

**Board of Education  
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, October 6, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. in the library at Reed Intermediate School.

Present:	E. McClure, Chair	J. Robinson
	L. Bittman, Vice Chair	L. Gejda
	K. Fetchick, Secretary	5 Staff
	D. Nanavaty	6 Public
	A. Wiedemann	2 Press
	R. Gaines	
	W. Hart	

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

Item 1 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the consent agenda which included the minutes of September 15, 2009, the donation of a laptop computer valued at \$600 from Mr. and Mrs. Gordon, the donation of \$1,500 from the Graustein Foundation Community Conversation Alumni Grant, the resignation of Karen Lane, teacher at Reed Intermediate School, effective October 23, 2009, and Darric Hall as volunteer coach for boys soccer at Newtown High School. Mr. Hart seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

MOTION: Mrs. Fetchick moved to add the AIS magnet school report and budget report under Item 3. Mr. Gaines seconded. Vote: 7 ayes

Item 2 – Public Participation – none

Item 3 – Reports

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Robinson said she will review her "State of the School District" at the Legislative Council meeting Tuesday night and also at upcoming meetings of the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance. She will discuss the progress of our strategic plan, our current enrollment numbers, and the high school expansion project. She is currently meeting with each principal to discuss the implementation of the strategic plan in their school.

Newtown High School has started a new program called Teams for Kids which matches a K-4<sup>th</sup> grade child with a handicapping or life-threatening medical condition with one of the high school sports teams.

The Sandy Hook language arts coordinator, Becky Virgalla, has been asked to represent Connecticut in a national review of a test of reading instruction knowledge and skills. This will be hosted by the Educational Testing Service.

Central office is still scheduled to move October 30 with Town offices moving earlier in the month.

Dr. Robinson asked the Board about contracting for enrollment projections. She chose not to do this last year because of the economy. Her inclination is to still wait another year. Right now our enrollment is going down.

Mrs. Wiedemann asked if anyone else did projections to which Mrs. Raymo said Chung did a very in-depth survey for the town.

Mrs. Raymo suggested working off the Planometrics report.

Mr. Nanavaty asked when the State's projections would come out.

Dr. Robinson said they don't do them anymore since Peter Prowda left. Her tendency is to wait at least until spring to see what the economic situation is.

Mrs. Wiedemann asked if we could find out how much Chung would charge for this service.

Dr. Robinson provided the unofficial October 1, 2009 enrollment figures. There is a two student discrepancy. Kindergarten, first and third grades are down with Head O'Meadow School down 56 students. She compared our actual enrollment to our projections. We did not receive the quantity of students from private schools that we expected and there could be a number of families who moved from the district.

The teacher evaluation committee met last week to begin rewriting our teacher evaluation plan and we would like at least one Board member to be on the committee.

Chris Lyddy proposed a bill which gives final approval for our high school expansion project which was approved. It must now go before the bonding commission to approve the money.

Dr. Robinson asked for Board members to choose the various committees that have been formed. Mrs. Bittman asked to form a communications committee. Mrs. Fetchick said she would be on the policy revision committee, Mr. Hart would be on the curriculum committee and Mr. Nanavaty chose the teacher evaluation committee.

#### Hawley School Report:

Dr. Robinson told the Board that there would be a report from each school over the course of this year with Hawley being the first.

Jo-Ann Peters, principal of Hawley School, introduced Chris Breyen, lead teacher and teachers Debbie Cowden and Lynn Holcomb. Mrs. Peters said that the challenges at Hawley include time for teacher collaboration. She suggested that the Board look at other districts to see how they make time for collaboration. A second challenge is the parking and traffic. If we could acquire the property at 27 Church Hill Road we could do some redesign of the parking lot. The other challenge is the handicap accessibility. The 1941 building is not handicap accessible. HVAC is another challenge. In the winter some of the classes are so hot the windows have to be open and some parts of the building are very cold. Also, when the windows are open it is hard to hear on the Church Hill Road side of the school. Fortunately, we now have a microphone system for the teachers so they can be heard. Lastly is the cafeteria. If we get the property she hoped we could put in a cafeteria.

Mrs. Fetchick asked how collaboration time is scheduled.

Mrs. Peters said the teachers have at least an hour and fifteen minutes per week. There is some after school hours also. Her previous district dismissed early every Wednesday to allow for meetings. She hoped that option would be considered.

Mrs. Bittman asked Dr. Robinson to get that information from other districts. She also reported on the AIS magnet school meeting. We have 40 students enrolled. The principal spoke about Spanish being taught and what the districts would do to maintain that when they return to their schools. There is no solution yet to bridge that gap.

#### Item 4 – Old Business

Newtown High School Expansion Project Update:

Dr. Robinson said that Mr. Dumais and Mr. Faiella are always consulted about the work at the high school. We are still on schedule with steel girders going in. The issue around the editorial in the Danbury News-Times regarding the asbestos removal is a non-issue. We followed the regulations. It is outside and contained and we are following all guidelines so there are no risks.

Mrs. Bittman said that the high school parents are getting regular updates on the asbestos removal.

#### Item 5 – New Business

Budget Report:

Mrs. Raymo said that regarding the budget for next year we know the economic condition of Newtown. The town said not to expect a budget increase next year. We met with principals and asked them to look at their budgets for this year and make reductions. We have the reality of union contracts, school maintenance, insurance, and bus contracts. The next step is how we go forward with what we have and come up with a tight budget. For this year's budget we anticipated 90% in excess cost money. It is going to be 70% instead. We have additional costs for six children who were placed by DCF which was not anticipated. Next year she understands the percentage will go down to 60%.

Dr. Robinson spoke about ways to save money now. One area that is high is the amount of overtime we have for custodians. The high school is used every Saturday and now Reed is also being used on Saturdays. We have to pay overtime for our custodians. She thought we could stagger custodians and have some work from Tuesday to Saturday but the union turned that down. We are looking at what to do to save money on Saturdays. The second option is to see if we could have a security person at these schools instead of a custodian. We could also charge overtime fees to all of the organizations using the schools. We did not budget money for overtime to cover Parks and Rec's use of our buildings.

Mr. Hart said that if we have custodians every Saturday then it is scheduled work.

Dr. Robinson said that when a custodian unlocks a building they receive a minimum of four hours overtime. The real concern is security, not cleaning the building. It would be less expensive to have a security person in the building.

Mrs. Fetchick asked what the cost was of the overtime.

Mrs. Raymo said there is approximately \$300,000 in custodial overtime. We have a lot of use in the high school, especially with the pool. We have stopped regular overtime now but we can't stop people from using the buildings.

MOTION: Mr. Nanavaty moved to approve the Newtown Board of Education owner/operator contract between the Board of Education and Fran McCutchan from September 23, 2009 through June 30, 2014. Mrs. Bittman seconded.

Dr. Robinson said we received a resignation effective September 23, 2009 just after the start of the school year. In discussing options, the practice in the past was to give it to a current owner/operator and now we can put it out with the same standard as MTM at a cost of \$280.00 per day. Ms. McCutchan has been with us a long time and had a bus not being used. We offered it to her and she accepted.

Mr. Hart requested that we clarify the contract concerning who was responsible for paying the property liability insurance.

Dr. Robinson said we are moving into the grounds of the MTM contract. Item #5 on page 4 needs to be changed.

Mrs. Wiedemann said that last spring we said the contract would go to the next person on the list.

Mr. Nanavaty said we terminated a driver earlier this year and as a result it was a contract that would have been Ms. McCutchan's contract. This replaces that one.

Mrs. Fetchick said item #12 doesn't say who would drive the bus.

Dr. Robinson said we have a number of owner/operators who hire drivers but do not name who will drive. Ms. McCutchan has a number of routes so will hire another driver. She has to drive two-thirds of the time on her main route.

Mr. Gaines said that in the future we should have something in the contract that speaks to the designated drivers.

Mr. Hart said the designated driver doesn't have to be the owner/operator.

Vote: 7 ayes

Policy Review Process:

Dr. Robinson provided a document from CUBE regarding their review of our policies.

#### Item 6 – Public Participation

Audrey Greenwood, 7 Susan Lane, thought the magnet school enrollment should be listed on the district enrollment report. She said that when she substituted in the elementary schools she saw a difference in the family-type atmosphere of each of the

schools. She would like to see more collaboration between the elementary school principals so they can be more consistent.

Jodi Bialek 5 Briarwood Lane, is a Hawley parent. The HVAC is definitely a problem and parking is a big safety concern.

Frank Scalzo, 175 Mt. Pleasant Road, said that regarding overtime at the high school having a security guard there instead of a custodian was not a good idea. If there is a problem in the building a custodian would have to be called to take care of it. Maybe the town hall could be used when the offices move to the new building.

MOTION: Mr. Gaines moved to go into executive session to discuss student discipline and a personnel issue and invited Dr. Robinson and Mrs. Raymo. Mrs. Wiedemann seconded. Vote: 7 yes

Item 6 – Executive Session

Executive session began at 9:10 p.m.

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

Item 8 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Kathryn Fetchick  
Secretary