

**Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, May 18, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. in the board room at 3 Primrose Street.

L. Bittman, Chair	J. Robinson
K. Fetchick, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
D. Leidlein, Secretary (9:15 p.m.)	D. Raymo
D. Nanavaty	12 Staff
R. Gaines	10 Public
W. Hart	3 Press
C. Lagana	

Mrs. Bittman called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Item 1 – Announcement of Valedictorian and Salutatorian

Dr. Robinson stated that once a year we celebrate our students' accomplishments. Tonight we were announcing the top two students in the high school graduating class of 2010.

Jason Hiruo, assistant principal of Newtown High School introduced Zoe Destories who has earned many academic recognitions such as receiving the Harvard Club Book Award in history and the Rachel Carson Award in English. She is currently a National Merit scholar Semi-Finalist and will be attending Harvard in the fall. Amar Agashe has been involved in the Connecticut Innovation Academy since his freshman year when it was a club and remained involved through its evolution to a course and as a junior was a member of FUSION program which provides support for our incoming freshmen. He has been involved in the Quiz Bowl Team and our Debate Team and will attend Yale in the fall.

Mr. Hiruo said Bret Nichols, high school guidance counselor, joined him in congratulating these students. Mr. Hiruo announced Amar Agashe as the valedictorian and Zoe Destores as salutatorian. He thanked their parents for all of their support.

Item 2 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the consent agenda. Mrs. Fetchick asked to remove the minutes of May 4, 2010 for modification. Mr. Gaines seconded the remaining item which was the resignation of Jennifer Fisher, school psychologist, effective June 30, 2010. Vote: 6 ayes

Dr. Robinson said there were revisions to the agenda. The Acceptable Use of Technology Guidelines should be changed to Policy and we will remove the Health Insurance Consultant item as that has not been chosen.

Mrs. Bittman said we would move the insurance memorandum of understanding to after the reports.

Item 3 – Public Participation – none

Item 4 – Reports

There would be no correspondence or chair report.

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Robinson said that because of the upcoming changes in the number of teams at Reed and the middle school along with questions from the high school administrators we had a scheduling consultant meet with those administrators to discuss any creative options for scheduling.

Dr. Robinson encouraged everyone to see the junior/senior projects Monday, May 24 in the high school lecture hall from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. It is an opportunity to see what these students have accomplished with the help of community mentors.

Dr. Robinson said Professional Learning Communities within each school and a Senior Leadership Team have been developed in the district. Team meetings are very important but are difficult to schedule. She is proposing an early release day every month to allow for these meetings. Because we have increased the length of our school day it would not affect the number of instructional hours we need.

We are in the final stages of principal interviews with four candidates. School visits would follow.

Policy Committee: Mrs. Fetchick said there was no meeting last week. The next meeting will be May 25.

Facilities Committee: Mr. Hart said there was no meeting.

Mrs. Fetchick said she was contacted by someone in the community about Bio Mass Heating Systems which she forwarded to Mr. Hart.

Legislative Report:

Mr. Hart said he attended a CABA meeting regarding the new laws that have been enacted this year. There was a large bill #438 to position Connecticut in the Race To The Top grant. A major section was high school reform that will take place and he went over some of the changes. He thought it would be good to list special education costs and special education transportation costs separately because of the changes in the excess cost reimbursement.

Mrs. Raymo said the impact would be that the town would get less revenue. Dr. Robinson also included points of reference for the school reform legislation.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if we had a time frame for Dr. Chung's enrollment study. Dr. Robinson said she just authorized the first payment today. She would send out the timeline he sent her.

There was some discussion about the high school reform and that we were in compliance with some of the items.

Mrs. Fetchick said there was a discussion about the upcoming science requirements. She thought the rooms were designed to meet these requirements from the state. Mr. Nanavaty said the Legislative Council and Board of Finance decreased the size of the high school expansion.

Dr. Robinson said the issue for us is making sure we have enough lab space for the freshmen who all take the same course.

Middle Gate School Report:

Judy Liestman, principal, began by saying their focus is on educating students with special needs in the regular education environment and also on data driven decision making. They have built a professional learning community and have compelling conversations with all certified staff to address student needs. Student achievement will increase by building the capacity of teachers, parents and students and developing leaders who can challenge themselves and others. Judy Beers, lead teacher, addressed the community circle which meets four times per year and enforces positive behavior and character development at all grade levels. Pam Fagan spoke about her work as the math/science specialist and the work done by the students in her lab. Chandra Salvatore talked about the 21st century skills the first graders are learning. Lisa Boff fostered global awareness for her first grade students with a pen pal project with students in China. Tisha McCoy said the PLCs at Middle Gate include a Response to Intervention group with grade level teams. Their decisions are data driven.

Mrs. Liestman said parent leaders are very important at Middle Gate and introduced PTA president Lisa Wallace who spoke about the school/family/community partnership. The PTA supports the school with a variety of committees who arrange events during the year and provide things like the outdoor classroom which was built for their junior master gardeners. Another parent, Heather Smith, spoke about the roles of the parent volunteers in Middle Gate.

Mrs. Liestman said the next steps for Middle Gate with a new administrator is to continue to meet the need of all students, help the teachers design 21st century skills and provide numerous interventions for the students. She introduced Tina Jones who wrote the Middle Gate school song and sang it with the teachers and video of the students.

Mrs. Fetchick asked about the rotation for the professional learning communities. Mrs. McCoy said we look at where the students need support, where they need enrichment and then look at that data. We look at classroom time available for the teachers involved. Data is looked at frequently so the schedules change.

Financial Report:

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the financial report for the month ending April 30, 2010. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 6 ayes

Item 5 – Old Business

Discussion and Possible Approval of Self-insurance Memorandum of Understanding:

Dr. Robinson said we want to establish an independent board to oversee the fund. Bob Tait, Town financial director, said it was passed by the Board of Selectman. The contribution is an estimate based on 12 months of prior claims. We chose the middle number which was \$50,000 more than the lower number. The lower would be the better for our budgets. We will have one voice and fund it for 12 months of medical claims. At the end of next fiscal year we should have a cash balance. We will have a significant savings of over \$1M. We will also save the state premium tax. One side shouldn't have their premiums increase more than the other because of experience.

Mr. Hart asked what Anthem's percentage was.

Mr. Tait said about 8.5% with half of that as administrative fees and stop loss insurance.

Mr. Hart said Anthem will still make \$750,000.

Mr. Tait said our next step would be to check other companies. We didn't have time to get another bid out now.

Mr. Nanavaty asked the role of the consultant.

Mr. Tait said that person would do claims analysis, advise, go to negotiations, and participate in the RFP process for third party administration.

Mr. Nanavaty asked who was taking over our dental coverage. Mr. Tait said dental was staying the same.

Mrs. Bittman said the consultant would make recommendations on contributions. We would have an expert on both sides.

Mrs. Fetchick asked if those on the insurance board would come from these two boards or be completely separate.

Mrs. Llodra said it would be a board like the pension board and those people are appointed to serve in that capacity. That needs to be described in the ordinance.

Mr. Hart asked if the board would manage the bid process. Who manages the medical consultant? We have to work together and speak with one voice. We need a very well honed single point conversation.

Mrs. Llodra said the pension board does that right now so we want to use that model. The consultant would be working for us. We are the clients so we would always be interacting and developing some assessments. We will always be evaluating the consultant.

Mr. Nanavaty said we will have to talk about the plans we offer now. There needs to be a conversation as to where we are going and if we are going out as one group with one modified number.

Mrs. Llodra said self funding failed the last time because money in the fund was tapped. We need to create a structure which is separate from the boards.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved that the Board of Education approve the memorandum of understanding regarding the development of a medical self insurance fund for the Newtown Board of Education and the Town of Newtown. Mr. Lagana seconded.

Mrs. Llodra said the Board of Selectman would forward the recommendation to the Legislative Council for their action.

Vote: 6 ayes

Mrs. Fetchick asked Mr. Tait if he finished research for the town to provide a funding mechanism for pay to play fees. Mr. Tait said he felt confident we can use a special fund for this.

Newtown High School Expansion Project Update:

Dr. Robinson said the project is still two weeks behind. Electricians have begun working on Saturdays to make up for lost time; the existing roof of the gym will be removed this week; the interior masonry work is mostly complete; all of the roof top HVAC equipment has been placed; the fence installation at the stadium has begun and the re-lamping of the field lights is scheduled for May 26.

Approval of Acceptable Use of Technology Policy:

MOTION: Mrs. Fetchick moved that the Board of Education approve the Acceptable Use of Technology Policy 8-300. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 6 ayes

Owner/operators Negotiations Status:

Mr. Nanavaty said the letter from the owner/operators' attorney indicated they were changing everything that has been negotiated up to that point. They made a proposal that was different from other proposals and they would not consider any changes in the terms we had agreed on. We have ended negotiations with the owner/operators.

Mrs. Bittman said if they want to open up the negotiations again we could.

Mrs. Fetchick said given where we are in the budget process it would be advantageous for us to talk to them to reopen negotiations. We should try to work something out with them.

Mrs. Leidlein arrived at 9:15 p.m.

Mr. Nanavaty said if we could see substantial savings he would agree. \$193,000 is not substantial and is only in the first year. We put a number of proposals to them. We asked them to take the current MTM contract rates. We recognized that they are a \$368 per day rate now. To achieve a total 5 year contract with marketable rates we would revise our offer and give them a slight reduction in the first year and they go down another reduction in the second and third years. They came back with a proposal that the Board pay the fuel. All of the offers we made we saw savings of close to \$400,000 in the first two years. If we went out with an RFP the next year or so we would get a more advantageous rate.

Mr. Gaines said if we locked in to their proposal it would cost us over \$2M more than the MTM rates. We need to competitive bid this. He would like to stay with them but they need to be competitive.

Mrs. Bittman agreed. For us to enter into a five-year contract that does not keep us competitive would be a mistake.

Budget update:

Dr. Robinson said 11 have opted to take the retirement incentive. The projected savings is \$233,274 for the early retirement. Taking the unemployment out saves \$88,452. The total savings is \$321,726. Some have said they will withdraw if there is no incentive. She recommends moving forward with what we have to which the Board agreed.

Mrs. Leidlein asked when open enrollment ended.

Dr. Robinson said it just started with 20 days to return the insurance forms.

Mr. Nanavaty asked for an updated list of reductions at the next meeting or on the website.

Dr. Robinson addressed some of the reductions suggested by other groups. An example was not having graduation at the O'Neill Center. We need to have a location with a capacity of 4,000. We looked at the Newtown Youth Academy but that was too small and there is no other location to have the ceremony. We can save bits and pieces here and there but they are not getting to the numbers we need. The cuts the Board approved includes 2 central office staff, 4.5 elementary teachers, 3.6 teachers at Reed, 2.6 teachers at the middle school, 1.79 clerks and 5 EAs. The Board took out 2 high school positions adding back a PE and art teacher at Reed and the library clerks at Reed and the middle school. In the second round of cuts she recommended 2 teachers from Reed, 6 teachers from the middle school, the afterschool activities at Reed and the middle school, 2 teachers at the high school, 1 technology specialist and a .86 bus driver.

Mr. Nanavaty asked for the list of commodity savings/infrastructure savings. He wants to break those numbers out again and add in the \$326,000.

Mr. Hart said the health number will change.

Mrs. Raymo said we have to put \$141,000 for an HSA account for July 1.

Mrs. Fetchick said we have data in our budget books but it would be helpful to have the difference to show the change. She asked that it be emailed to the Board.

Dr. Robinson said Mr. Tait didn't know about the HSA.

Mr. Hart said he would like to see the health number after meeting with Mr. Tait.

Mrs. Raymo said the Anthem number doesn't agree with the HSA.

Mrs. Bittman asked Mrs. Raymo to get the insurance numbers and explain health insurance at the next meeting.

Discussion and Possible Approval of the Race To The Top Memorandum of Understanding:

Dr. Robinson said when the state submitted their first application she didn't feel there would be an advantage for Newtown. As predicted, Connecticut did not get the grant. This is the second submission. We will get \$140,000 more than the last offering which comes to \$204,000 over four years. We are required to do what is in the grant application anyway. It makes sense to approve the MOU. The teachers' union will not vote until next week.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved that the Board of Education approve the Race To The Top Memorandum of Understanding. Mrs. Leidlein seconded.

Mrs. Leidlein asked which goals we had to work on and the costs.

Dr. Robinson said the goal on data collection questions cannot be answered yet. We will need someone to deal with data on a more regular basis which could be a part time person. We already have AP courses and will finish the teacher evaluation. It's a plus

to us because we are going to have to do the work anyway. Based on the law we will have to put in more than we will get back.

Mr. Gaines mentioned the CO personnel leaving and if we had someone in place to do the data work. For goal two it implies a great deal of technology work.

Dr. Robinson said a data person would be needed. We upload PSIS data to the state which is done by a tech person.

Mr. Nanavaty said we will receive \$50,000 for the next four years if Connecticut is chosen. Even if we approve it is not guaranteed. The Commissioner said even if we don't get the money this will move forward.

Vote: 7 ayes

Item 6 – New Business

Dr. Gejda said TEAM was the Teacher Education and Mentoring program which has replaced the BEST program. It is a 3-year district plan developed by our district TEAM coordinating committee. As of July 1, 2010 we must enact this program. This is the first read and it will be up for approval at the next meeting.

Item 7 – Public Participation

Carla Kron, 4 Clapboard Ridge Road, said she assumes anything concerning health and safety issues was in the budget. They should have their own items in the budget. Don't cut the bleachers.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to approve the minutes of May 4, 2010 as amended by Mrs. Fetchick. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Vote: 7 ayes The amendment is on page 4 after the sentence "Mr. Hart suggested having that information on our web site."
Amendment: *Mrs. Fetchick agreed with Mr. Hart. She suggested to Dr. Regan that the communications committee could help facilitate getting information on our district web site. Other districts have information to help guide parents through the process.*

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to go into executive session inviting Dr. Robinson for an anticipated discussion regarding the position of an administrator. Mr. Hart seconded.
Vote: 7 ayes

Item 8 – Executive Session

Executive session began at 10:15 p.m.

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

Item 9 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Debbie Leidlein
Secretary