

Please Note: These minutes are pending Board approval.
Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on October 15, 2019 at 7:30 p.m. in the Reed Intermediate School Library, 3 Trades Lane.

M. Ku, Chair	L. Rodrigue
R. Harriman-Stites, Vice Chair	A. Uberti
D. Cruson, Secretary	R. Bienkowski (absent)
D. Leidlein	10 Staff
J. Vouros	20 Public
A. Clure	2 Press
D. Delia	

Mrs. Ku called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 2 – Celebration of Excellence

Dr. Rodrigue was proud of the work of our staff at Middle Gate School and Newtown Middle School in recognizing our heroes in their Veteran's Day programs. It was a privilege to have Tom Saadi, Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Affairs and Steve Armstrong, Social Studies Consultant from the Connecticut State Department of Education here to present these awards. She also thanked Donna Randle, Senior Vice Commander of American Legion Post 202, Jay Mattegat, Junior Vice Commander, and Chuck Taylor, Executive Committeeman for being here.

Mr. Armstrong spoke about the program which was in its third year. The two entries from Newtown were very deserving. Donna Randle introduced Commissioner Tom Saadi who is also a Major in the United States Army Reserve.

Commissioner Saadi said it was an honor to be here to present these awards from the Remembering the Veterans Program. Students understand the mission of remembering our veterans because of the programs held in these schools. The awards were presented to Linda Baron, Middle Gate teacher and Chris Geissler, Principal. Newtown Middle School teachers Shari Oliver and Andrew San Angelo, along with Principal Tom Einhorn, received their award. A reception followed.

Item 3 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve the consent agenda which includes the minutes of October 1, 2019 and the donation to the Newtown School District for Hawley School. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 4 – Public Participation

Item 5 – Reports

Chair Report: Mrs. Ku spoke about the new Board member orientation with Nick Caruso from CABA with possible dates of December 12 or 19. The candidate's forum is this Thursday in the high school lecture hall at 7:00 p.m. The next Board meeting will be after the election and she wished everyone luck.

Superintendent's Report: Dr. Rodrigue said there is a need to focus on diminishing absenteeism and she will be attending a conference on that topic on December 3. The PTA is sponsoring the Board of Education candidate forum on Thursday and Jason Edwards will be the moderator. She thanked Kristen Bonacci and others who helped coordinate the event. Some changes to

the high school grading practices have been made to provide consistency between levels. The goal was to ensure the students have similar educational experiences. All families were notified by Dr. Longobucco.

Mr. Clure asked the thought behind doing this.

Dr. Rodrigue said we were noticing issues where there wasn't consistency in all grade levels and also looked at the quality of assessments. A priority is to have both formative and summative assessments to be able to measure improvements and progress. This was done through staff and department chairs.

Mr. Clure asked if any thought was given to just implementing it for the freshman first so the students in the upper grades don't have such a change.

Dr. Rodrigue said they are not grading differently. All students should have consistent experiences. It is strengthening what should have been in existence. Dr. Longobucco would come to an upcoming Board meeting to discuss this grading system.

Mr. Vouros stated that the Curriculum and Instruction Committee met last Tuesday. They discussed the NGSS status, plans for the November 5 professional development day, the district-wide assessment plan, and an SEL update.

Student Representatives:

Ms. Jojo reported that that many sports events are being held including cross country senior night and the high school band and guard home show.

Mr. Chand said that spirit week will be in two weeks and the Homecoming Dance is set for November 4.

Ms. Jojo stated that there is a new grading system in the high school which includes a 70% summative and 30% formative grading assignment which means tests and bigger projects receive more weight than classwork and homework.

Mr. Chand said the students now know what to expect in each class and are being held with the same standards. While this system is very efficient and structured, many students believe that this is not a true representation of their effort. The new system has lot of the same grading techniques. Sometimes teachers have less summative assignments. The SEL program progressing well.

Ms. Jojo reported that applications for the NICE travel opportunities were recently due with positive feedback for the Panama trip. Schoolwide testing is tomorrow with the PSAT for freshman, the Pre-ACTs for sophomores and the actual PSAT for juniors.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites appreciated the feedback on the grading system offering the student perspective.

Mr. Delia thought it would be nice to have some other grade levels and schools come to share information.

Financial Report:

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve the financial report for the month ending September 30, 2019. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Vadas reviewed the financial report. The special education tuition account has a negative balance of \$224,000 and is subject to continuing change. There were two emergency repairs

needed which were replacing the ductless splits in the Reed data room for \$9,730 and replacing the flue pipe at the maintenance shop for \$6,010.

Motion passes unanimously.

Item 6 – Presentations

Dr. Rodrigue introduced Dr. Peter Prowda who did the enrollment study with an analysis of the district enrollment the past 10 years.

Dr. Prowda said this report projects Newtown's enrollment to 2029. He looks at enrollment in one year for one grade and then looks at the same group the next year to see the pattern. For projecting kindergarten he looks at births five years earlier. In the previous reports the projections were close.

Mr. Delia said the report says the State enrollment is going down but we are going up. Historically, our enrollment has gone down faster than the State.

Dr. Prowda said in the 70s and 80s we followed the State pattern. Newtown out-performed the State.

Mr. Clure noted that regarding migration there a jump of 100 between fourth and fifth grades. Dr. Prowda said you will see a 2% increase per year.

Mr. Clure asked if the town's health or property taxes are factored into the predictions.

Dr. Prowda said the key question is why people move to Newtown with possible reasons such as more affordable housing and quality schools. Speak to real estate agents that cover more than one town to find out.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites looked at the accuracy of prior projections. They are far below where we are now and asked if that was a trend he has seen.

Dr. Prowda said Chung's report was in 2009 and a year after that there was a recession. Our State population is still down from 2010. Milone and MacBroom pretty much tracked their enrollment.

Mr. Ku said we are trending much higher than what they projected.

Dr. Prowda said they were good until 2016.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites asked what led to that.

Dr. Prowda said Newtown had a catastrophic event in 2012. You had to make adjustment for the next year. Some parents didn't want to go to Monroe. That could have affected things.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites asked if other towns have seen the enrollment decline they expected.

Dr. Prowda said they fell short. You never know when the recovery will happen. He liked the way we make our projections. Milone and MacBroom are still good.

Mrs. Ku said we would send him any questions.

Student Performance Review:

Dr. Rodrigue said we are looking at where we've been and where we are moving in every school and grade level. The learning walks done by Mrs. Uberti and Mr. Purcaro are supporting our principals to look critically at instruction in the classrooms.

Mrs. Uberti reviewed student performance data from 2018-2019. The data shared represents some of the more important standardized test data but is only a fraction of the multitude of performance and achievement data points that are collected each year. No one test defines

achievement or the potential of a student. There are many ways to look at the State assessment. She and Mr. Purcaro have been closely analyzing our results from a variety of perspectives and not only interpret the results but create solid action plans because of those results.

Mr. Delia asked what is being done to help students in levels one and two advance. Mrs. Uberti said we have to look at these students and what help is being provided. Those at level 1 are receiving special education services. Level 2 students appear to be making the least amount of growth. Mr. Purcaro is working with the administrators identifying those students and what we are doing for them. Some of those students are not receiving tiered supports. We are looking at who the students are and developing goals for teachers for those students.

Mrs. Leidlein asked about assessments.

Mrs. Uberti said we are trying to look at if we understand why we are giving the assessment and what we will get from it.

Mr. Clure was encouraged by SAT scores. He asked if we are able to help students prepare for this test and maybe not have homework the night before.

Mrs. Uberti has spent a lot of time at the high school. Last year they analyzed data from the previous year and were excited about the results to help improve student learning.

Item 7 – Old Business

BOE Budget Goals for 2020-2021:

Mrs. Ku stated that we still have a motion from the last meeting but would have to amend it to include changes.

MOTION: Mrs. Ku moved to remove the second item under Priorities that states “Maintain a contingency item in the budget for Special Education enrollment changes” and replace it with “Ensure adequate funding for special education to meet anticipated enrollment and needs and maintain a contingency item in the budget for unanticipated changes in enrollment or needs.”

Mr. Cruson seconded

Mr. Cruson suggested changing the wording to “Ensure adequate funding for special education to meet anticipated enrollment and needs as well as maintain a contingency item in the budget for unanticipated changes in enrollment or needs.” Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved to add the following item to the Priorities: “Continue to pursue curriculum improvement and innovation in order to ensure that the educational needs of all students are supported.” Mrs. Harriman-Stites seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Vote on the main motion to approve the Board of Education Budget Goals for 2020-2021. Motion passes unanimously.

Letter Regarding 27 Church Hill Road Property:

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education direct the Superintendent to send a letter to the First Selectman regarding the purchase of the property at 27 Church Hill Road. Mr. Vouros seconded.

Mr. Cruson said that regarding the land, it was a gift to the Town and if the Town uses it, it would not revert to Yale under any conditions including not being a school. Taylor Field has to be used for recreation by the Town or it would revert back to the Taylor family.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites appreciates the letter but is hesitant because of the cost to the Town but feels it was important to look into it fully.

Mr. Delia agrees but would like to know what the uses would be.

Motion passes unanimously.

Policy 9000 Roles of Board Members:

MOTION: Mrs. Ku moved to amend the main motion to approve policy 9000 to replace the last sentence in #7 with "The Board will receive reports of retirements and resignations at each Regular Board meeting and will act on terminations when required by statute or contract." Mrs. Harriman-Stites seconded.

Mrs. Ku shared it with a CAGE attorney and our Board attorney and they agreed with the statement.

Amendment to the motion passes unanimously.

Motion to approve Policy 9000 Roles of Board members passes unanimously.

Action on Policies:

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved to rescind Bylaws 9110 and 9260. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve Bylaw 9100. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites noted Mrs. Ku's changes after speaking to legal counsel and that it was not an approved practice.

Mr. Cruson said the language has the potential for the person running the meeting to be one of the persons who might be voted on. He feels it needs to be a third party.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites agreed.

Mrs. Ku was forwarded this information from the previous chair. She suggested asking other boards.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said moderating the meeting would be a suggestion. She would discuss it with the policy committee tomorrow.

Mrs. Ku said we would bring back Policy 9120.

MOTION: Mrs. Ku moved to postpone the discussion until the next Board meeting. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman Stites moved that the Board of Education approve Bylaw 9125. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve Bylaw 9140. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve Bylaw 9221. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve Bylaw 9230. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve Bylaw 9240. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 8 – New Business

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve the ratified Newtown Federation of Teachers Contract. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Ku said the negotiations process was very productive. A lot of time was spent talking and listening to the concerns. She thanked the Legislative Council and Board of Finance members who spent time in this process.

Mr. Clure thanked Mrs. Ku, Mrs. Harriman-Stites, and Mr. Delia for representing the Board and appreciated the updates and being able to ask questions along the way.

Motion passes unanimously.

Item 9 – Public Participation

Deborra Zukowski , 4 Cornfield Ridge Road, suggested the Town Clerk be considered an independent person used for voting officers which the Legislative Council uses.

Regarding the enrollment report, you can only go by last year's experience. The Chung study was in 2007 when the market crashed. They were high projections. In 2013 for the Milone and McBroom study there was a recession. She asked how we should interpret these projections if a recession should happen.

Dennis Brestovansky, 11 Longview Heights Road, said that parents are concerned about the grading policy at the high school. He recommends more communication to help people understand. Regarding the data on enrollment, we should have a margin of errors looking 10 years down.

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

Item 10 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Daniel J. Cruson, Jr.
Secretary

If you would like to view all attachments included with these Board of Education minutes click the following link and select "10-15-19 minutes" from the listing:

<http://www.newtown.k12.ct.us/District-Information/Board-of-Education/BOE-Agendas-Minutes-2019-2020>