

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

Minutes of the Board of Education virtual meeting held January 28, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.

M. Ku, Chair	L. Rodrigue
D. Delia, Vice Chair	A. Uberti
D. Cruson, Secretary	T. Vadas
D. Leidlein	12 Staff
J. Vouros	2 Press
R. Harriman-Stites	Public by phone
D. Zukowski	

Mrs. Ku called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. and stated it was being recorded and live streamed.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 2 – Public Hearing on the 2021-2022 Budget

There were no public comments.

Item 3 – Discussion and Possible Action to suspend the Board’s Policies and regulations Pursuant to Policy 9314

Mrs. Ku explained the two motions.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education suspend the Board’s policies and regulations pursuant to policy 9314. The policy to be suspended is 3323. The suspension shall be for the specified purpose of opting into the state’s waiver that allows for the extension of the Board’s food service contract for one additional year. Such suspension shall only be for the meeting held on January 28, 2021. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Ku said this motion is about our Policy 9314 and if the Board is willing to suspend this policy specifically for extending the food service contract.

Motion passes unanimously.

Item 4 – Discussion and Possible Action on Food Services Contract

Mrs. Vadas said the USDA Food and Nutrition service granted all states a one-year bid waiver on our food service contract. This is our fifth year and we would be obligated to do an RFP. With so many unknowns in next year’s budget she would like to extend their contract as they are familiar with the district and community. Changing companies would not be advantageous.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that

WHEREAS, the Board’s current contract for food services has been amended to provide the maximum allowed, four one-year extensions (7 CFR § 210.16 - Food Service Management Companies) and will expire on June 30, 2021;

WHEREAS, due to COVID, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service has provided a waiver to allow for the use the emergency noncompetitive proposal procurement method to negotiate a new one-year Food Service Management Company contract for FY 2021-2022 (FNS Document COVID-19: Child Nutrition Response # 71);

WHEREAS, the State of Connecticut has elected to use the waiver provided by USDA Food and Nutrition Service;

WHEREAS, due to COVID, food vendor walk-throughs for the RFP process would be challenging under the current conditions;

WHEREAS, Newtown Public Schools Business Director has recommended extending the contract with the Board's current Food Service Management Company;

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board authorize the Superintendent or her designee to notify the state of the intent to use the waiver allowing for a one year extension on the current food service contract with Whitsons New England, Inc.;

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Superintendent or her designee be authorized to negotiate a potential one-year extension of the Food Service Management Company contract for Board review and approval.

Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Ku said we are not approving the extension at this point, just directing the Superintendent to negotiate this extension.

Mr. Delia was in support of this motion and wanted to be sure we aren't approving the contract but the negotiation of the contract which will come to us for approval.

Mrs. Vadas said we are a few weeks behind and considering it's a four to five month process we would have to get started on the RFP right away. This would also give Whitsons time to put a budget together for next year.

Motion passes unanimously.

Item 5 – Budget Discussion

Dr. Rodrigue thanked her leadership team and central office staff in putting this budget together which reflects a balance between typical requests and annual obligations. We have a new middle school schedule with some new courses. We moved our funding for social workers and school psychologists, the addition of behavior interventionists, reading and math supports, additional special education teachers and the Diversity and Equity Compliance Officer. We continue to include curriculum projects and new textbooks and staff development related to next generation science, a new K-5 math program, and diversity. These are the hallmarks of next year's budget. There are still a few unknowns but we will have further support from the NOVO and BOCA grants. Yesterday we received news the ESSER funds will be higher than double than received before. She thanked the Board for their support.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites asked about the equity audit on the curriculum and the new person coming in to work with the district in that area and if we can extend their contract. There is a lot of desire to do this audit.

Dr. Rodrigue has reached out to other districts about the potential cost for the audit. Re Center would be interested in staying on another year and could help with the curriculum to work with Mrs. Uberti and Dr. Purcaro. We are currently paying \$35,000 and she assumes some of the work would be on curriculum if we extend it another year.

Mrs. Uberti said there is some work already going on but you have to create a plan. The teachers are also asking for training in handling difficult situations especially regarding what is happening in the country. The equity audit should be in our long range plan. She agrees with continuing the relationship with Re Center. We are in the process of developing a student advisory council for students in grades 8 through 12. This will be a facilitated conversation by those involved in delivering the curriculum.

Mr. Vouros asked for an update to the conversation we had regarding the new middle school schedule in the areas of project challenge, project adventure, and the intended courses that are being designed for the students so we know what that schedule is going to look like and what direction it's going in and if it requires any more money.

Mrs. Uberti said there is no additional funding needed in the budget. The time students will be engaged in project challenge is being addressed. Those students will attend on a fixed day schedule and will miss some schedules on a rotating basis like at Reed. Regarding the new courses, she doesn't anticipate any additional expenditure. We don't know what the courses will be yet and will do a student survey to get a student voice. We want to fill a need and offer what the students want to take.

Mr. Vouros wants to make sure project adventure at the middle school will be the same model as at Reed where it will stand alone in the schedule.

Ms. Zukowski asked that regarding summer school and the need for students to participate if more funds will be needed for it to run.

Mrs. Uberti spoke to Mr. Einhorn and Dr. Longobucco about this. It's hard to know what will be needed for those students. Last year it didn't impact the continuing education budget when we knew what we needed for students who needed to be supported over the summer. Most students who are failing are not doing the work. We connected them with an adult who checked in with them to help organize their work. We will do the same this year.

Mrs. Ku asked if there was a cost for students who need credit recovery.

Mrs. Uberti said there was a cost for students.

Ms. Zukowski asked if it was possible to get an estimate of how much she paid for certified or non-certified staff for Tuesday night. She noted also that the total amount we pay on special education is in the budget plus the out-of-district tuition we receive.

Mrs. Vadas stated that was an expenditure offset and included in the transition program.

Dr. Rodrigue said it was there to support the program.

Ms. Zukowski said it would be interesting to know what that offset was in special education. On page 128 the contingency line still shows the \$100,000. We talked about the five-year average and asked if that should be hiked up to the five-year average or take off the part of that bullet. She wants the report to be stricken from page 7 with everything we are dealing with.

Mr. Cruson noted we voted on the bullet on page 7 before the budget was made. We don't need to amend it to strike a part of one of those bullets. There is a valid discussion on amending the budget to meet that goal.

Mrs. Ku said we should be fully funding that special education line. The motion when we added that to our goals was a good one.

Ms. Zukowski state we could plan on putting in some surplus at the end of the year into the non-lapsing account over and above the \$100,000.

Mr. Delia was very alarmed with students not being engaged virtually. What will be our need next year to help students catch up?

Dr. Longobucco said we are adequately staffed in this area. We are not doing home visits so it's hard to connect with many of the students. It's not a staffing issue. Now with more students back it's starting to fix itself.

Mr. Delia asked if we were anticipating more of a need at the student level. A lot are not engaged and we will need more counselors or social works when they return to school.

Dr. Longobucco stated we won't need more than we have now.

Mr. Delia referred to enrollment being a concern because we are using the study before Covid happened which shows significant increase in certain populations and what would happen if we hire teachers and the enrollment doesn't go up.

Dr. Rodrigue has looked at Prowda's predictions for this year which were pretty much right on target. This kind of things happens even without Covid. If it's a wash in a certain grade level or plus or minus in another grade we will utilize a staff member in another area. We see that happening here. We added a plus one at Hawley, Sandy Hook, and Head O'Meadow. Middle Gate was plus one and minus so it was a wash. We looked at problem areas by grade and go through this every year. We look at the predictions but it was much harder this year because we had students pulled out of school for a year. With the challenges this year we also have the retirement package and attrition. We don't do scheduling until after the budget is in place. She feels these figures are accurate in a year of uncertainty. The biggest concern she has is the mobility which will be a factor but feels confident we did our due diligence with the predictions.

Mr. Delia asked the timing of hiring if the Board approves these new hires.

Dr. Rodrigue said we wait until the budget is approved to fill new positions.

Ms. Zukowski agreed with Mr. Delia but felt more comfortable after receiving information from a real estate agent. If you look from last December to this past December we are running 150 single family houses higher in pending sales. She is more confident we will have more students than we anticipate.

Mrs. Ku feels the Prowda projections are more accurate.

Dr. Rodrigue said that in discussions with area superintendents Prowda has been extremely accurate.

Mr. Moretti noted that he is supposed to add a fourth kindergarten section at Hawley. By the time the budget passes and if we are significantly lower than the projections he will notify Dr. Rodrigue and then monitor it. That position may be needed at another school if not in his.

Mr. Delia said his concerns are not just at the elementary level. They also predicted high school would go down. He wants to make sure we are best prepared to serve every student in all grades.

Mrs. Leidlein said it was important to make data-driven decisions. There have been teachers hired and moved within their grade level. If there is a need in an area it is normally offset by a need in another area. She trusted the data regarding staffing and the dollar amounts. We need to take a lot of things into consideration like reassignments and moving. She was comfortable with the process.

Ms. Zukowski asked if we don't have as many in the elementary schools and find we are short a teacher in the high school if we would be able to use that money to hire for the high school.

Mrs. Vadas said we could hire for any school with those funds.

Mr. Delia said when he joined the Board they chose not to use the paid for company predictions and use our own internal numbers so he is skeptical of this report.

Mrs. Vadas said at that time we used Milone and MacBroom which was an outdated study. We had the Prowda study the following year.

Dr. Longobucco appreciates Mr. Delia's and Ms. Zukowski's concerns but a six student change is different in the high school from an elementary school. It's much easier at the high school. The numbers are not that concerning for her at the high school.

Mr. Delia asked Mr. Gerbert the cost of painting a classroom and how he would prioritize doing that job.

Mr. Gerbert said the principals give us requests but a lot of it comes down to custodians recognizing needs through inspections and taking feedback.

Mr. Delia asked for the cost by the next meeting.

Item 6 – Public Participation

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to adjourn. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 7 – Adjournment


The meeting adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Daniel J. Cruson, Jr.
Secretary

**NEWTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BUSINESS OFFICE**

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 27, 2021
TO: Newtown Board of Education, Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Superintendent
FROM: Tanja Vadas, Director of Business & Finance 
SUBJECT: Food Service Waiver

Under normal operating conditions, our food service contract would require going out to bid after five years. Due to the many interruptions caused by the pandemic, the USDA Food and Nutrition service has given districts in Connecticut the option to apply for a one year waiver of this regulation. The State of Connecticut was approved for this waiver, giving Newtown the opportunity to extend our existing contract with Whitson's for one more year.

There are a number of reasons that I would recommend extending our contract with Whitson's for an additional year.

- We are very pleased with the level of service that Whitson's has proved, especially through the pandemic. They have developed cost mitigation strategies by providing their services to other community members.
- Whitson's has been in place for five years and they are very familiar with our operation. If we were to assign a new food service management company, it would take time for them to become familiar with our operations which would include a possible walk-through. Also, not knowing how the pandemic will play forward, I feel this would place more disruptions during these times of uncertainty.
- This is an extension of the original contract which was originally put forth as a "breakeven" guarantee. There will be no purchasing of goods or services as it is a self-funded activity that resides outside of the general fund.

If agreed to this waiver, a renewal/amendment to the contract will be forthcoming. The State is working through this and will be sending the renewal/amendment process out sometime in March/April. At that time, we will review the guarantee and the financial budgets submitted by Whitson's.

Thank you for assistance on moving this forward,