

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

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on December 3, 2019 at 7:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers at 3 Primrose Street.

M. Ku, Chair
D. Delia, Vice Chair
D. Cruson, Secretary
D. Leidlein
J. Vouros
R. Harriman-Stites
D. Zukowski
H. Jojo
M. Chand

L. Rodrigue
A. Uberti
R. Bienkowski
D. Halstead, Town Clerk
8 Staff
3 Public
2 Press

Mrs. Halstead opened the meeting at 7:35 p.m.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 2 – Election of Officers

Mrs. Halstead asked for a nomination for Chair.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites nominated Michelle Ku for Chair for the Board of Education

Mr. Delia nominated Dan Cruson for Chair of the Board of Education.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites spoke to her nomination. She has served as Vice Chair and saw firsthand how Mrs. Ku she has led with dignity and grace, kindness and respect with attention to detail. She has a great deal of humility and flexibility, shows up for everything and is a presence in the town and on the Board of Education.

Mr. Delia spoke to his nomination. Mr. Cruson has served for two years as secretary. His attention to the needs required as secretary of the Board is impeccable. He would do a wonderful job chairing the Board of Education.

Mrs. Leidlein spoke to Mrs. Ku's nomination. The Chair is not an easy position. Mrs. Ku leads with fairness and represents this board in town and at the State level very well. The public appreciates what she does tirelessly

Mrs. Zukowski asked Mrs. Ku and Mr. Cruson over the last two years what they held as one of the biggest accomplishments of this board.

Mrs. Ku said the board discussions over the past two years have been very respectful, budgets have passed on the first try, CIP passes, and issues have been resolved very quickly. This is because of the success of the entire board which shows the importance of the whole board working together.

Mr. Cruson agrees that we have come a long way the past two years. The accomplishment of changing the start time was a decision in the best interest of students along with hiring a new superintendent which helped us come together to build our board to what it is today.

To his own nomination, Mr. Cruson said we have come a long way as a board but we can improve in areas. We dealt with the start time change and worked through problems with the special education system. He would like the board to be proactive in using data. There are areas we can divvy up the work so everyone can have a more active role if they want to take it.

Mrs. Ku emphasized that it's the work of the entire board that is important for the district and bringing ideas out to work together to come to an understanding as to what we want to achieve.

Mrs. Halstead called for a vote.

Michelle Ku received 4 votes: Mr. Vouros, Mrs. Harriman-Stites, Mrs. Leidlein and herself

Mr. Cruson received 3 votes: Mr. Delia, Mr. Cruson, Mrs. Zukowski

Majority vote was for Mrs. Ku.

Mrs. Halstead congratulated Mrs. Ku.

Mrs. Ku thanked Mrs. Halstead for moderating the meeting and opened up nominations for Vice Chair.

Mrs. Zukowski nominated Dan Delia for Vice Chair.

Mrs. Leidlein nominated John Vouros for Vice Chair.

Mrs. Ku nominated Mrs. Harriman-Stites for Vice Chair.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites declined the nomination and said it was time for someone else to step in.

Mrs. Zukowski spoke to her nomination. She said that the leadership of the board should be diverse, both qualitative and quantitative, and Mr. Delia as a former accountant and certified administrator brings a wealth of quantitative background to the board and is well-suited.

Mr. Leidlein spoke to her nomination. Mr. Vouros was beginning his third term on the board and has 30 years as a teacher in our district. He works tirelessly and is very passionate and dedicated to education and others see that in him. He will serve the board well.

Mr. Delia thanked Mrs. Zukowski for her nomination and stated that he supports and respects any decision of the board.

Mr. Vouros thanked Mrs. Leidlein for her nomination. He stated that he is not on the quantitative side of the spectrum and definitely on qualitative side. He thinks this board operates as a whole. There is tremendous respect in listening to what everyone else says but it's all about the children. This is a cohesive board now that works well and we have leadership that guides.

Although Mrs. Harriman-Stites declined the nomination, Mrs. Ku wanted to take this opportunity to speak about Mrs. Harriman-Stites' work. She stated that Mrs. Harriman-Stites has spoken her thoughts, communicates her position clearly, and speaks knowledgeably. She fiercely advocates our Board of Education budgets and has chaired the Policy Subcommittee. She is dedicated to the Board of Education's success and thus our student success. Mrs. Ku thanked her for her work on the board.

Mrs. Ku called for a vote for Vice Chair of the Board of Education.

Mr. Delia received 4 votes: Rebekah Harriman-Stites, Dan Cruson, Deborra Zukowski, Mr. Delia

Mr. Vouros 3 votes: Mrs. Ku, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Vouros.

Majority vote was for Mr. Delia.

Mrs. Ku asked for nominations for Secretary for the Board of Education.

Mr. Vouros nominated Dan Cruson.

There were no other nominations.

Mr. Vouros stated that Mr. Cruson's talents and abilities as secretary speak for themselves.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said that Mr. Cruson is excellent in the job he is doing and brings a lot to the board.

Mr. Cruson thanked everyone for their encouraging words.

The vote was unanimous for Mr. Cruson.

Mrs. Ku requested that Item 7 Old Business would be moved to after the reports were given.

Item 3 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to approve the consent agenda which included the correspondence report. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Zukowski moved to postpone the vote until she saw the correspondence.

Mr. Cruson said they were received before she was on the email chain but he would forward them to her.

Mrs. Ku said she could abstain since she did not see them.

Mr. Cruson seconded the motion.

Mrs. Ku asked why she wanted to postpone the vote.

Mrs. Zukowski felt that addressing correspondence is an important aspect of our position and should be seen by all Board members. She spoke to one of the people who corresponded and wanted to know what it involved.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites understood her point but this came in prior to when she started on the board. They were received before November 30.

Mrs. Leidlein said the reason to vote is just to acknowledge this was received by the Board secretary between meetings. We do not speak to the correspondence. In the past, the practice has been we would vote but new board members would not vote.

Vote on the motion to postpone voting on the consent agenda: 1 aye, 6 nays (Mrs. Ku, Mr. Delia, Mr. Cruson, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Vourros, Mrs. Harriman-Stites) Motion fails.

Vote to approve the consent agenda: 6 ayes, 1 abstained (Mrs. Zukowski) Motion passes.

Item 4 – Public Participation

Andy Clure, 24 Winton Farm Road, said it was truly an honor to serve on the Board for 4 years. He wished Mrs. Zukowski the best of luck. This is a tremendous group and wished everyone the best. He congratulated those elected tonight.

Keith Alexander, 8 Fawnwood Road, thanked everyone for being on the Board. He appreciates the policy work and was glad it's continuing to move forward.

Item 5 – Reports

Chair Report:

Mrs. Ku welcomed Mrs. Zukowski and said that she attended the CABA/CAPSS Convention and has also met with her and Dr. Rodrigue. She will also be attending the CABA new board member orientation meeting. She said that Mrs. Zukowski provided notes from the convention that were shared with the Board.

Mrs. Zukowski stated there were wonderful key notes at the convention which were very inspiring. She provided a handout on the Lighthouse Project that CABA is championing.

Mrs. Ku referred to information provided in the packets with dates of upcoming meetings during the Orientation for New Board Members. December 12 is the Board of Education retreat.

She also included information on committees that will be renewed at the next meeting. CAFE/EdAdvance will have a legislative breakfast on January 9 at 7:30 a.m. The CIP will be discussed at the December 18 and January 15 meetings of the Legislative council and possibly January 8 also. December 18 is also the joint meeting of all of the boards to discuss budget.

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Rodrigue congratulated the newly elected board officers. She attended a Superintendent's Roundtable at CES regarding later school start times and spoke about our experiences with this. We are sending another survey out in January to gather post implementation data. A letter was sent today to staff and families regarding plans for the 12/14 anniversary. On December 13 there will be a heightened police presence at all schools and at Sandy Hook School beginning Thursday evening through Friday. No press will be allowed on school campuses. There will be an interfaith service at Trinity Church at 7:00 a.m. on December 13. Tomorrow night she will attend the teacher of the year celebration with Kim Lowell. Bob Gerbert will provide a list of facilities updates for work over the winter break. She gave the Board CIAC passes for tournament games. All winter concerts are beginning and she thanked all teachers in the music department for their fine work under the leadership of Michelle Hiscavich.

There were no committee reports.

Mrs. Zukowski enjoyed attending the CAFE/CAPSS Convention which included the Lighthouse Project to help in decision making.

Mrs. Ku said that Nick Caruso conducted that session.

Student Representatives:

Mr. Chand reported that November 20 the Newtown Chapter of the National Honor Society hosted our induction ceremony for 130 new members.

Ms. Jojo said the football team played Masuk High School on Thanksgiving and won earning a first round state playoff game tomorrow night.

Mr. Chand said November 18 to 22 Newtown schools hosted International Education Week. He feels it needs to be advertised more attention. He urged the Board to create more cultural learning opportunities and funding money to the NICE program.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites agrees that we could do better with cultural awareness.

Mr. Vouros asked if in the world language classes there was a heavy emphasis on the culture of countries where the language was spoken.

Mr. Chand there was but the biggest thing is getting students interested in it. This should be started at a younger age.

Mr. Vouros agreed and said that some teachers have come down from the high school to work with elementary students.

Dr Rodrigue said the keynote speaker at the CAFE conference spoke about cultural diversity. She has had these discussions with parents regarding diversity in Newtown.

Item 7 – Old Business

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Beyond Grade 5 Curriculum and Grade 6 Curriculum.

Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Zukowski asked if this was a restructuring of an existing program and if there was a need for changes in resources.

Mrs. Uberti said this is a combination of two courses which are 21st Century Skills and Project Adventure. This is now one course for each grade with no additional resources required.

Motion passes unanimously.

Item 6 – Presentations

Teaching and Learning Presentation:

Dr. Frank Purcaro, Director of Teaching and Learning, gave a presentation of his work in the district and how his responsibilities connect to the district goals. He is addressing Goal #2 which is to implement concept-based curriculum to promote a culture of rigorous learning in all classrooms and Goal #3 which is to analyze and utilize common assessment data to drive instructional practices. He has been gathering information through classroom visitation and learning walks along with quantitative data analysis and qualitative data analysis and collection.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites asked if teachers know when they are coming for the learning walks and how feedback was shared.

Dr. Purcaro said the first rounds were announced. For the last few rounds we will just go to the class. Feedback was asked more from the principals. It would be more of a general discussion about our visit.

Mrs. Zukowski said it was an excellent presentation and was appreciated in such a short time.

Mrs. Leidlein noted that the focus is more on evaluating instruction and not evaluating the teacher. She asked if he would be part of the teacher evaluation process.

Dr. Purcaro said he doesn't evaluate teachers but is part of the teacher evaluation committee.

Mr. Delia feels teachers need to hear something if they are observed. Regarding the map testing he asked if math closely ties with SBAC achievement. Does it only test ELA and math and was science included?

Dr. Purcaro said we are just using the math and ELA portion. He doesn't believe there is a science component.

Mr. Delia asked how often map testing was used to guide instruction.

Dr. Purcaro said the test is three times per year and will provide good information in the learning continuum to improve instruction. He also works with the ELA and math specialists.

Mr. Delia asked the turnaround from when the test is taken to see if there is any modification of instruction to meet a need.

Dr. Purcaro said that was happening right now as we see results.

Mr. Vouros assumed he would be able to show us how he can help the teachers give this instruction based on the needs of cohorts in the class falling in three or four levels.

Dr. Purcaro said we are working to make it efficient for teachers dealing with these levels.

Regarding Mr. Delia's concern, the plan is to meet with teachers regarding the learning walks to explain to them the protocol. He and Mrs. Uberti will be meeting with teachers in the next few weeks.

District K-12 Counseling Program:

Bret Nichols, Director of K-12 Counseling Services, appreciated the opportunity to show what is being done in the counseling department. He introduced school counselors Sue Connelly from the middle school, Amy McGoldrick from Reed Intermediate School, Kim Shapiro from Head O'Meadow School and Alexa Blanchard from the high school.

Alexa Blanchard reported that we work to make connections with the high school students and we also teach counselor workshops there.

Sue Connelly, eighth grade counselor at the middle school said they get to know everyone in depth and they get to know us. We have also increased the number of lessons we do with students with activities conducted in different environments. We provide support between Reed and the high school when needed.

Amy McGoldrick from Reed stated that they discuss student success plans starting in fifth grade and work on ways for them to achieve their goals.

Kim Shapiro from Hawley School stated that early intervention is key. We work on counseling lessons in each elementary school to prepare them for Reed.

Mrs. Leidlein asked that regarding the streamlined 504 process, if this means students who have had a 504 in the past are no longer receiving accommodations.

Mr. Nichols said we can't take away the accommodations, but this protocol will help limit the referrals to those who are really qualified. Information on the 504 process is on the district website.

Mrs. Leidlein loved the shadow day and asked if we did that for students in private schools and if they can go to the middle school for this program.

Mr. Nichols said it is limited but we are looking into offering it a different way because there were space issues in the classrooms.

Mrs. Zukowski asked Mr. Nichols how much time he had to do all of this extra work beside the high school counseling.

Mr. Nichols said him leaving the building has not impacted the high school but he still needs to be there and could use more time.

Mr. Vouros spoke about the students selected to shadow at the high school and what the plan was for eighth graders to spend a day there.

Mr. Nichols stated they started with those who were interested which was 30 students. There are other times eighth graders visit the high school.

Ms. Blanchard would like to include a second day for students this year depending on the interest.

Mrs. Ku asked if they had anything specific regarding the process of transitioning to college.

Mr. Nichols said he was proud of the work they have done giving information to seniors in the counselor workshops. We have more resources about college on our website for parents and students.

Item 8 – New Business

First Read of Policies:

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said if there are questions about these policies we have another policy meeting next week. These are a continuation of the 9000 series. We have been doing a lot of consolidation of policies so we have a number to rescind which were folded in to others or are duplicates.

Policy 9321 – The biggest change is that we incorporated language from the previous policy and from Cabe where they used electronic participation in meetings for full participation of board members.

Mrs. Zukowski had a number of questions regarding rescinding Policy 9320.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said information was folded into another policy. Frequently it's not just one policy. There are policies that have three sections so we tried to consolidate the information. She would provide additional information at the next meeting.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites explained the procedures of the Policy Committee in revising our current policies.

Mr. Delia asked if the Policy Committee thoroughly vetted this.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said we did and feels that we presented this in a simplified way.

Mr. Cruson stated that we go through numerous versions of policies including ones from other towns to pick the one that is the best for us.

Mrs. Zukowski asked that when the second read comes and there are questions if you have to vote on the policy.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said that certain policies have to be put in place so we try to stick to the second read but we don't always have to do that. Getting the questions in writing to the Policy Committee is essential.

Mrs. Zukowski gave examples of her concerns on this policy.

Mrs. Ku said the Policy Committee works hard on the bylaws of the board and she has questions also but it is best that questions can be brought to the Policy Committee. You can attend but you cannot participate.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said input is always appreciated but the Board needs to trust the people who have done the work. Maybe taking time to see how things operate would be helpful.

Mrs. Zukowski understands the work is extensive but an independent set of eyes should not be dismissed.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said the first read has been about general substance and change made. Taking time to see how things operate would be best.

Mrs. Ku asked her to submit questions to the Policy Committee to bring back for a second read. Dr. Rodrigue stated that was why we send the packet in advance and questions can be asked in advance.

Policy 9323 solidifies how the agenda is formed.

Policy 9325 follows our existing policy. We were concerned about #3 regarding complaints against employees being forwarded to the Board of Education. We feel the Superintendent should notify the Board.

Policy 9325.1 there was a discussion around #5 so we added wording to make it more clear.

Mrs. Zukowski said there is a conflict between the Charter and the bylaws and the Charter takes precedent.

Mrs. Leidlein said if you are not present for the discussion you cannot vote on any item.

Mrs. Ku asked the Policy Committee to answer that question.

Policy 9325.2 we added the consent agenda piece.

Policy 9325.3 language was confusing so we extended it and quoted from Robert's Rules.

Policy 9325.4 there are not many changes.

Policy 9360 was taken from another district.

Mr. Cruson said this was a Cabe recommended policy.

Mrs. Zukowski said CAFE is a voluntary membership and asked if we could decide not to be a member. If we have this as a policy, how would that be rescinded if we were not a member of CAFE?

Mrs. Ku also had a question but feels it is good to be involved with CAFE State relations but it is a time commitment and wanted to consider that as a board

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said that if we are going to have a Board of Education member on that we should have it in the policy.

Mrs. Zukowski asked if that could be done with an annual resolution. We could join other organizations besides CAFE.

Policy 9400 there is additional wording part of which Dr. Rodrigue has been doing. It is important to ensure the policies are being carried out.

Mrs. Ku asked if CAFE required all of the series policies to come to them at once.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said that's what we have been doing.

Mr. Cruson suggested looking into that when we decide to move them through the Board.

Item 9 – Public Participation

Minutes of November 19, 2019:

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the minutes of November 19, 2019. Mr. Cruson seconded. Vote: 6 ayes, 1 abstained (Mrs. Zukowski)
Motion passes.

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

Item 10 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:43 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 "12-3-19 minutes" from the listing:

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