

**Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education special meeting on Monday, May 2, 2011 at 7:30 p.m. in the Reed Intermediate School library.

W. Hart, Chair	J. Robinson
D. Leidlein, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
A. Buzzi, Secretary (7:55 p.m.)	R. Bienkowski
D. Nanavaty	13 Staff
L. Bittman	9 Public
R. Gaines	3 Press
K. Alexander	

Mr. Hart called the meeting to order at 7:37p.m.

Item 1 – Public Participation

Kevin Fitzgerald, 24 Old Farm Hill Road, spoke as a citizen. He was disappointed in the voter turnout. There needs to be restraint in making cuts. The core function of the Board is to provide a quality education with the necessary number of teachers and education professionals. He is concerned about programs being cut.

Charles Hepp, 4 Winter Ridge Road, spoke about the low voter turnout which means the budget has to be cut. The Board's job is to allocate the money as you see fit but not from core education. His concern is about structural cuts mentioned by the Legislative Council.

Kinga Walsh, 21 Horseshoe Ridge Road, asked that there be consideration for the long term effect of reductions. We need to know how the cuts will affect the students. Go to Legislative Council if there has to be too many cuts and find a contingency plan.

Robin Fitzgerald, 24 Old Farm Hill Road, was disappointed that Board's budget was not rewarded with a massive voter turnout. She spoke about options to help reduce the budget if we are forced to choose education first. Those include cutting sports programs which should be separate like the marching band, closing our facilities after hours and on weekends, end the lunch program, end the transportation program unless by law, end litigation associated with services, and outsourcing the custodial services so we don't have to carry benefits.

Item 2 – Discussion and Possible Action on the 2011-2012 Budget Options

Mr. Hart asked Mr. Capeci to explain the Legislative Council resolution.

Mr. Capeci read the resolution from the minutes where Ms. Jacob proposed that the Board of Education decrease their budget by 70% and the Board of Selectman decrease theirs by 30%. The Council passed the resolution to allow the boards to deliberate on the \$1,066,259 reduction.

Mr. Hart asked if the Council would change our amount of \$746,000 if they didn't like some of our line items.

Mr. Capeci didn't believe that would happen. It would be the Board of Education's choice.

Mr. Hart was concerned about labeling it structural.

Mr. Capeci said he wouldn't be in favor of increasing the size of the cut based on the reductions the Board makes.

Mr. Hart said we need to base our budget on what was the least damaging. Our alternative is to not do anything tonight and wait until the Council comes forward. We owe it to the taxpayers to know where we will spend the budget. He doesn't want to see additional cuts by the Council.

Mr. Capeci said the vote was 10 to 2 so the Board budget was supported.

Mr. Nanavaty said the Council moved the \$1,066,000 reduction with 70% from the Board of Education and 30% from the Town. Collaboration between the Board of Education and the Town could have been achieved by a 50-50 split. He wants know if education is a priority. The Town has the ability to purchase bonds in advance and save funds to the Town and can also have a contingency fund. He was troubled by the automatic 70-30.

Mr. Capeci said education is a priority. The 70-30 is a guideline.

Mr. Nanavaty asked if there was any thought to taking something from our capital account.

Mr. Capeci said the Council was in agreement to not take from the fund balance.

Mr. Hart stated that many Council members spoke about not taking from the fund balance.

Mr. Nanavaty said if this Board picks an area to reduce and is not appreciated by the voters the budget will be defeated again. He was uncomfortable choosing areas to cut tonight.

Mr. Gaines asked why we should cut. Many people didn't vote so let's increase the budget and see what happens.

Mr. Capeci said there is only one direction to take it because it was voted down.

Mr. Hart said we have to modify the budget. Through the transfer process we can make changes during the year. We can modify our budget if we have to prior to the adoption.

Mr. Gaines said the wording of our motion could allow latitude to make changes to our areas given the Board of Selectman budget. We can agree on the proposed areas to allow them latitude to modify after speaking to Mrs. Llodra.

Mrs. Bittman said EAs are directly related to education. She asked to come up with either/or scenarios.

Mrs. Leidlein wanted the public to see where we are going. Mrs. Bittman agreed.

Mr. Buzzi proposed a resolution of intention which shows we considered reductions and when the process is complete we will bring those reductions back to the table.

Mr. Hart stated that we are required to provide school transportation by law.

Mr. Nanavaty said we should run the numbers dealing with transportation for the non-profit schools in the district. We are pinpointing private schools in our district and per

pupil expenditures to transport them. It might be worth giving them a stipend for the transportation.

MOTION: Mr. Buzzi moved the resolution of intention which stated that after reviewing the proposal in the document entitled Options for Budget Cuts for 2011-2012 as proposed by the Superintendent of Schools that the Board approve the reductions in the amount of \$837,000. Mr. Nanavaty seconded.

Dr. Robinson spoke about the reductions she recommended. We had an increase in special education costs estimated at \$115,000. With the number of expulsions the cost for homebound tutors increased. We estimate that the existing deficit is about \$121,000 for this year. We used \$716,000 as the amount to be implemented and have to find a savings of \$837,000.

Proposed cuts are \$30,000 for the Efficiency Study, \$48,000 for two behavioral therapists, \$60,000 for a 5% reduction in supplies, \$22,174 for new equipment, \$10,000 for furniture, \$95,000 for projects, and \$543,000 for 38.65 educational assistants. The projects reduced are the visitor bleachers at the high school, the swings at Sandy Hook School, the chimney at Hawley School and the Head O'Meadow restrooms. Regarding the educational assistant reductions, all proposed non-special education EAs will be leaving with only one kindergarten EA to be used in each elementary school. These reductions total \$808,147. We are down 99 students spread throughout the grades. It is not feasible to remove teachers. Other options for reductions are the social worker shared between Reed and the middle school for \$69,000, the Middle Gate grade 3 teacher for \$57,000, the Hawley School grade 1 teacher for \$57,000 and the high school social studies teacher for \$57,000.

Mrs. Bittman asked for an explanation regarding the EAs.

Dr. Robinson said the kindergarten EAs assist the teachers and do a lot of interventions in the classroom. We may have to look at two-hour lunch supervision because the EAs cover the cafeteria while the teachers have lunch. Specialists would probably work in the classroom.

Mrs. Leidlein cannot support such a drastic reduction in EAs. She looked at new positions or vacant positions not filled. She did not support the high school assistant principal and looked at areas where we could share services between elementary schools. Sandy Hook is coming close to meeting the enrollment at Middle Gate. Head O'Meadow has 170 fewer students than Sandy Hook. She asked if EAs could be shared between schools. We will have a vacant lead teacher position and thought some of those responsibilities could be shared. She agreed with eliminating the Middle Gate grade 3 grade position.

Dr. Robinson said the high school assistant principal position was not on the cut list because next year the freshman and junior classes will be the two biggest classes at the high school. We have had a number of severe discipline issues and it will save money by having another assistant principal. It is also important to get the administrators into the classroom. We have to be up to date in our evaluations.

Mr. Nanavaty said some things that have been said by various groups need to be addressed such as the closing a school. If we close a school it becomes the

responsibility of the Town. He disagreed with the point of view to decrease our budget because debt service is on the Town side. There needs to be more discussion between Mr. Hart and Mrs. Llodra to see how this reduction will be worked out between both groups.

Mrs. Llodra stated that the Board of Selectmen decided on a total of \$334,000 as reductions in the Town budget.

Mrs. Leidlein amended Mr. Buzzi's motion to add to the list of reductions the lead teacher at Middle Gate School at \$57,256, the high school assistant principal position for \$123,323, the high school social studies teacher for \$57,256, the remaining new equipment for \$11,000, the Middle Gate School grade 3 teacher for \$57,256 and reduce number of EAs to be eliminated by 17 for \$248,000. Mr. Alexander seconded.

Mr. Nanavaty said the reductions for the EAs is valid but disagrees with cutting the high school social studies teacher. We have an opportunity to add that teacher moving toward change in State regulations. The more high school teachers we add the more the assistant principal becomes necessary. We are seeing an increase in enrollment at the high school. He can support the lead teacher but we should look at maintenance.

Mr. Alexander made a friendly change to remove the high school social studies teacher from the list of reductions. Mrs. Leidlein accepted that and asked to decrease the number of EAs being reduced.

Mr. Buzzi said the resolution gives the voters a guideline. We should not consider cuts of the high school staff because that's where our population is expanding.

Vote: 2 ayes, 5 nays (Mr. Gaines, Mrs. Bittman, Mr. Nanavaty, Mr. Buzzi, Mr. Hart)

Mrs. Bittman asked for the class size at Middle Gate and Hawley if we take those positions out.

Dr. Robinson said there are 21 students in each class for grade 1 and third grade at Middle Gate School the class sizes are 23, 24 and 24.

Dr. Robinson said the shared social worker position was from IDEA funds. We would move a special education teacher into that position.

Mrs. Bittman was concerned about the wireless to support our strategic plan for \$8,000. She doesn't want to forget it.

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

Mr. Gaines proposed an amendment to remove the efficiency study and add \$30,000 back for the EAs. There was no second.

MOTION: Mr. Buzzi moved the following Resolution of Intention:

Resolved: After review of the proposed budget to date and after review of proposed reductions as set forth in the approved amended list to said budget it is hereby resolved that the Board of Education shall

consider the proposed reductions to the existing budget when a final budget is approved by the citizens.

Efficiency Study:	(\$30,000)	
2 Behavior Therapists	(\$48,000)	
Supplies	(\$60,000)	
Equipment	(\$33,000)	
Furniture	(\$10,000)	
Projects	(\$95,000)	
Social Worker	(\$69,000)	
MG grade 3 teacher	(\$57,000)	
Hawley grade 1 teacher	(\$57,000)	
EA's	(\$394,000)	
Total Reduction	(\$853,000)	(\$853,000)

Additional Information:

Additional budget needs since 3/8/11	\$121,000 (tuition & tutors)	
BOE Net Reduction	(\$732,000)	69%
Town Proposed Reduction	<u>(\$334,000)</u>	<u>31%</u>
Recommended LC Amount	(\$1,066,000)	100%

David seconded.

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

MOTION: Mr. Alexander moved to adjourn. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 3 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Andrew Buzzi, Jr.
Secretary