

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

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on November 19, 2019 the Council Chambers at 3 Primrose Street.

M. Ku, Chair	L. Rodrigue
R. Harriman-Stites, Vice Chair	A. Uberti
D. Cruson, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
D. Leidlein	12 Staff
J. Vouros	12 Public
A. Clure (absent)	2 Press
D. Delia	
H. Jojo	

Mrs. Ku called the meeting to order at 7:45 p.m.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 2 – Celebration of Excellence

Dr. Rodrigue welcomed the Newtown High School Marching Band and congratulated them on what their Band Director, Kurt Eckhart, called their best performance of the season, which earned them 3rd place finish at the MetLife Nationals with awards going for Best Percussion and Best Color Guard. In attendance are Shilin Ray, Virginia Hepp (Drum Majors), Conor Vignola (Brass Captain), Annie Minor (Woodwind Captain), Ellie Minor, Cooper Agresta (Percussion Captains), and Moira McKinley, Katie Farrington, Grace Bauch (Color Guard Captains).

Michelle Hiscavich, Director of Fine Arts and Music, thanked the Board for having them.

Ms. Hiscavich was happy to say that the Newtown Hawk Band was once again State Champions. They competed against 10 different bands from 3 different states with their biggest competitors being from Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.

Item 3 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education move the minutes of November 6, 2019 from the consent agenda to the end of the meeting.

Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve the consent agenda which includes Newtown High School Debate field trip, donation to Newtown High School and the correspondence report. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 4 – Public Participation

Kinga Walsh, 21 Horseshoe Ridge, Sandy Hook, addressed the change to the high school grading system. Overall, her family agrees with the change given the new information she received after meeting with Dr. Longobucco. The implementation of this change, however, left her baffled. On October 30, 2019, Ms. Walsh met with Dr. Longobucco and reviewed her draft presentation. She thanked her for taking ownership of the lack of clarity and communication with the parents. Ms. Walsh requested that Dr. Longobucco's presentation be a stand-alone document and put on the website as a parent resource. She noted that Dr. Longobucco suggested that she would have each Department create a department specific grading change presentation and show to students during their class. Ms. Walsh expressed her concerns regarding communication with this change. There was no communication with parents prior to the school year. She asked for the Board to come up with a plan after tonight's presentation. She suggested that the presentation be added to the district website and send a link of that

presentation to parents. She hopes moving forward, parents, administrators, educators and elected officials can work together but that requires an upfront plan.

Mary Murphy, 32 Churchill Road, Newtown, wanted to introduce herself to the Board of Education as the newly appointed Co-President of the Newtown SpEd PTA. We are a special needs PTA that aims to provide advocacy and support for special needs parents. We are unique in that we exist to help all kids, whether they are homeschooled, outplaced, in the regular school district or not in the school system yet (daycare). The PTA is focused on positive collaboration between the schools, parents and teachers and creating an atmosphere where everyone can get to know each other. The PTA also started a parent support group for parents of kids represented from Pre-K to Super Seniors.

Item 5 – Reports

Chair Report: Mrs. Ku said that she sent Board members an outline of the Organizational Meeting of the Board of Education. It consists of points that she put together two years ago when we elected the Executive Board of the Board of Education. It will be useful to hand off to the Town Clerk for doing the elections in December. Mrs. Ku welcomed any feedback or changes that need to be made.

Mrs. Ku attended the CAFE/CAPSS Convention along with Dr. Rodrigue, Mrs. Uberti and our new Board member, Deborra Zukowski. Mrs. Ku attended a workshop on the use of EdSight and a workshop on regionalism of shared services. The keynote speakers were Derrick Gay and George Couros, both of whom were fantastic speakers. Another item that was discussed was the collaboration between the Board of Education and Superintendents and making sure that it is a good relationship and we support each other in terms of what is best for the District. The State Board of Education is supporting that effort and additional statements and information from them will be coming out in the future.

Mrs. Leidlein looked over the Organizational Meeting of the Board of Education and thought it would be good to add that individuals would be able to speak to their nominations between when nominations are made and voting. She noted that it was possible that it was mentioned and she missed it.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites noted that it does say that any member may speak to the nomination but we can make it more specific.

Mrs. Leidlein said in the past, once the nominations were closed, people were able to speak to their nominations. It may be best to put it between #4 and #5.

Mrs. Ku said that she will move that any member can speak to the nominations below #4 and make sure it is clear if there are no objections.

Superintendent's Report: Dr. Rodrigue stated that Frank Purcaro, Director of Teaching and Learning, will be on our next Board of Education agenda for an update on his work thus far in the District. He has been working very closely with Mrs. Uberti and has spent time in all of our buildings in the district, facilitating committee work, working with staff so he has a good handle on the changes that we need to make around students' learning. He also met with PTA Presidents to give them an overview of his role and in return, they shared their perspective about what information might be more useful for parents across the district.

We have begun meeting with school leaders as a part of the budget development process and asked them to look closely to align their requests with district priorities that we discussed at previous meetings and to be mindful of enrollment and professional development needs. We

plan on having a very transparent process and will post the basic budget process and timeline for parents and community members.

Dr. Rodrigue also mentioned her time at the Practices Conference in Cromwell with the emphasis on attendance. It is important to engage parents to ensure students are attending school regularly and consistently. We have regular communication through the buildings and parents but there is always room for improvement.

Committee Reports: Mrs. Harriman-Stites said the Policy Committee met last week and we went finished the review of the 9000 series and will decide which series to look at next. At our next Board of Education meeting, we will have a packet of recommended rescinded policies for review. While looking at the 9000 series there were a lot of duplications.

Curriculum and Instruction: Mr. Vouros said at the last Curriculum and Instruction Committee meeting, Mrs. Uberti presented information regarding tech devices and Chrome Books in particular. Mr. Vouros asked for the Board to look at these because of the budget impact.

Mrs. Ku updated the Board that the CIP has been approved by the Board of Finance and is now with the Legislative Council and should be on their agenda soon.

Student Report: Ms. Jojo stated that Mr. Chand was unable to attend tonight's meeting but wishes he could be here to tell everyone what is happening at the high school. A memorable event was the Veteran's Day Ceremony with veterans attending a breakfast in the gym and a ceremony in the auditorium. The fall drama, A Midsummer Night's Dream, had their opening night on Thursday, November 14th at the high school. Fall sports are coming to an end. Newtown Football had a win against Barlow 44-10. Multiple students have been voicing concern regarding transportation for the gymnastics team. They are provided a bus to practice in Oxford but no way back and they are not allowed to drive themselves. This causes many transportation issues for the team. The gymnastics team is requesting that the Board would consider allowing the seniors drive themselves and others to practice so that they are able to get home without any issues.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites would like to understand the transportation issue and asked Ms. Jojo to elaborate on how the students get home if a bus is not provided.

Ms. Jojo answered that student's parents have to drive to Oxford to pick up their child and can cause issues if they can't make it there.

Mr. Vouros said that he was very proud of our music department and the involvement of the students during the Veteran's Day Celebration. The writing and presentations were wonderful. Mrs. Harriman-Stites asked if any member of the gymnastics team asked Mr. Memoli for transportation back from practice.

Ms. Jojo answered that they have talked to him and he is working on a bus but the team would rather drive themselves.

Mrs. Ku believes that there are policy implications and would need to get administrators involved to speak with the Board.

Mr. Cruson said that he understands requiring the team to take the bus to practice and agrees with Mrs. Ku that there is probably a policy implication there. He didn't understand the reasoning on not providing a bus back.

Mrs. Ku thanked Ms. Jojo for her report and agreed with her comments on the Veteran's Day celebration. These programs are wonderful and provide a very important educational experience.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites stated that she thinks that Ms. Jojo's reports are wonderful and appreciates that she brought an issue to their attention because if the Board isn't told of an issue then they have no way of trying to find a resolution.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve the financial report and transfers for the month ending October 31, 2019. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Financial Report: Mr. Bienkowski presented the report. For the first time, the report includes "Anticipated Obligations" in addition to the actual YTD expenditures. The report also includes transfer recommendations for teacher salary accounts and paraeducator salary accounts. The teacher transfers are a result of the most current placement of new personnel, adjustments to positions, extra credits, FMLA's and turnover savings.

Mr. Bienkowski pointed out that an addition was made to transfers recommended. After two days of budget discussions, it was clear that there were inconsistencies in the duties that people were performing that were called Early Interventionists but they were teaching reading so they were moved to that category.

Mr. Delia asked if this is a proper classification. He would agree that they are providing early intervention services.

Dr. Rodrigue stated that this change has a lot to do with certification. It is important to define them in the same way as we report them to the State.

Mr. Cruson asked if this change was anything more than what we call them. Dr. Rodrigue stated that it just puts them in the right category so we are in alignment with what we need to report to the State.

Mrs. Uberti added that because the same people delivering the same service in different schools were in different categories, it provides clarity to have those people in the same categories across all schools.

Mr. Delia asked if there are still teachers classified as interventions.

Mrs. Uberti answered that they are out of that category.

Motion passes unanimously.

Item 6 – Presentations

Mrs. Ku introduced Dr. Longobucco who will be presenting the change to the Newtown High School grading system. She mentioned that Dr. Longobucco already attended a C & I meeting with her presentation and it clarified things for us a great deal.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites wonders what the communication was prior to the school year to the students and parents. It is outlined what the communication was to the staff but would like to hear how bit was communicated to the parents.

Dr. Longobucco decided that it was best for each teacher to explain it to their particular classroom at the beginning of the school year. This was decided because each class and department is different. For the first week of school, Dr. Longobucco went to multiple classrooms and saw teachers explain their exact breakdown of grading. It was also going to be discussed during Open House but it is agreed that some sort of communication should have gone out before the start of school.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if homework was graded for completeness or correctness.

Dr. Longobucco said that in the past it was for completion but now it is for correctness. One of the conversations we had was that if homework was graded just for completion then the student would never know if it was right or wrong.

Mrs. Leidlein also asked if there are a required number of summative assessments in each department.

Dr. Longobucco explained that this is the first step in a multi-step process and the end goal is to get to a point where the teachers are giving the same number of summative and formative assignments. There are some courses and departments that are more in line than others.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if there was a timeframe.

Dr. Longobucco answered that they are planning to look at the number of assignments in the spring so the goal is for the beginning of the school year in September 2020.

Mr. Cruson appreciated the breakdown of the summative and formative definitions because it answered the questions that he had. He stated that this presentation helped explain it better than before and agrees that this should be on the website for parents as soon as possible.

Mr. Vouros asked Dr. Longobucco to help them understand the homework portion of the program because there are students that feel they do not need to do the homework. They may feel it is a waste of their time. What can we do to help those students understand the importance of doing the homework?

Dr. Longobucco explained that because the homework is a portion of their grade and there are so many levels that they will need to do homework. They will need to continue to talk about feedback from homework so the students can understand the meaningful reason for homework.

Mr. Delia asked what the plan was to reflect on this process and improve it. Is there something in place to see how well it is working?

Dr. Longobucco explained that there is something to be said for instruction and something to be said for assessment and grading. What we can look at through grading is making sure students are performing the way they were in the past. We believe this is better preparing them for life after high school.

Mr. Delia is concerned with the guidelines that have departments with different percentages.

Dr. Longobucco believes that different departments need to be able to have different percentages because it bodes to exactly what they do and what their specialty is. We are not only talking about the core classes but speaking to the many electives as well.

Mrs. Leidlein would love this to reflect teaching and learning style. It is important to give the ability to the teacher to decide what is best for their class and how they best access what their students are learning.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites would like to reflect on the process because when thinking about process, implementation comes to mind. She appreciated that Dr. Longobucco owned not fully communicating with parents before the start of school. It is important to come up with core practices on how we communicate change that is best for everyone.

Mrs. Ku remembered last year when parents said there was no consistency in grading and thanked Dr. Longobucco for addressing that. There is a huge amount of appreciation for

Dr. Longobucco's ability to get faculty who have very different philosophies about grading on the same wavelength.

Mr. Delia asked for a follow up at the end of the year.

Mrs. Ku will add to a future agenda.

Mrs. Ku introduced Mrs. Mailloux-Petersen, Director of Special Education, who will provide an update from the Special Education Self-Study.

Mrs. Mailloux-Petersen went through the self-study and picked out highlights that were most important. These points include the number of Wilson Level 1 Certified teachers, Orton-Gillingham Certified teachers and Confidentiality Training. She is very proud of everything accomplished in a short amount of time. The new program Foundations is currently being implemented in grades K-1. Parents are happy and already see improvements with this program.

Mr. Vouros asked if there was an Orton-Gillingham Certified teacher at each school.

Mrs. Mailloux-Petersen said there are three in one building and two in the other elementary schools.

Mr. Vouros asked if the certified teachers travel to a school if there is a need for them.

Mrs. Mailloux-Petersen said that they typically use Wilson 1 certified teachers to provide any specific reading instruction.

Mr. Vouros is concerned because it is his understanding that the Orton-Gillingham program is the better of the two programs and believes that if one child needs that program then it is important that they have access to a teacher that is Orton-Gillingham certified.

Mrs. Hall explained the difference between Orton-Gillingham and Wilson. Orton-Gillingham is an approach that has been around for years but not as structured. Wilson is an Orton-Gillingham approach packaged into a curriculum that is highly structured. If a child is getting the Wilson program then they are essentially getting the Orton-Gillingham approach.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites asked if the general education teachers have been trained.

Mrs. Mailloux-Petersen said that only special education teachers have been trained. Some general education teachers reached out to their administrator, however, training is on the teacher's own time so it is not certain if they followed through.

Mr. Delia asked if there was a Wilson Certified teacher in every school.

Mrs. Mailloux-Petersen said that there is not a certified teacher in each school but there is a certified teacher that travels throughout the district.

Mr. Vouros asked what happens if a parent asked for Orton-Gillingham.

Dr. Rodrigue stated that this started with parent concerns and their concern wasn't so much about the program but more about the training for teachers. The parents want to make sure it is working for their child.

Mrs. Leidlein remembers parents saying that it is important for the program to be available for their child so having more teachers trained are important. Mrs. Leidlein loves the Foundations program and very happy it is a part of our curriculum. Wilson makes more sense in a school setting because it is small group appropriate.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites asked if they were able to collect any data on how many confidentiality breaches there have been.

Mrs. Mailloux-Petersen said there were no breaches since training occurred in the beginning of the school year. The protocol is that they inform the supervisors but there have been no reports. Mrs. Harriman-Stites suggested that we can communicate with parents that they can feel comfortable coming forward if there is a breach with confidentiality.

Mr. Cruson asked if there is one central person that is notified if a breach occurs.

Mrs. Mailloux-Petersen noted that if there was a special education breach then she would absolutely know about the breach.

Mr. Cruson asked if there was a consequence for confidentiality breaches.

Mrs. Mailloux-Petersen said that she speaks with them personally. She cannot share specific details but if there is a chronic situation there is a procedure on how to handle it.

Mr. Vouros asked if there was a procedure on how they handle student records and if they double check before putting it into the envelope.

Mrs. Mailloux-Petersen answered that yes, their new procedure is to initial the paperwork and it has been working to her knowledge.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites was happy to hear that Special Education is collaborating with the PTA and the Parent Mentoring Program which was one of the action items. It is important to put information about the Parent Mentoring Program on the website as a parent resource. Also, parents have brought the small print of the Safe Guard to the attention of the Board. She asked if it was possible to provide the parents with information on where they can find it online along with the packet.

Mrs. Mailloux-Petersen answered that they can provide that for the parents.

Mr. Vouros thanked the Special Education department for their hard work and noted that they have come so far over the past 8 years.

Dr. Rodrigue stated that she has been working closely with Mrs. Mailloux-Petersen about strategies that are meaningful and thanked the whole department for their hard work. It is great to see a year's difference.

Item 7 – Old Business

Action on Policies:

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve Bylaw 9130 - Committees. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites noted that a Board member asked why "Ad hoc" was crossed off on page 9130(b). Mrs. Harriman-Stites said that it was repetitive because there was a subtitle and it was not needed.

Mrs. Ku stated that "an" needed to be changed to "a" on page 9130(b).

Vote on Bylaw 9130 – Committees as amended: Passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve Bylaw 9222 – Resignation/Removal from Office/Censure. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve Bylaw 9272 – Code of Conduct on Data Use. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites noted that there is a change to the language in this bylaw.

After discussion, Mrs. Harriman-Stites proposed that the language for #1 will now read "Look to the Superintendent as the point person. The Superintendent will respond to all data requests to the Board as a whole. If the Superintendent finds the data request will take a considerable

amount of staff time, the Superintendent will communicate with the Board Chair. The Board will then direct the Superintendent on how to proceed with the request.”

Vote on Bylaw 9272 – Code of Conduct on Data Use as amended: Passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve Bylaw 9311 – Formulation, Adoption, Amendment of Policies, Bylaws and Administrative Regulation. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Action on 2020 Schedule of Board of Education Meetings:

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved to amend the previous motion to approve the 2020 Board of Education meeting schedule as reflected in the document presented.

Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Ku stated that there were questions regarding the revised dates on the 2020 schedule of Board of Education meetings. The first question was why the meeting was changed to August 25th from August 18th.

Mr. Cruson said that he was fine with having a meeting the third week of August. His thinking behind changing the dates in the summer was to give a bigger gap between meetings but not necessarily change the September 1st meeting.

Mrs. Ku agreed and would be fine with having the August meeting on August 18th. The second question was why the September 1st meeting was eliminated. Mrs. Ku agreed that the September 1st meeting should be on the calendar because according to the Policy, the Board of Education should have two meetings in September.

The third question referred to the Election Day meeting and if it needed to be changed from Tuesday (Election Day) to Wednesday evening (day after Election Day).

Mr. Vouros is not in favor with changing the August meeting to August 18th.

Mrs. Leidlein noted that if the August 25th meeting date does not change, she is not in favor of adding in the September 1st meeting because it is a week apart.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites believes that the Board of Education does a good job on publicizing their meeting dates so the public has enough time to plan if they would like to attend, even if it isn't their normal schedule.

Mr. Cruson feels that they do not need to take Election Day off but does not feel strongly enough about it to argue that point. Mr. Cruson feels that it is important to have two meetings in September, as it is Policy and we would be in violation of our own Policy if we didn't. Mr. Cruson feels that having meetings on August 18th and September 1st is the better option.

Mr. Cruson moved to amend the calendar and move the August 25th meeting to August 18, 2019 and add September 1, 2019 to the 2020 Board of Education meeting schedule. Mr. Delia seconds.

Vote: 3 ayes, 3 nays (Mrs. Harriman-Stites, Mr. Vouros, Mrs. Leidlein) Motion fails.

Vote on the 2020 Board of Education meeting schedule as presented: 4 ayes, 2 nays (Mr. Cruson, Mr. Delia) Motion passes.

Item 8 - New Business:

First Read of Project Adventure & Beyond Grade 5 Curriculum and Grade 6 Curriculum:

Mrs. Uberti thanked Sara Strait, teacher at Reed Intermediate for her hard work on this new course. This course is a combination of two courses which are 21st Century Skills and Project

Adventure. Up until this year, students took a half year of both of those classes. Now, Project Adventure & Beyond is a full year course in 5th and 6th grade.

Sara Strait displayed the curriculum for Project Adventure and Beyond for 5th and 6th Grades. They focus on being mindful in the moment, building a community, being safe, being honest and setting goals.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved that the Board of Education approve the minutes of November 6, 2019 with proposed changes. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mr. Cruson noted that there are changes that need to be made to the minutes and he will send the approved changes to Kathy June.

Vote: 4 ayes, 2 abstained (Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Delia). Motion passes.

Item 9 – Public Participation

Deborra Zukowski, 4 Cornfield Ridge Road, is looking forward to joining the Board at the next meeting. She wondered how the teachers responded to the grading system change at the High School and how it was received once it was implemented. Mrs. Zukowski also had a question for Special Education and if there are programs for non-special education students that have difficulty reading.

Kinga Walsh, 21 Horseshoe Ridge, Sandy Hook, believes that getting consistency in the schools is a wonderful change. It would be helpful for the Board to review the slides and make sure the presentation is clear for parents. It is important to poll the students to find out the social/emotional impact. The District has a responsibility to communicate with parents and everyone should work together to make it as seamless as possible.

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

Item 10 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:45 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 “11-19-19 minutes” from the listing:

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