

**Board of Education  
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on December 6, 2016 at 6:45 p.m. the cafetorium at Newtown High School, 12 Berkshire Road.

K. Alexander, Chair	J. Erardi
M. Ku, Vice Chair	J. Davila
D. Leidlein, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
J. Vouros	260 Staff and Public
R. Harriman-Stites	2 Press
A. Clure	
D. Cruson	
S. Chand	
D. Lew	

Mr. Alexander called the meeting to order at 6:47 p.m.

MOTION: Mr. Clure moved that the Board of Education go into executive session to discuss BCBA contracts and interview the candidate for the Newtown High School Assistant Principal position and invited Dr. Erardi, Mrs. Davila, Mr. Bienkowski, Lauren Connor and Kimberly Longobucco. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 1 – Executive Session

The Board exited executive session at 7:22 p.m.

Item 2 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 3 – Possible Vote on Candidate

MOTION: Mrs. Ku moved that the Board of Education appoint Kimberly Longobucco Newtown High School Assistant Principal effective January 9, 2016 with salary per the administrators' contract. Mr. Vouros seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Mrs. Longobucco thanked everyone on interview committee, Dr. Erardi, Dr. Rodrigue and Dr. Abbey. She is excited to be here and join the administrative team.

Mr. Alexander congratulated Mrs. Longobucco and welcomed her to the district.

Item 4 – Celebration of Excellence

Item 5 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mrs. Ku moved that the Board of Education approve the consent agenda which includes the donation to Sandy Hook School. Mrs. Leidlein seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 6 - Public Participation

Mr. Alexander thanked everyone who wrote to the Board and asked those in favor of comments to raise their hand. He requested that comments be kept to the vote at hand regarding restructuring the middle school to house the eighth grade at the high school and seventh grade at Reed Intermediate School. Other options were re not part of tonight's discussion.

Tom Kuroski, 4 Westview Drive, Naugatuck, teaches at the high school and spoke in favor of the teachers at the middle school. He read a letter in support of teachers at the middle school and the families in Newtown. The move doesn't follow the strategic plan or the mission for the district. He urged the Board to vote in the best interest of children in Newtown and keep the middle school open.

Michelle Garrity, 53 Toddy Hill Road, wants to keep eighth graders out of Newtown High School. Children are still coping with PTSD and trauma. We are taking away transitional years. If there is a decline in enrollment then why are we being told there is no room for fifth grade in the elementary schools? Why would closing a school be an educational benefit? She urged the Board to look at numbers and trends before making a decision.

Jamie Pearson, Hundred Acres Road, said the vote should be postponed until school configurations are researched regarding this transition. The decision to build the Reed School was based on research. There is no structure on how to configure the seventh and eighth grade teams and other issues such as traffic have not been looked at. School size effects achievement and school climate. A new subcommittee should do an in-depth study of school configuration and is against having eighth graders at the high school.

Mike and Laura Brennan, 7 Fallen Leaf Lane, opposes closing the middle school and the grade configuration. Reed enrollment is extremely tight and there is no market for buildings in town. This option has 10-year sustainability.

Don Ramsey, 3 Prospect Drive, is a retired teacher and feels it is not in the best interest to have eighth graders in the high school. Vote in favor of what is in the best interest of the children and not because of the political pressures you are under.

Sabina Ali, 8 Fawn Hollow Lane, moved to Newtown for her children's education. She prefers the 5-6 and 7-8 configuration. They moved to Canada for three years and came back to Newtown for the schools. The middle school has greatly helped her daughter.

Elizabeth Bogdnoff, 32 Obtuse Road, said we have to look at rites of passage. The middle school is an incredible school and the first opportunity for independence for these children.

Judy DeStefano, 12 Horseshoe Ridge Road, is on the Legislative Council but spoke as a citizen. Dr. Erardi has stated that we are proud of the configuration we have now but no one has said that about the new configuration. Being financially motivated to make this change is not necessarily the best for the children. This option doesn't warrant a yes vote. We value education and this is worth the cost.

Jennifer Padilla, 32 Glen Road, said if the school is closed the savings are minimal for families. We need a view on the savings and a guarantee of the improvement to the educational process. We need in-depth research. Why not put to a referendum and let the public decide.

John Feder, 27 Poverty Hollow Road, is concerned about an eighth grader going to the high school with 18-year-old boys. From a common sense standpoint putting them with this age group is not sound.

Frank Corigliano, 174 Brushy Hill Road, thanked the Board for their work. He's on planning and zoning and feels it doesn't make sense to eighth graders with twelfth graders. The issue to close a school is to try and save money. The taxes are not too high because we have a middle school. This past year the town approved a number of new developments which include houses, an apartment complex and condos. These will add students to our district. The population is expanding and we have a tremendous amount of buildable land. If closing the

middle school will cause us to have to build another school we will have to deal with that cost. That is counterproductive.

Joanna Rosen, 60 Sugar Lane, is opposed to closing the middle school. We have not heard how this proposed reconfiguration is in the best interest for our students. What research has been done about eighth graders in a high school? Why haven't positives been shared, what are the merits of the proposed configuration, and where is the plan? No data has been provided. She does not support the proposed reconfiguration.

Karyn Holden, 68 Berkshire Road, thanked the Board for their work on this issue but she was opposed to closing the middle school and reconfiguring our schools because of the social emotional impact on those who were at Sandy Hook School on 1214. We have complex issues before us. Where is the research to support eighth grade being in the high school and what about sports and afterschool activities. Eighth grade sports won't fit at the high school and those students won't feel part of it. Moving seventh graders to Reed will change that school too. We won't be able to keep our fifth and sixth graders young. She wants to know why this is a good decision.

Lexie Leidlein, high school student, feels eighth graders need time to mature and their social and emotional well being will be affected. The middle school should not be closed.

Tegan Doherty, 15 Mountain View Drive, said that seventh and eighth graders are on the bus with high schoolers. The benefits for eighth graders at the high school are more educational opportunities such as advanced courses. If we believe the high school is unsafe that should be addressed.

Evelyn Backer, special education teacher at the middle school said that these students just want to fit in. We work to meet their social emotional and academic needs.

Chris Met, 22 The Old Road, said splitting seventh and eighth grades will affect services these students receive.

Suzanne Chung, 2 Crows Nest Lane, saw a lot of growth in her daughter when she was in the middle school. Not having the middle school opportunity is a great loss.

Lorraine Cornell, Little Brook Lane, is against closing the middle school. If you close a school it might affect people moving into town causing a decrease in school population.

Kinga Walsh, 21 Horseshoe Ridge Road, said the high school is a phenomenal school. There is a lot on social media about drugs but you have that everywhere. The money saved isn't going back into education or to the residents. This started by questions from other boards and councils. You all have been bullied into investigating this but what needs to be done now is what is in the best interest of the students.

Michelle Assante, 16 Wendover Road, said there is no plan for the eighth grade. Regarding the drugs and sexting at the high school you have it have anywhere. You don't have 8-12 high schools. She opposed closing the middle school. There is a fair amount of bullying here. The decision was made by pressure from one group on another. This should be in the best interest for children before making this vote.

Aline Troy, 42 Farmfield Ridge Road, asked about how crowded Reed will be if the seventh grade goes there. Carts for computer labs were suggested. She has a pediatric practice and seventh and eighth graders go through hard times with emotions. It doesn't make sense to have eighth graders in the high school.

Melissa Horan, 94 Riverside Road, said we would be doing harm putting the eighth grade in the high school. We have to pay close attention to the puberty years especially for Sandy Hook students.

Deborah Sullivan, 9 Fairview Drive, said the middle school offered advanced classes with peers. She is opposed to closing it.

Rachel Smith, is a middle school teacher and appreciates teaching there. The middle school is a special place that supports student needs with a caring faculty.

Christina Asner, spoke about her experience at the middle school with great teachers who supported her. She was in eighth grade when 1214 happened. The middle school helped her grow up.

Christin Alesovich, 16 Fieldstone Drive, doesn't think anyone on the Board wants to close the middle school and doesn't think they will do something to put our children at risk.

Eric Paradis, 85 Riverside Road, said that regarding the developmental appropriateness of the middle school, a lot of students are struggling and the middle school is needed to help them. Closing could really harm them.

Matthew Schnitzel, 51 Main Street, moved here because of the schools. He is a middle school teacher in Brewster and sixth, seventh and eighth grades are a rollercoaster for these children.

David Smith, 41 New Lebbon Road, said his wife teaches at Reed. We think highly of this board. He asked everyone to think about why we need education when it's time to vote on the budget.

Amy Collins 167 Sugar Street, said her child receives special education and is terrified of her being in the high school in eighth grade. Early adolescence is a vulnerable period of development.

Robin Fitzgerald, 24 Old Farm Hill Road, appreciates the study on each school. Closing the middle school needs more research to answer questions. A vote tonight would be premature. She asked her son about having eighth graders in the high school. He said seventh and eighth graders should be in one place together. He didn't feel comfortable as a ninth grader when he went to the high school. This decision needs to take a lot more time before voting.

Renee Wilson, said this will be the most detrimental decision for our children. The #1 item that negatively impacts students is class size. We already have some of the highest student-to-teacher ratios in the state. We are 130 out of 200 on what we spend on students. We are looking at 30 children in a classroom. She wants them to guarantee this is the best option for educating our children.

Laura Terry, 64 Robin Hill Road, said this configuration was presented as the last option standing. Take that into consideration and listen to the community voice. There are 37 against and one for it.

Christine Ford, 45 Toddy Hill Road, was concerned that for the small amount of savings if we were being short sited in looking at the enrollment. The middle school is a unique time for students to grow and learn.

Michelle Garrity added that she had 590 signatures on the petition against closing the middle school and having the eighth grade go to the high school.

Mitch Bolinsky, 3 Wylie Lane, spoke as a resident. The best years of his children's lives were spent at the middle school. No schools in Connecticut use an 8-12 model. It is socially and developmentally a bad fit. He doesn't see any other choice but to walk away from this. He appreciates the work of the Board and thanked them for their hours and patience. He was concerned about putting students in a more adult environment.

Charles Barra, 9 Georges Hill Road, said we are a community divided between education and spending money.

Laura Roche, 42 Cobblers Mill Road, said there are so many unknowns and variables. The Board has the charge to make the decision and administration has to figure out how it will work. It will take many hours with multiple committees to get this accomplished.

#### Item 7 – Reports

Chair Report: Mr. Alexander said he would have the committee recommendations for the next meeting.

Superintendent's Report: Dr. Erardi thanked the interfaith clergy partnership in their extension to help with the Sandy Hook anniversary.

#### Student Reports:

Dylan Lew: The drama department had their fall production of Caesar with actors from all grade levels. The senior and junior class councils collected food items to donate to the Food Pantry and Women's Shelter.

Simran Chand: November 23 was the final football conference game where Newtown defeated Masuk. We lost to Shelton in the CIAC state quarterfinals game. Last Friday there was a special guest at the high school; Britney Maier is a blind and autistic savant who showcased her talent for piano.

Dylan: The high school sang at the tree lighting, the Rotary Club pancake breakfast and many were in the Nutcracker Ballet at Edmond Town Hall. The Families United in Newtown committee of the National Honor Society had their Christmas gathering which concluded with giving presents to the children with special needs.

#### Item 8 – Old Business

Discussion and possible vote on facility and enrollment study:

MOTION: Mr. Alexander moved that effective the start of the 2018-2019 school year, the Board of Education reconfigure the present PK-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-12 existing teaching and learning model to a PK-4, 5-7 Reed Intermediate School setting, and an 8-12 Newtown High School setting model. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mr. Alexander stated that several people asked how we got to the point of doing a study. After looking at the issue of enrollment and what our facilities can maintain the Board decided to ask the administration to conduct this study.

Dr. Erardi said that change causes great emotion. As a community you should be incredibly proud as you modeled behavior we teach our children.

Mr. Cruson said he has been on both of this issue. His concern is that we have a lot of space that will be open over the next few years. The middle school has had many costly issues and we will have to consider costly renovations. To the end of projections the high school will only have 66% of its capacity. If we don't do something there will be an issue for us.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites looks at the extra space to enhance our learning environment and what we can do with that extra space.

Mrs. Leidlein said we spend a lot of money on outplacing students. She would like to see more students brought back into the community. If we close a school there wouldn't be adequate space to bring those students back.

Mrs. Ku put together a history of Newtown schools from the time Hawley was built to our current situation. We never closed a school when the enrollment decreased. We felt it was bound to go up and used portables at Sandy Hook School and built Reed school. Looking at a short-term savings will not help Newtown over the long term.

Mr. Alexander is concerned about the quality of education and the social emotional development but not whether eighth graders will be safe at the high school. It is more important to look at whether there are reasons to keep the structure the way it is.

Mr. Cruson said the number of transitions is a concern. Academic time is lost because we are concerned about transitions.

Mrs. Leidlein doesn't feel that the separation of grades is the best way to have less transitions.

Mrs. Ku spoke about the Milone and MacBroom study and concern about census bureau information being updated. She referred to page 14 of their report regarding permits. The average unemployment rates have been going down in Newtown. Birth rates are projected to go up.

Mr. Cruson sees a great benefit in the way we could share resources with the proposed configuration. He hoped we could reach some of the educational benefits from the work of the committee to further the education of Newtown students.

Mrs. Leidlein agreed.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said we have ideas that could happen with reconfiguration but there is not a fully developed plan. We can't say what would happen.

Mr. Vouros was struggling with the educational issues, transitions and our curriculum expectations. He proposed not to close the middle school with the promise to address his educational concerns and implement change in keeping the middle school open.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said the committee worked hard for a solution that was sustainable and suitable. She didn't want anyone to think that we did not fully research this issue or to think we didn't do the job we were tasked with.

Mr. Clure said last Friday he attended the career day at the middle school and was most impressed with how engaged the students were. He would never want to take away the transitional period from any student and was not in favor of this configuration.

Mrs. Leidlein was also grateful for the work of the Future Forecast Committee and agrees that there are not enough answers to questions to move forward. Keeping the school is in the best interest of the students.

Mrs. Ku said as a board we need to look at a risk analysis. The biggest risk is that the \$25M to \$50M to reopen a school is big and is a long process. The analysis of this situation has cost so much. Dr. Erardi invited the parents, community, teachers, administration and the skeptics to discuss closing a school. The response at the joint meeting was not a conversation about what would happen but questioned the validity of the data. If we close and the skepticism continues and we report we need more space that is a risk the school district must take. If a school is repurposed, we take the risk of having to open again in eight years.

Mr. Alexander said the effort the people went through to provide this information is significant. The tax burden will still be an issue. We will need the community to help support the students in our budget. He feels the configuration we have supports our students but can't guarantee the proposed reconfiguration will do that. He will vote against it also.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said the configuration is not sustainable and the model is not suitable. She is in favor of enhancements but fears the proposed configuration will do the opposite. Most concerning to her is the year of onset of the configuration which will impact a group of students we have an obligation to support. She asked the public to be at the budget meetings in town to help support education.

Vote: 7 nays Motion fails.

#### Item 9 – New Business

Minutes of November 15, 2016:

MOTION: Mr. Clure moved that the Board of Education approve the minutes of November 15, 2016. Mrs. Harriman-Stites seconded. Vote: 6 ayes, 1 abstained (Mrs. Leidlein) Motion passes.

#### Item 10 – Public Participation

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to adjourn. Mr. Clure seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

#### Item 11 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Debbie Leidlein  
Secretary

12 Dickinson Drive  
Sandy Hook, CT 06482  
(203) 426-7657



# Memo

**To:** Dr. Erardi  
**From:** Erin Ardino  
**Date:** November 21, 2016  
**Re:** Enclosed Donation Check

Dr. Erardi,

Enclosed please find a donation check for \$100 made payable to SHS for the "Lunch Program".

We are asking that the Board approve depositing these funds.

Thank you,

Erin

REMOVE DOCUMENT ALONG THIS PERFORATION

**THE BACK OF THIS CHECK CONTAINS A SECURITY MARK - DO NOT ACCEPT WITHOUT HOLDING AT AN ANGLE TO VERIFY SECURITY MARK.**

<b>Please Post to Account: DONOR</b> CURTIS L DUPUIS PO BOX 153 OAKVILLE, WA 98568-0153	<b>KeyBank</b> PO Box 7236 Sioux Falls, SD 57117-7236	Payable Through KEYBANK, N.A. ONLINE BANKING BILL PAY	6 103 410 <b>17397238</b> November 14, 2016
<b>PAY</b> One Hundred and 00/100 Dollars			\$ *****100.00
TO THE ORDER OF:	#CSP0100065EA987# 42986851 SANDY HOOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 12 DICKENSON DR SANDY HOOK CT 06482-1298		VOID 90 DAYS AFTER ISSUE PAYELECTRONIC.COM  Authorized Signature

Memo: IMO JUDY ANNE WILSON DU PUIS FOR LUNCH PROGRAM

⑈ 17397238 ⑆ ⑆ 04 1207040 ⑆ 350993518504 ⑆

PLEASE DETACH HERE BEFORE CASHING

## **Administrative Report**

**Tuesday, December 6<sup>th</sup>**

**1. Interfaith Clergy Partnership**

**2. Annual Reports – Policy 2250 - Monitoring Goals** (ATTACH #1)

**3. EdAdvance Legislative Breakfast**

**a. December 9<sup>th</sup> - Sandy Hook Elementary School**

**4. NEF Partnership**

**a. Honor a Teacher**

**b. Evening of Comedy – January 21<sup>st</sup>** (ATTACH #2)

*Joseph E. ...*  
12/6/14

## **Administration**

### **Monitoring of Product and Process Goals**

The Superintendent, in cooperation with the school staff, student body, parents and any other interested persons or groups, shall establish and maintain a comprehensive plan in concert with the Newtown Public Schools Strategic Plan for monitoring the progress of the schools in achieving product goals (student learning) and process goals (effectiveness of operations).

The plan shall provide, first, for reports to the Board of Education on student achievement in academic, vocational and general behavioral pursuits in relation to professional and Board-adopted instructional goals. Second, the plan shall provide for reports to the Board of Education on the effectiveness of the schools in reaching Board-adopted goals in community relations, administration, business and non-instructional operations, personnel, student personnel administration, and instruction.

Eventbrite

**VIP PARTY**  
*Clayton*

*Comedians*

**RC Smith**  
**Tony Liberati**  
**Chris Morretti**

**JOIN YOUR FRIENDS AND SUPPORT**

**Newtown Education FOUNDATION**

**evening of COMEDY**

**SATURDAY NIGHT**  
**JANUARY 21ST**  
**EDMOND TOWN HALL**

JAN 21

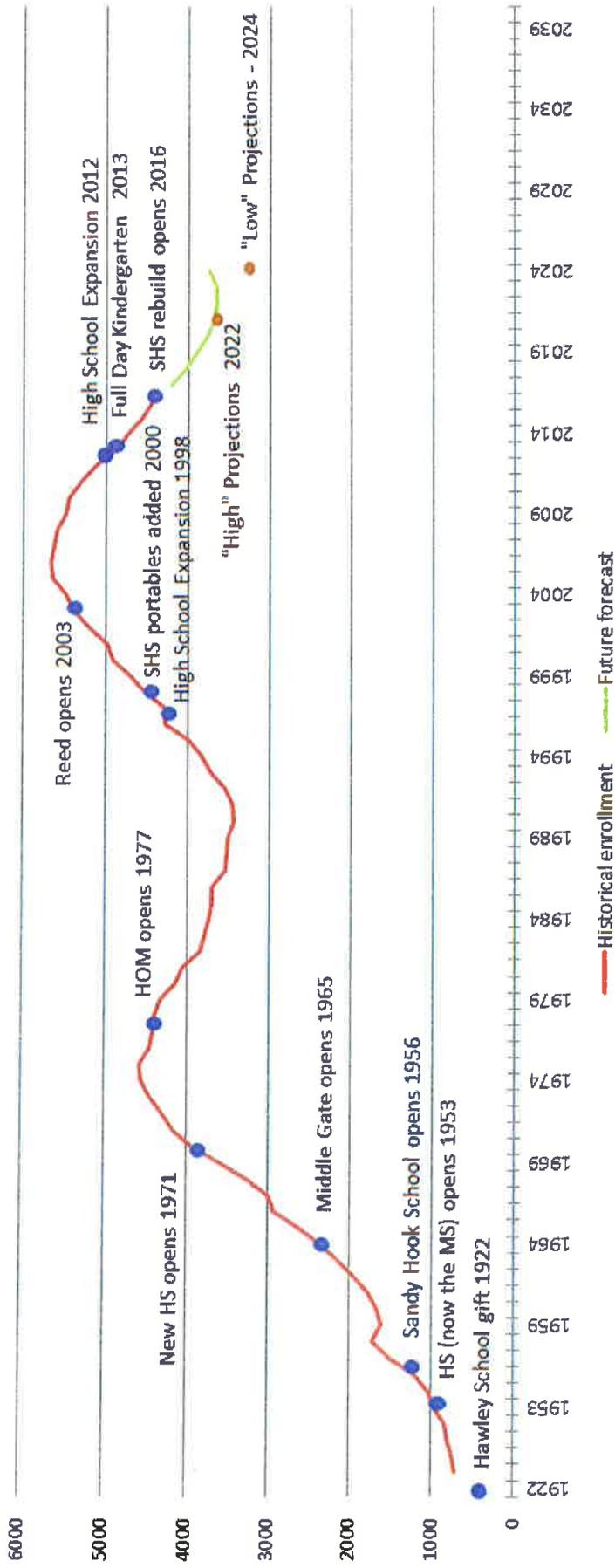
Evening of Comedy

By Newtown Education Foundation

545 - 568

TICKETS

# Newtown: School Enrollment and Facilities



Compiled by Michelle Embree Ku  
 Sources: Newtown Public Schools,  
 "Newtown Comprehensive School Enrollment Analysis and  
 Projections, 2014" Milone and MacBroom, and  
 "HISTORY OF NEWTOWN POPULATION  
 SCHOOL POPULATION AND AVAILABLE SCHOOL SPACE,  
 1922 - 2005" Ruby Johnson