

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

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting held on January 31, 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	30 Staff
J. Kuzma	2 Public
J. Larkin (absent)	
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 – Public Hearing on the 2023-2024 Budget

Trent Harrison, 59 Platts Hill Road and President of the NFT, asked for consideration to put the necessary funds of approximately \$272,000 back into the budget to keep the paras in their current staffing levels. To protect and enhance the instructional core we need to keep staff in place. Paras are necessary to cover classes and other areas. If we reduce paras, it will stress the system and not be beneficial. Do what is best for students. Let the people of Newtown decide if the budget meets the needs of the students.

Linda Biscoe, 47 Old Hawleyville Road, is a para at Hawley School. We work with students and do small group instruction which includes special education students. Please do not eliminate any of our positions.

Item 3 – Budget Discussion and Adoption

Mrs. Vadas presented the technical adjustments to the budget which include liability insurance for \$9,616, workers comp for \$20,915, food service equipment repairs for \$25,000, and music stands and science and computer lab tables at the middle school for \$8,000, for a total of \$56,531.

MOTION: Mrs. Plante moved that the Board of Education adopt the Superintendent's recommended budget for \$85,989,669. Mrs. Kuzma seconded.

MOTION: Mrs. Plante moved to amend the motion to reduce the Superintendent's budget by \$56,531 based on the technical adjustments provided by the Director of Business. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Cruson moved to amend the motion to add \$57,836 to restore the four library paraeducator positions. Mr. Vouros seconded.

Mr. Cruson heard a lot why paras are important to schools. The two big things to keep in mind are that we are asking the media specialists to take on a new task with enrichment activities, which is illogical because of the additional duties they will have without their paras. In addition, the State is telling us to focus on reading. To lose services from the library in a year when we need to focus on reading comprehension and fluency also seems illogical.

Mr. Vouros agreed with Mr. Cruson. Were this to happen and the enrichment program is moved to the library media specialists, in order to keep the fidelity of that program we need to maintain the staff in that library. Because the enrichment model is going into the library, it enhances the Project Challenge program because the two teachers will be moving it to the libraries with the paras in place which is a win-win for the elementary schools.

Mr. Ramsey said the Superintendent's budget was extremely well done. He read the letters regarding the paras and visited Sandy Hook School's library. Paras are on the front line interacting with students and they are an important assistant in the class. He supports Mr. Cruson and Mr. Vouros in this decision.

Mrs. Plante also agrees about the budget document and with her colleagues regarding the paras. Having them is an extremely high value for our students.

Mrs. Kuzma knows the special education department is understaffed and overworked. If there happens to be an immediate need in a school would it be possible for a para to go to another school to help for a period of time.

Mr. Melillo didn't think any para would refuse helping where needed.

Mrs. Kuzma questioned the enrichment piece responsibility for the teachers.

Mrs. Uberti said it's for an hour. She planned to start meeting with the current Project Challenge teacher regarding her schedule and meet with the library media specialists to see what time is realistic.

Ms. Zukowski said the enrichment is not just for Project Challenge students, but for others that need enrichment. It's an important program to continue and agrees it's not the right time to pull people they rely on.

Amendment passes unanimously.

Mr. Vouros referred to the \$200,000 for all of the other para positions and questioned the math specialists will be able to take over the duties of MTSS. What does that look like on a daily basis and how much will the caseload increase taking over the para duties.

Mrs. Uberti said MTSS is fluid regarding how many are in each school. In two years we added a full time certified person for each elementary school. We also added a math interventionist in each elementary school.

Mr. Vouros said it was important if these paras are not reinstated that we keep a very close eye on what's going on in those classrooms and let us know if they need assistance.

Mr. Cruson thanked Mr. Melillo for his time and energy preparing this budget.

Mrs. Kuzma asked for clarification on the four library para positions and if there were other positions for them.

Mr. Melillo said we have almost \$800,000 in grants ending this year, we had \$1M in contractual increases, and the costs around special education are rising. All of those combined costs would give us a budget of almost 7%. The first thing he thought about was how to keep our programs and our people. He recognizes you all have families and rely on a paycheck. He wanted to ensure he had a landing spot for everyone. Almost \$1.75M was cut but we still maintained positions. It's a budget that keeps people here if they want to be here. There is a process in place going to the Board of Finance and Legislative Council and then to the referendum.

These decisions were not about not valuing the work that you do. Paras are the backbone of the district and you perform above and beyond and he wanted to be sure you had a position here.

Ms. Zukowski shared five concerns about this budget. The first is that we have \$1.1M in addressing the repercussions of Covid and asked if there is a landing place for some of the 14 people.

Mr. Melillo was not sure how long the recovery from the pandemic would take but we will continue to monitor our students. There is no position necessary if we have met our goal. If we are at a point where students need to be, we will see if we can find spots over time. We have less than a handful of retirees so far.

Ms. Zukowski said the second was a concern about ensuring we can provide special education students with services they need to make them whole. We need the administration helping but need them to run the program. If we have to go outside for services from BTs, we will take a hit.

Number three is a concern about out-of-district transportation increases and also because of the lack of bus drivers so we may have to come up with money in the budget.

Number four is the elementary enrollment concerns. We may need two classes for kindergarten and two teachers not in this budget.

The fifth concern is looking at inflation rates, which hurt everyone.

Ms. Zukowski closed by saying we have the best budget we can have at this time and thanked Mr. Melillo.

MOTION: Mrs. Plante moved that the Board of Education adopt the Superintendent's recommended budget of \$85,990,974 Mr. Ramsey seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mrs. Plante 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. Mrs. Kuzma seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

#### Item 4 – Public Participation

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

#### Item 5 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Donald Ramsey  
Secretary

<b>2022-23 Current Approved BOE Budget</b>						
	<b>82,134,639</b>	<b>Cumulative Adjustment</b>	<b>Percent of Change</b>	<b>Total Budget Balance</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>	<b>Budget Increase</b>
<b>2023-24 Superintendent's Request</b>						
	<b>85,989,669</b>	<b>3,855,030</b>			<b>4.69%</b>	
<b>BOE Adjustments to Superintendent's Operational Plan 1/31/23</b>						
<b><u>Technical Adjustments</u></b>						
1		(9,616)	-0.01%	85,980,053	4.68%	3,845,414
2	(20,915)	(30,531)	-0.04%	85,959,138	4.66%	3,824,499
3	(18,000)	(48,531)	-0.06%	85,941,138	4.63%	3,806,499
4	(8,000)	(56,531)	-0.07%	85,933,138	4.62%	3,798,499
5		(56,531)	-0.07%	85,933,138	4.62%	3,798,499
<b><u>BOE Adjustments</u></b>						
4		(56,531)	-0.07%	85,933,138	4.62%	3,798,499
5		(56,531)	-0.07%	85,933,138	4.62%	3,798,499
6		(56,531)	-0.07%	85,933,138	4.62%	3,798,499
7		(56,531)	-0.07%	85,933,138	4.62%	3,798,499
<b>BOARD OF EDUCATION'S REQUESTED 2023-24 PLAN</b>						
		(56,531)		85,933,138	4.62%	3,798,499
<b>Total Adjustments</b>						
		(56,531)	-0.07%			
<b>Requested Board of Education Operational Plan</b>						
				85,933,138		
<b>Requested Budget % Increase</b>						
					4.62%	
<b>Requested Budget \$ Increase</b>						
						3,798,499