

**Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, February 8, 2011 at 7:30 p.m. in the board room at 3 Primrose Street.

W. Hart, Chair	J. Robinson
D. Leidlein, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
A. Buzzi, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
D. Nanavaty	15 Staff
L. Bittman	6 Public
R. Gaines	2 Press
K. Alexander	

Mr. Hart called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to add the discussion and vote on the 2010-2011 school calendar to the end of the meeting. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 1 – Superintendent’s Budget Summary

Dr. Robinson reviewed the technical adjustments to the budget. The reductions include the transportation bus driver, a set of middle school clickers, four middle school smart boards, the middle school renaissance learning, the duplicate high school clerical position, the adjustment in the cost for the central office property, the high school property insurance, we are removing \$5,617 for the first installment of the \$93,000 high school sewer because the rest will be paid out of the project, and adjustment for copiers, unemployment compensation and electricity. The total reduction is \$201,995 taking the status quo budget to 3.38%. There are four modules that can be inserted. They are full-day kindergarten, additional teachers at the high school, the addition of deferred maintenance, and technology.

Mrs. Bittman inquired about the building level substitutes in each school budget. Dr. Robinson explained that they have typically been called interns but they are building level subs. These are in the general services budget.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved that the Board of Education approve the technical adjustments to the Superintendent’s estimate of expenditures in the amount of \$201,995 as presented. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Mr. Nanavaty said we have to separate our wants from our needs. This is the clearest most concise budget presented. He would look to cut technology. He referred to page 87 property and equipment with most being replacement items which are a status quo. He questioned if there was an advantage to renting or purchasing instruments.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to keep everything on page 87. On page 88 he would remove the \$46,859 as the diff between the \$216,102 and what Mrs. Amodeo views as her status quo budget. Mrs. Leidlein seconded.

Mrs. Bittman said she supports this and made an amendment to take the \$8,800 from the motion to keep the high school wireless. Mrs. Leidlein supported that.

Dr. Robinson asked the Board to give a dollar amount for the technology reductions so Mrs. Amodeo and the principals can determine the highest priority items. Picking up the wireless is important. The VOIP system is updating the phones systems for one school each year. She urged the Board to consider these as high priorities.

Mr. Nanavaty amended his motion to reduce the amount to \$40,000. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Mr. Nanavaty asked about the maintenance vehicle. Mr. Faiella said the purchase could wait a year or so.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to remove the maintenance vehicle for \$40,000.

Mrs. Leidlein seconded.

Mr. Hart asked to see the plan for vehicle rotation.

Vote: 7 ayes

Mr. Hart suggested taking 37,000 gallons out of the oil estimate and if we could remove 7,000 gallons from Reed and 5,000 gallons from the high school.

Mr. Bienkowski said we monitor oil on a monthly basis. If we had an issue the end of the year we just wouldn't fill the tanks at that time. There should be enough to get us through.

MOTION: Mr. Buzzi moved to reduce the oil budget by \$33,635. Mr. Gaines seconded.

Vote: 7 ayes

Mr. Hart began a discussion on contingency.

Mr. Buzzi was uncomfortable supporting a \$200,000 line with no specification.

Dr. Robinson said if we can maintain our emergency repairs money we could take out that contingency amount.

MOTION: Mr. Buzzi moved to remove \$200,000 from the contingency line. Mrs. Leidlein seconded.

Mr. Gaines asked what happened to the money if we didn't use it.

Dr. Robinson stated we would lose it. The law allows boards of education to put money left at the end of the year into a capital non-recurring account.

Mr. Buzzi said we can take money from other line items if we need it. We have had no discussion because it's a new concept. We should work on a policy to address contingency.

Vote: 7 ayes

Mrs. Leidlein asked about the Hawley Fund.

Mr. Bienkowski said it is a trust fund to put principal away and the school utilizes the interest for the building. We've done some projects using the fund outside of the budget. The cafeteria was put in from that money along with the weather vane.

Mrs. Leidlein said we have \$31,000 for Hawley repairs this year and wondered if the money could be used for that.

Mr. Bienkowski said we could but have to be careful not to diminish it too much.

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to remove \$20,000 from the budget to rebuild the chimney in the Hawley 48 building and use the Hawley Fund for that work.

Mr. Buzzi seconded.

Mr. Faiella was asked if this work had to be done this year. He stated the steel straps have severe cracking and the chimney also needs a cap. He feels it should be done this summer but could possibly be more than \$20,000.

After a discussion Mrs. Leidlein withdrew her motion. Mr. Buzzi seconded.

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to remove \$50,000 from plant maintenance. Mr. Buzzi seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Mrs. Leidlein asked about reducing the insurance costs.

Mr. Hart said the number we have now is based on a 4% premium increase. We are waiting to hear back from the carrier and consultant as to what the official number will be.

Mr. Buzzi asked if we had experience numbers.

Mr. Hart said they are quite good at this time.

Dr. Robinson said her number one priority was the additional staff at the high school. Mr. Nanavaty was in favor of the high school social science teacher and the assistant principal.

Mrs. Bittman recommended having a discussion on full-day kindergarten.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to add full-day kindergarten at a cost of \$318,988.

Mrs. Bittman seconded.

Mr. Gaines feels it is worthwhile and educationally beneficial to get to this soon.

Mrs. Bittman said it has an educational benefit but she would put the high school needs over this in this fiscal year but she would like to see this as soon as possible. With the new addition and the need to address SAT scores we need to focus on the high school.

Mrs. Leidlein struggled with this decision but there are other things to take into consideration. We have a commitment to work with the Town and wait until the ad hoc facilities committee work is done before we make a decision. The increase in kindergarten diminishes over the years but money would be better spent at the high school at this time.

Mr. Buzzi agreed with Mrs. Bittman that the full-day kindergarten is not right at this time.

Mr. Alexander said we have an overwhelming number of administrators and teachers who said full-day kindergarten is an educationally valuable. It is hard to ignore that.

Mr. Nanavaty supports full-day kindergarten but not this fiscal year. We spend more on transportation than any other town or city in the state because of what we pay for the owner/operator system. The savings we could see in a competitive contract would pay for full-day kindergarten and still have a surplus. There will have to be some changes in our priorities. Full-day kindergarten is an important part of education but we have a large eighth grade class going into the high school next year and we have to accommodate for that.

Mr. Gaines said the consensus is that we would like to have it as a board but the time is not right.

Mr. Hart is in favor also but supports it for next year.

Mrs. Bittman said that by focusing on the SAT scores we are following the enrollment at the high school. We have an initiative at the lower grades to increase the CMT scores but not at the high school level due to not enough teachers.

Vote: 7 nays The motion failed.

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to add a history/social science teacher at the high school for \$57,256. Mr. Nanavaty seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

MOTION: Mrs. Bittman moved to add back into the budget the assistant principal position at the high school for \$123,323. Mr. Nanavaty seconded.

Mrs. Bittman said that discipline takes a lot of their time and an additional assistant principal will allow them all to be in a better situation with the teachers and students.

Mr. Alexander was not in support of this position. He would rather spend the money on the teachers directly.

Mr. Nanavaty felt the same way but new teachers need the support of a good administration. This also helps the students.

Mr. Gaines supports the assistant principal but we would be able to have the Flex math teacher and the ELL English teacher for the same dollars. Given the scores he would prefer to address the teachers prior to the assistant principal.

Mr. Hart feels we need an assistant principal but prefers to have the entire high school package of proposed staff.

Vote: 4 ayes, 3 nays (Mr. Alexander, Mr. Gaines, Mrs. Leidlein) The motion passed.

Dr. Robinson said we have an inclusion teacher leaving and she offered to not replace that position as the work of that position has been accomplished. This was a major initiative in special education to work with teachers to have these students in the classroom. Her transition as been pretty much completed and we will not replace her.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to remove the inclusion teacher salary of \$84,275 Mrs. Bittman seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Mr. Hart stated we have \$150,000 in a capital non-recurring account and we should plan on using that but it cannot be used for salaries.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to add a middle school guidance counselor. Mr. Buzzi seconded.

Mr. Nanavaty said that Mrs. Sherlock made a request five years ago. We added one at Reed last year.

Mr. Buzzi also remembered her request. It's very important for this age group.

Mrs. Leidlein preferred using the money for teachers.

Mrs. Bittman said the students at the high school and Reed stay with their counselors but not at the middle school. It is important we have adults follow them for both grade levels.

Dr. Robinson agreed with the compelling need for that age group.

Mr. Hart deferred to our Superintendent's opinion that the counselor position was not as important as the others at this time and would not support it.

Vote: 3 ayes, 4 nays (Mr. Alexander, Mr. Gaines, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Hart) The motion failed.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to add the .2 Flex math teacher, the .2 ELL teacher, the secretary, the English teacher and the math teacher at the high school. Mr. Alexander seconded.

Mr. Gaines spoke about the state initiatives and that this was a worthwhile package to support.

Mr. Alexander feels ELL is something we should provide.

Mr. Hart feels we need to be sensitive to the needs of the Town. He would like to move some of our equipment items to capital account but it's not enough. We would reduce our property line by \$150,000. We would make a request to the Town to have the money put into the capital non-recurring account. It would have to be approved by the Board of Finance and Legislative Council.

Mr. Buzzi said we would reduce the line item by \$150,000 and let Mr. Faiella prioritize the items. His concern is that this is unprecedented and hoped that we could get it back. He would not support that right now.

Mr. Hart amended the motion to include reducing our property line by \$150,000 and getting that amount back from the Town to support adding these positions.

Mr. Gaines accepted the amendment. Mr. Alexander seconded it.

Vote: 2 ayes, 5 nays (Mrs. Bittman, Mr. Nanavaty, Mr. Buzzi, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Hart) The motion failed.

MOTION: Mrs. Bittman moved to add back the .2 Flex math teacher and the .2 ELL teacher at the high school. Mr. Alexander seconded. Vote: 3 ayes, 4 nays (Mr. Nanavaty, Mr. Buzzi, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Hart) The motion failed.

Mrs. Bittman asked if we could get answers on the \$150,000 and revisit this after the budget has been approved.

Mr. Hart said we would and would also do the Town a disservice if we don't use it for high priority items.

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved that the Board of Education adopt a total operating budget in the amount of \$69,201,017 for fiscal year 2011-2012. Mr. Buzzi seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved that the Board of Education grant permission to the Director of Business to make any minor technical adjustments and/or mathematical

corrections necessary to the 2011-2012 adopted budget as a result of these changes.
Mr. Buzzi seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 3 – School Calendar

Dr. Robinson said this morning the teacher's union put out a survey to which 394 teachers responded regarding the February 18 vacation day. 75 % said they would work and 25% said they could not. For those who have reservations we have worked out an agreement. She also spoke to Floyd Dugas regarding the 180 school days. Although a grievance could be brought, we would probably prevail.

MOTION: Mrs. Bittman moved that in recognition of the extraordinary weather situation this year, we make the following modifications to the current year school calendar:

1. Eliminate the currently scheduled vacation day on February 18.
2. Direct the Superintendent to negotiate with the teacher's union to change the staff development day scheduled for April 15 to a regular school day.
3. If additional school closings occur, that with the previous calendar change, extend the school year beyond June 24, they will be deducted from the April 18-22 recess.
4. If further school closings occur after the April recess, they will be accommodated by reducing the school year from 183 days. In the unlikely event that the 180 day limit is reached, extra closing days will be accommodated by adding days starting with June 27.

Mrs. Leidlein seconded.

Mrs. Bittman feels that adding time to the end of the year is difficult for high school students because of AP exams.

Mr. Nanavaty doesn't agree with taking away February 18. There would be 97 teachers plus families who have already made arrangements.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to eliminate # 1 to remove the February 18 vacation day.
Mr. Alexander seconded.

Mr. Buzzi said that 75% coming to school is admirable. As long as we have the resources to accommodate the school he would support it.

Mr. Alexander wasn't sure if we had enough substitute teachers. It's not worth it.

Dr. Robinson is not sure how many subs would be available that day.

Mr. Hart asked what was best for the students.

Dr. Robinson said there are minimal problems having school on the April professional development day. #2 is appropriate. She has concerns with the heat in the schools. Also, many seniors will have conflicts.

Vote: 5 ayes, 2 nays (Mrs. Leidlein, Mrs. Bittman)

MOTION: Mr. Buzzi moved to amend #2 to say the Board will discuss deducting days from the April recess. Mr. Nanavaty seconded.

Mrs. Bittman said more families go away in April so the more advanced notice we give is better.

Mr. Nanavaty said we can look at the 180 day limit before we go into April recess. That would be fairer to the community. Capture those extra three days before we take time from the April vacation.

Mrs. Leidlein said by removing three instructional days we are sending a message that they aren't important.

Mr. Hart said the last choice is to remove instructional days. The last week in June is difficult because of the heat. He would vote against the amendment.

Vote: 1 aye, 6 nays (Mr. Alexander, Mr. Gaines, Mrs. Bittman, Mr. Nanavaty, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Hart)

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved that if additional school closings occur, that with the previous calendar change extend the school year beyond June 24, they will be accommodated by reducing the school year from 183 days. In the unlikely event that the 180 limit is reached, extra closing days will be accommodated by deducting them from the April 18-22 recess. Mr. Buzzi seconded. Vote: 2 ayes, 5 nays (Mr. Alexander, Mr. Gaines, Mrs. Bittman, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Hart)

Mrs. Bittman's amended motion:

1. Direct the Superintendent to negotiate with the teacher's union to change the staff development day scheduled for 4/15 to a regular school day.
2. If additional school closings occur, that with the previous calendar change, extend the school year beyond 6/24, they will be deducted from the April 18-22 recess.
3. If further school closings occur after the April recess, they will be accommodated by reducing the school year from 183 days. In the unlikely event that the 180 day limit is reached, extra closing days will be accommodated by adding days starting with 6/27.

Vote: 5 ayes, 2 nays (Mr. Nanavaty, Mr. Buzzi)

MOTION: Mrs. Bittman moved to adjourn. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 4 - Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Andrew Buzzi, Jr.
Secretary