now so we will be ready in 2 years.

Mr. Alexander said we decided to start the process next year in April.

Mrs. Leidlein said she wasn't expecting our enrollment to decline as it has. It made sense that we are using our resources to the best utilization we can. She feels strongly that we owe it to the community to look at this.

Mr. Gaines said it took a great deal of time and energy to come up with the recommendation six months ago. The recommendation is it would take 18 to 20 months. We are jumping on this while we are struggling to find money for a student. Where will we find money for a study?

Dr. Robinson said there is no cost to put out an RFP.

Mrs. Leidlein asked the cost to update our projections by Dr. Chung.

Dr. Robinson said his cost would be \$10,000 to \$15,000 for only projections. She would like to have the Board consider someone less expensive.

Mrs. Leidlein felt it would help us move forward to have someone look at the whole picture.

Dr. Robinson said the consultant would set the timeline.

Mr. Gaines felt this discussion was out of sequence. We should set what the scope of the study would be.

Mrs. Roche asked if we could consider redistricting instead of closing a school.

Mr. Bienkowski said redistricting is a major task and would increase transportation costs.

Mrs. Leidlein read information from one of the sample RFPs which indicated the study would include projections, demographics, technology infrastructure, options for educational grouping, and focus groups with staff, parents and community members. They would prepare a plan with 3 options which would include the impact on children and families.

Mr. Gaines said for Newtown we want to have an enrollment study, facilities use, and a redistricting conversation. We need to spell out what we want as a Board.

Dr. Robinson stated we also need a transportation piece.

Mr. Alexander said the best process is to put this into our budget for next year. He would rather use the \$18,000 to help a single student at Sandy Hook School rather than use money that did not get budgeted.

Mr. Gaines said it would be good to put out an RFP to get an amount to put in the budget for next year.

Dr. Robinson said the year for the study would have to be stated in the budget. The RFP process is what you select for the time period. We would also need Board members on the committee.

Mr. Bienkowski said a simple RFP could be done in a month. The process could probably be done in 2 to 3 months. We could put a placeholder in the budget. There is not time to draft an RFP as we are in the middle of budget preparation.

Dr. Robinson feels we definitely want focus groups with parent and staff input and would request an enrollment study. She'd also want to run it by a legal expert. She could try to do a draft in a month, with the Board's forgiveness if she can't make that deadline.

Mrs. Leidlein asked her to share the other samples with the Board.

Item 3 – Reports (continued)

Superintendent's Report:

For the past 6 years the Newtown Rotary Club has provided 4th grade students with their own dictionary as part of their campaign to support young people and literacy around the world.

Last year 3rd grade students were given dictionaries through the Rotary also. That gave the district a savings of approximately \$3,257.

Parent group meetings are being scheduled to inform parents about the changes in the waiver approved for the state of Connecticut and what it means for their children. We hope that by the time the new assessment replacing the CMT/CAPT are in place that teachers and parents will be familiar with this change.

All of the bus drivers wore tee shirts on Monday saying "Be Nice on My Bus" to support the anti-bullying campaign.

A session on texting and driving entitled "Hang up and Drive" presented by Jacy Good will be held for parents and students October 4 at 7:00 p.m. and during the day for 10th and 11th grade students.

Current Budget Report:

Mr. Bienkowski reported on the current budget. See attached report. The 2012-2013 budget increase by major object code was \$384,367. We covered these increase with significant reductions in other areas of the budget. These decreases came as a result of our planning on how to handle certain aspects of the budget. There was a total of \$862,656 in budget decreases.

Item 4 – Old Business (continued)

Transportation Update was covered in Mrs. Leidlein's report. They will meet again in November and should see things steadily improving.

Mr. Alexander asked how long the early morning pickups would stay at those times.

Mrs. Leidlein said that is still being analyzed and will stay for the time being.

Mrs. Roche is waiting for them to give us a report with the actual times. Looking at the 3rd tier they are clearing 15 minutes later than last year.

Mr. Alexander asked if they are given timelines for answers.

Mrs. Leidlein said they are. The town hired a crossing guard for the high school and they are working on ways to move the buses into Reed faster.

Mrs. Roche said there was talk about opening up the access road by the fields at the high school.

Mrs. Leidlein spoke to Mrs. Llodra but she was not hopeful it would pass. Another option is a left turn signal at Trades Lane to allow more buses to get in sooner.

September 18, 2012 Minutes:

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to approve the minutes of September 18, 2012. Mr. Alexander seconded. Vote: 4 ayes, 1 abstained (Mr. McCubbin)

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to approve the CIP Subcommittee minutes of September 5, 2012. Mr. McCubbin seconded. Vote: 2 ayes

Item 5 – New Business

Dr. Robinson postponed discussing the budget goals and State waiver.

Early Retirement Package:

Mr. Bienkowski presented a theoretical model with a number of factors that come into play for early retirement for teachers. See attached information.

Mr. Alexander asked how soon we would have to determine this and when would we know who would take it.

Dr. Robinson said we should know by the end of January for budget purposes. She would be need to start the conversations with the union so we could make a decision by November.

Mr. Alexander wants to discuss this at the next meeting.

Item 6 – Public Participation

Michelle Assante, 16 Wendover Road, asked about the special education increase of \$300,000 and transportation savings of \$387,000 offset by expenses.

Mr. Bienkowski said out-of-district tuition costs were deducted from the \$800,000 transportation savings.

Mrs. Assante is concerned about closing a school and what's going to happen to Hawley.

Phil Carroll, Fieldstone Drive, said All Star buses only hold 6 more students than the old buses. The issue of getting to Reed and St. Rose late can be taken care of by having half go to each school and then switch rather than sit in line.

MOTION: Mr. Alexander moved to go into executive session regarding possible litigation and invited Dr. Robinson and Attorney Michelle Laubin. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 5 ayes

Item 7 – Executive Session

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to adjourn. Mrs. Roche seconded. Vote: 5 ayes

Item 8 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:21 a.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Cody McCubbin
Secretary