

**Board of Education  
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Thursday, January 6, 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	R. Bienkowski
D. Nanavaty	19 Staff
L. Bittman	12 Public
R. Gaines	3 Press
K. Alexander	

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

**Item 1 – Consent Agenda**

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the consent agenda which included the minutes of December 7, 2010, the donation of \$100 from Taunton Press for the high school library media center, an anonymous donation of \$500 for Reed School special education students, the donation of \$500 from Mrs. and Mrs. David Nowacki to be used for materials in room #2 at Sandy Hook School, the donation of \$557.60 for nursing supplies for the district from the Visiting Nurse Association of Newtown, the high school Junior State of America Club field trip to Washington, and the child-rearing leave of absence for Liza Eleoff, teacher at Sandy Hook School, to begin on or about March 10, 2011 through the end of the 2011-2012 school year.

Mrs. Bittman seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

**Item 2 – Public Participation**

Kinga Walsh, 21 Horseshoe Ridge Road, asked the Board not to pass the calendar. She was concerned about classroom time on early release days and conference days. We don't have enough full weeks.

Maureen Casetta 12 Johnny Appleseed Drive, was also concerned about the calendar and the issue of the loss of instructional time. She suggested moving the early release Wednesdays to every other month and suspend them in November and March when there are conferences. The inservice days should be reevaluated.

Jayne Long, 34 Woodbine Lane, asked to postpone voting on the calendar until the next Board meeting to survey parents. The February break is just before the CMTs. It is educationally sound to keep them in school before the testing.

Bill Sughrue, 24 Ashford Lane, said the Westport schedule is like ours. Conferences are eliminated and are just held when requested by parents.

Laura Roche, 41 Cobblers Mill Road, asked the Board to relook at the calendar. There are 22 early release days and having a half day is not very productive. It is not state mandated to have conferences. Westport and Darien don't have them for grades 6-12.

Julie Luby, 15 Fox Run Lane South was in favor of the full February break. The teachers can come in two of those days for professional development.

**Item 5 – New Business**Newtown Middle School Report:

Diane Sherlock introduced her leadership team consisting of Kathy Boettner, Wendy Bowen, Cathy Cincogrono, Bev Andracchi, Linda Dale Mulholland, Andrew SanAngelo, Nancy Maxwell, Maryann Bisson, Bob Rousseau, Jonathan Pope, Gino Heiter and Tina Welsh. A video was shown of the students and school activities. They spoke about academic performance, the quality of the middle school teaching staff and the expanding of work in the PLCs along with the various programs in the middle school.

**Item 3 – Reports**Audit Report:

Mr. Hart said it hadn't been the practice of the Board to review the audit report with the auditor but felt we should make a practice of it each year. Pat Llodra and John Kortze joined the Board.

Joe Centifanti of Kostin, Ruffkess & Company spoke about the report which covers all funds of the Town. The federal and state governments have thresholds on certain grants. They look at transactions and compliance areas. He discussed the Board of Education recommendations. General ledger entries should be used. Regarding grants, they look more at processes and controls and cash management. Regarding budget transfers, the State statute requires transfers at a certain level need to be approved by the Board, which did not happen last year.

Mrs. Leidlein was concerned about what would happen if these recommendations were not followed and if it could affect the Town's ability to borrow money or our bond rating. Mr. Centifanti didn't know but it would have an impact because we weren't doing something on a fiscal basis that we are supposed to be doing.

Mr. Nanavaty asked what was done after the report was prepared.

Mr. Centifanti files it with the State Office of Policy and Management and the State Department of Education.

Mr. Buzzi referred to the Board of Finance December 13, 2010 minutes where there was a discussion on how we would report our finances this year. We want to coordinate with the Board of Finance and other Town agencies that our reporting is consistent with them and do what is necessary for the Town.

Mr. Centifanti said you cannot spend without an appropriation. Transfers should happen first with funding in place.

Mr. Buzzi said the Board of Education is funded once a year and we have the discretion to spend money and alter how we spend it. Our end-of-year report for June 30, 2010 is consistent with our policy. We also have some flexibility. It is \$10,000 or 5% of the current account allocation. At the end of last year we had funds left over and decided to expend those funds on computers and Smartboards. What the Board did not do is have a motion to move the money to the appropriate object code for the computers. Appropriate motions need to be made so the June 30 report shows positive balances.

Mr. Centifanti stated that the state says transfers above the limit have to be approved unless the money is needed for an emergency.

Mr. Bienkowski said that often times you don't know until June if you will have any deficits. We can't predict electricity costs. He is concerned with the comment that money needs to be in place before we spend it. The appropriation is the money we need to spend from other accounts. The deficits will be offset by the excess cost grant and other revenues coming in. We need to put something in our policy to address this.

Mr. Hart said in the statute there is a provision to allow emergency transfers to be approved by staff because the Board cannot meet.

Mr. Centifanti said regarding unexpected special education expenses, he prefers us to put the money in the grant fund and use it from there. He agreed with Mr. Bienkowski's comments.

Mr. Buzzi said we are not overspending our appropriation. We have consistently returned money to the Town. Last year it was \$155,000. Regarding the state statute that requires us to have transfers, any board may transfer funds to pay for other items. He asked Mr. Kortze if they discussed this at his board meeting. We are going to discuss a possible change in our policy. He asked him to ask his bond person about this issue.

Mrs. Leidlein was concerned that those who establish our bond ratings would see us as an unfavorable risk if we didn't follow the transfer recommendations.

Mr. Centifanti said it is something they could consider but he couldn't quantify what they would do.

Mr. Nanavaty said the report doesn't indicate Newtown is not compliant. The budget transfer is a recommendation.

Mr. Centifanti stated we aren't doing what we are supposed to be doing.

Mrs. Bittman asked for specific examples of what we should do. At the meeting we gave money to the Town and then used money to purchase the items.

John Kortze said the Board of Finance has been concerned about this. He passed around our policy, the September 7 minutes of our meeting regarding transfers and the June 30 year-end financial report. It shows three accounts in deficit. There is a fiduciary issue, a legal issue and the issue of the audit. Transfers used to be explained. We don't want to have a finding on our financial statement. This needs to be corrected.

Mr. Hart asked for a recommendation for the 2009-10 financial report. Mr. Centifanti said the procedural issue is to vote for transfer approval. Mr. Kortze stated it would be good to clean up the books.

Mr. Kortze asked Mr. Bienkowski if he could have a contingency line item in the budget for the purpose of a risk item. The Board of Finance would like to understand why there would be a risk in an item.

Regarding items one and two, Mr. Bienkowski said we would just add the cafeteria and custodial fund to the ledger. The grants are being reviewed with Dr. Gejda and Dr. Regan.

Mr. Hart recommended putting the policy on the agenda for the next meeting on January 25.

Mr. Buzzi said he and Mrs. Bittman have to meet first and meet with Mr. Kortze to provide information on their policy.

Correspondence:

Mr. Buzzi said there was correspondence from Laurie Carerro, Bill Sughrue and Carla Kron, and a letter to Cate Brainard from the Womens Center of Danbury.

Chair Report:

Mr. Hart said he and Dr. Robinson are putting together a video on the budget process. Tom Mooney was taped this week and spoke about Connecticut law.

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Robinson provided a list of the work that was done by the custodial and technology departments over the break.

There are two upcoming events for the Board. We would like a follow-up session to the previous CABA retreat and also an FOI information session with Tom Hennick prior to the start of a Board meeting.

Facilities Committee: There was no meeting.

Financial Report:

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the financial report for the month ending November 30, 2010. Mrs. Leidlein seconded.

Mr. Bienkowski said we had to extend the rental for the high school modulars. There are no reasons for transfers at this time. An update was added on the maintenance projects.

Mr. Nanavaty asked if he approached the Town for assistance for the middle school driveway repairs.

Mr. Bienkowski said he would check with Mr. Faiella. It depends on what Mr. Hurley has to do because he usually puts a contract out on work like that.

Mrs. Leidlein asked what extra costs we have incurred from the high school delay transporting students to other facilities for sports. How will that show in financial report. Mr. Bienkowski said the funds are coming out of the increase in play to participate fees.

Mr. Hart stated we want to have a full accounting of the delays and any extra maintenance work. A running report should be produced and updated as an addendum to the financial report.

Vote: 7 ayes

**Item 4 – Old Business**

High School Expansion:

Dr. Robinson said the move is scheduled for Saturday. Supplies started to be moved on Monday.

Mr. Hart said people started expediting things to get work complete. There were eight critical level one items which have been completed except for some in the culinary section.

Board of Education Goals for 2010-2011:

Dr. Robinson broke the goals down into action items. Each member will take a goal and she requested input on any changes or additions.

**Item 5 – New Business (continued)**

Calendar for the 2011-2012 School Year:

Dr. Robinson spoke about the calendar committee that worked on calendars for the next two years. The area superintendents are looking at developing a regional calendar so we are just looking at next year's calendar for approval. They felt that the former committee eliminating Veteran's Day has been a positive decision along with Columbus Day. There was much discussion on the February break because of lack of continuity of instruction and because students were out of school some days of both weeks. She took the conference day schedule to the administrators. They took the drafts to their constituencies for their opinions.

Mrs. Bittman referred to the original survey regarding the February break where most wanted a long weekend. She asked if we could not have the early dismissal day on September 7.

Dr. Robinson said we have no ability to do ongoing professional development days. Election Day is the only other PD day. We need to have time on the shortened days to bring grade level teachers together for writing. We also need to do vertical planning which is done on the early release days. We can't do it after school because schools are out at different times.

Mrs. Bittman asked how often we have to bring in substitutes when teachers are out attending workshops.

Dr. Robinson said Dr. Gejda is working on that information. Teachers must attend PPT meetings using a substitute. A group of middle school teachers just started on the PBIS model with state training during the day which will require substitutes for them.

Mrs. Bittman said we need that information documented. What are we doing compared to what the state is mandating? She doesn't feel we need the February break.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if it was possible to have the April 4 early release day moved to April 5 because there is no school on April 6. People are struggling with child care issues. Also, instead of June 6, move the early release day to the last day of school. She seconded Mrs. Bittman's thoughts on not having the full week for February break. We had asked parents for their input before.

Dr. Robinson said we had a large committee who discussed this for many meetings. If you start making decision changes we will have trouble getting people for these committees.

Mr. Hart noted there were no Board of Education volunteers for this committee. These people invested a lot of time so we owe them some respect and the benefit of the doubt. Mrs. Bittman agreed but the parents who took the survey don't want to be disregarded.

Mr. Nanavaty wants to keep the February vacation. The half day on December 23 could be a PLC. He asked if the half day on November 23 was contractual. Why is December 23 a half day? These two days could be for PLC's. At the December 7 meeting there was information requested about the early release days such as to quantify the costs if teachers come in one Saturday per month, information if this work has been effective, incremental reports on the changes and how much professional development time is mandatory, how much is voluntary and the impact before we start the program. This Board needs to be understanding to the parents. Finding day care is difficult. Maybe we should do a Wednesday early release every other month. How is this affecting the students?

Mr. Buzzi said we need the data before we make a decision. Parents are trying to comply with the early release days and they are concerned that no one can be home with their children. The goals of the program are valid goals but we have to look at some alternative to achieve those goals. This is a burden on the community.

Mr. Gaines said the information we requested would be helpful for the parents also. What are the CMT dates?

Dr. Gejda said they are March 5 through 29. The testing doesn't extend throughout the month.

Mr. Gaines suggested eliminating the September early release day, move the January 4 day to December, the April 4 day to April 5 and June 6 to the last day of school. This gives some relief to the parents. Regarding conferences, the State statutes only requires two days.

Mr. Alexander said we can get comments from parents on both sides. He's not sure if the community knew there was a committee. It would help to know why the committee made their decisions.

It was decided that the Board would make decisions on the calendar when they get the information they need.

Dr. Gejda said there would be financial information at the next meeting along with the cost of bringing all our staff in on a Saturday.

#### **Item 6 – Public Participation**

Carla Kron, 4 Clapboard Ridge Road, said no one asked for her PTA input on the calendar. She is proud of our China initiative with a number of our students going there in April.

Susan McGuinness Getzinger, 31 Little Book Lane, said she was involved in a 504 hearing and asked for FOI information.

Laura Roche, 41 Cobblers Mill Road, thanked the Board for hearing concerns on the calendar. The Board must develop a policy on parent conferences and the number of days needed. The proposed bill did not pass.

Bill Sughrue, 24 Ashford Lane, said he didn't understand why we needed so many early dismissals for conferences. Lunch is 10:00 or 10:30 on those days. The middle school has a different schedule with no lunch. Twenty-minute classes are not effective. Cut the number of classes down on those days. Professional development should be full days.

MOTION: Debbie moved to go into executive session and invited Dr. Robinson and Mrs. Llodra to discuss possible litigation. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

**Item 7 – Executive Session**

Executive session began at 11:00 p.m.

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

**Item 8 – Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 11:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Andrew Buzzi, Jr.  
Secretary