

**Board of Education  
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on Monday, February 7, 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	20 Staff
L. Bittman	12 Public
R. Gaines	2 Press
K. Alexander	

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

Mr. Hart spoke about not having the amount of equipment needed for the snow removal. Mr. Faiella has been working with the Town and a structural engineer regarding snow on the roofs. Crews were clearing snow over the weekend. The middle school C-wing roof leaks are due to damage from clearing the snow.

Dr. Robinson said the structural engineer did field testing on the school roofs, none are near a dangerous rating, and we don't have any structural damage issues. A roofing company was contracted to patch the middle school roofs.

Item 1 – Public Hearing on the 2011-2012 Budget

Charles Hepp, 4 Winter Ridge Road, spoke about the SAT scores and compared our scores to the schools in our DRG. He also addressed per pupil expenditures in all the DRGs. He referred to Madison, Avon and Glastonbury that are below us in that area but produced better test scores. We are the highest in our DRG for transportation costs and we are outspent by every other DRG. Hawley boilers were on for seven years but we have had money to keep them running. Regarding professional development, those three towns are doing the same thing with early release days.

Laura Main, 42 The Old Road, thanked the Board for their commitment, time and questions, especially regarding the special ed. budget. We need detailed accounts of revenues including net costs and grants. She researched a number of grants such as equity grant, idea grant, preschool grants, transportation grants, birth to 3 grants, and there is also transportation aid. Another issue with this budget is that special ed. monies are in many different places. The audit called for oversight and accountability. She was concerned that taking over Project Succeed would not be in our best financial interest.

Mr. Hart said the Town audit report lists the grants. Accounting rules require that the grants don't show up in our budget.

Karen Visca, 30 Mile Hill South Road, spoke about snow days and asked why we had a survey when we have a plan listed on the calendar.

Julie Luby, 15 Fox Run Lane South, said we have a balance of power in Newtown. Dr. Robinson's budget items are necessary items. The full-day kindergarten proposal of \$300,000 is a nominal cost compared to the amount of the budget. Other positions are

necessary but a full-day kindergarten will increase our property value and school system. Bethel is going to a full-day kindergarten next year.

Lydia Horvath, South Main Street, said at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade freshman orientation Mrs. Ostar spoke about fusing together college levels. She asked for information about it, why it is happening and how it will affect the students. Her husband is a teacher with all levels in his classes, which is hard to teach.

Sue Zimmerman, 20 Pine Tree Hill Road, asked the Board to agree and support the budget. We need a united front. She would like the budget to go forward and leave it up to the people.

David Duschene, 9 Saw Mill Ridge Road, asked the Board to consider the full-day kindergarten and not to phase it in. Principals are for it also. No reason not to do it next year.

Lisa Bircher, 30 Monitor Hill Road, said legally we only have to go 180 days. The last week of school teachers stop teaching. Regarding the budget she asked what impact there would be on our overall enrollment for full-day kindergarten.

Kinga Walsh, 21 Horseshoe Ridge, said that regarding the snow days, take the three professional development days and make them school days and shorten the days to 180. Teachers can make up the professional development days when the children are out in June. Regarding the budget, she asked to bring back the Project Adventure teacher at Reed and also the requested high school teachers.

Lauren Wolf-Abdulraman, Brookwood Drive, feels our children are rushed academically and asked if we get a full-day kindergarten that the Board be sure the students have everything they need.

#### Item 2 – Budget Discussion

Mrs. Bittman asked for information on the substitutes.

Dr. Robinson said this fall we had 10 interns we pay tuition for. We have the advantage to observe them, coach them for classroom management and look for good potential candidates. They cover teacher classes and can be used if an EA is out.

Mr. Bienkowski said there are two from the University of Bridgeport and seven at the high school and three in the middle school from Sacred Hear.

Mr. Alexander asked why substitutes were listed in the schools and also in general support services.

Mr. Bienkowski said there are substitutes used for the day to day operation of the schools and others used for teachers out for professional development. We ask the schools how much money they need for substitutes for these uses.

Mr. Hart wanted to see a full accounting for the \$487,000.

Mr. Bienkowski spoke about the costs for Project Succeed. If it stayed under Education Connection it would have been a \$212, 656 net cost. Next year in-house our total costs are \$486,598. Bringing the program here is \$39,436 less after the excess cost grant.

Mr. Nanavaty said we would only get money from the excess cost grant for three students because one is out of district. That town would get that money and we would get tuition.

Mr. Bienkowski said we will now have four Newtown students and one out of district.

Mr. Nanavaty said that the tuition paid by the out-of-district student would be paid to the Town, and could not be deducted from the expenses for the replacement program for Project Succeed.

Mr. Bienkowski stated he spoke to Bob Tait about having the tuition be handled as a grant so it would not be an additional cost.

Dr. Robinson said to keep the program in Newtown we would have to pay for the personnel. We also have the opportunity to share staff we currently have.

Mr. Hart requested the history of property appraisals.

Mrs. Bittman asked for technology prioritization by building.

### Item 3 – Discussion and Possible Vote on 2010-2011 Calendar Regarding Snow Days

Dr. Robinson said with 8 snow days the last day of school is June 23. The calendar states that after June 30 days would be deducted from the April recess. A questionnaire was put out with the option of taking a day from the February break, going until the end of June, or taking days from the April break. Over 60% said to take away February 18 but that is problematic. The Board needs to have a plan when this happens.

Mr. Gaines said he received many emails to not go deeper into June due to the heat and that not much work is done in school. Many also want to keep the long weekend.

Mrs. Bittman asked about the teacher's contract taking days from February and April. She also asked if we could go to 180 school days.

Dr. Robinson said we cannot make up days on Saturdays or go into July. There is no relief from the 180 day restriction. We cannot add time onto days to equal a day. One concern is a sentence in the teacher's contract that there is a required 30 day notice to change their work year. It could also refer to taking away a day next week. If the Board chose to go to 180 teaching days we would discuss it with teachers as a one-time event.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if teachers were polled.

Dr. Robinson said the survey was opened to all. She spoke to the head of the teachers' union who wants to cooperate but there is the possibility of a grievance.

Mrs. Bittman asked Dr. Robinson her feeling about going 180 days.

Dr. Robinson said if we went past June 24 we should consider that option. We meet our hours of instruction.

Mr. Hart was concerned that the last few days are unproductive. Going to 180 would be his last choice. It's late to drop a day in February.

Mrs. Leidlein prefers looking at the February break as an option.

Mr. Nanavaty said the statement on the bottom of the calendar has always been there. There was a year we went into the last week of June. Taking the April break, aside from Christmas, is the only break for families. He thinks we should utilize the end of June. It's an administration position to reduce from 183 to 180 days.

Mrs. Bittman's concern is that students are booked for issues involving college during the last week in June.

Mr. Buzzi said it's late to discuss February 18 without further discussion with the union president. He asked for a report at the next meeting.

Mrs. Leidlein said moving the professional development day in April to June would give us a day.

Mr. Gaines requested that the Superintendent ask the union to poll the membership regarding having school on February 18 because of the extreme circumstances and leave it to the end of our discussion tomorrow night.

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

Item 4 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Andrew Buzzi, Jr.