

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

Minutes of the Board of Education budget workshop on February 4, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers at 3 Primrose Street.

M. Ku, Chair	L. Rodrigue
D. Delia, Vice Chair	A. Uberti
D. Cruson, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
D. Leidlein (7:30 p.m.)	14 Staff
J. Vouros	2 Press
R. Harriman-Stites	5 Public
D. Zukowski	

Mrs. Ku called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 2 – Public Participation – none

Item 3 – Second Read and Possible Action on Grade 4 Math Curriculum

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the Grade 4 Math Curriculum.

Mr. Cruson seconded.

Dan Delia thanked the committee for their hard work which was impressive.

Motion passes unanimously.

Item 4 – Special Education Out-of-District Transportation Contract

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the Out-of-District Special Needs Transportation Services Contract to EdAdvance for the period of five (5) years beginning July 1, 2020 and terminating on June 30, 2025 at the rates as bid on January 10, 2020.

Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mr. Delia said the CIP Committee met January 29 and discussed the transportation bids. He thanked those present at the meeting which included Debbie Leidlein, Bob Gerbert, Dr. Rodrigue, Deb Zukowski, Ron Bienkowski, Deb Petersen, Sally Lynch, Tanya Vadas and Rick Spreyer.

We received five bids, interviewed two companies, and chose EdAdvance. Mrs. Vadas provided a financial analysis and Sally Lynch, Deb Petersen and Rick Spreyer spoke about our experience with EdAdvance. He fully supports this decision.

Mrs. Zukowski said EdAdvance had the lowest price of the group and they provide our transportation now as well as for surrounding towns.

Mrs. Ku said because she serves on the EdAdvance Board of Directors she would abstain from voting as a conflict of interest.

Vote: 5 ayes, 1 abstained (Mrs. Ku) Motion passes.

Item 5 – Schedule Update – Elementary Schools

Dr. Rodrigue addressed concerns about the elementary 6-day schedule. This grew out of a discussion regarding the benefits of this for students and staff for having a common, flexible schedule not tied to the calendar day. This will allow the inclusion of science instruction, Spanish in its own instructional space in the schedule, and a way to mitigate natural losses in instructional time that occurs every year. This is related to the budget in terms of spending dollars in resources, professional development, texts and units of study without being able to fit

this in at the elementary level. The 5-day schedule has losses in instruction and allows little flexibility.

Mr. Moretti stated that this concept started because of the struggles teachers are having fitting everything into their day. The 6-day schedule came out of that conversation. It allows us to have larger blocks of time on certain days. We can't do that now without cutting something else. Dr. Gombos said we will not lose art or music classes.

Mr. Geissler said they have increased instructional demands and it's difficult to have the needed classes.

Dr. Rodrigue said it's not easy to find that balance with Spanish, science and academics while giving time to the arts.

Mrs. Zukowski noted that regarding art and music we are spending a lot of effort on SEL but art and science are also tools therapists use to help children.

Mr. Cruson said it sounded like there was a concern about art shows being impacted and asked if there were plans to look at music and art and add oversight to it to see if things could be changed for the better.

Mr. Moretti stated that he has heard art show comments for a while. The art teacher that retired when he started had large art shows. When she retired the new teacher was asked by parents to help but she did not tap into that help. Shortly after that the art teachers began being shared between buildings. We should have mapped out what a quality art show would look like and have it be uniform between the four elementary schools.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites asked the impact of the 6-day schedule for students who get enrichment or are pulled out for services.

Mr. Geissler said we have to put in lunch, recess, and the interventions and enrichments as well as not lose PLC time.

Mrs. Leidlein commended them for looking at this which is in the best interest of the students. Parents have the hardest time changing but the students adapt well.

Mr. Delia asked the plan to stay ahead communication-wise and share with the Board.

Mrs. Uberti said we are early in the process and only laid out a portion of the schedule. A lot of work needs to be done including how we communicate this. We have not had a full discussion with staff yet. We want parents to know that everyone is on the same page.

Item 6 – Discussion and Possible Action on 2020-2021 Budget

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education adopt the Superintendent's recommended budget for \$79,281,774. Mr. Cruson seconded.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education amend the motion to accept the technical adjustments as presented for a total reduction of \$34,065. Mr. Cruson seconded

Mr. Bienkowski spoke about the technical adjustments which included liability insurance for \$7,506, property insurance for \$4,064, out-of-district transportation for \$20,000, and National Superintendent's Roundtable for \$2,495.

Motion passes unanimously.

Dr. Rodrigue spoke about the BOE adjustments which include the special education teacher for the SAIL Program at the middle school for \$61,961, the health and wellness teacher less the grant for \$35,000 for a cost of \$29,316, the Bounce Back trauma awareness training for staff for \$2,500, and the Diversity Program for students for \$7,500.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved to increase the proposed budget by \$101,277 as presented by the Superintendent. Mrs. Leidlein seconded.

Mrs. Leidlein asked how many teachers will train for Bounce Back.

Mrs. Uberti said that we will potentially train counselors at the elementary schools. We have a trained staff member who can train others.

Mr. Vouros feels the Diversity Program should be for the elementary students also.

Dr. Rodrigue was not sure that this group deals with elementary but we would look at other programs.

Mr. Vouros feels it was essential to have it for K-6 students.

Motion passes unanimously.

Mrs. Ku spoke about our current positive balance and asked if there were things we could pay for from the surplus this year.

Mr. Bienkowski said we have a \$436,000 surplus. We could purchase these items with little risk to this year's budget. He expects an uptick in special education tuition for half of the school year for \$100,000 to \$150,000. We will have a balance of \$200,000 remaining. He is confident we can handle all of these items.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved to reduce the budget by \$97,210 for the purchase of one concert tuba for \$7,700, one Lacrosse goal for \$1,850, Stepping Stones textbooks for \$28,000, Envision textbooks for \$14,000, two ride-on floor scrubbers for \$15,000 each for the middle school and Middle Gate School, one walk-behind floor scrubber for Hawley School and one maker space for the middle school for \$8,160. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Mrs. Zukowski compared our budget from 2010 when the high school addition opened. She asked why there were two school psychologists at Sandy Hook School and was not sure why we needed a guidance counselor in each elementary school.

Dr. Rodrigue said we clarified the psychologist and social worker positions at Reed and the middle school. Counselors are support personnel and many in the elementary schools were grant funded. We need one in each elementary school. Sandy Hook School has the pre-school which is why they need two psychologists.

Mrs. Petersen stated that the pre-school always had a psychologist. The other psychologist does the same as the ones in the other three elementary schools. The behavior analysts oversee the pre-school and the autism program at Middle Gate School. They do observations and assist teachers with students. One works with SEAL Program at Hawley and also works at the high school in the SAIL Program. One picks up the other schools and helps with a high school student.

Mrs. Zukowski wanted to learn more about what the staff does in these positions.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved to reduce the allowance for savings from turnover for \$97,000.

Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mr. Delia took the average actual figures over the last three year and felt it was reasonable to expect the average to stay the same.

Mrs. Leidlein asked Mr. Bienkowski how we came to that number and his thoughts on motion.

Mr. Bienkowski said the numbers have been favorable and this year we have budgeted \$375,000. With the proposed adjustment it would be \$472,000. This is the highest since we had the early retirement incentive. We could adjust that number but he would be more comfortable with \$50,000. Whatever we do will put stress on next year's budget.

Mrs. Leidlein spoke about amending the motion to adjust Mr. Delia's number to \$50,000 instead of \$97,000.

Mr. Delia was trying to come closer to the actual number.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites was concerned that we might be over-expecting and felt there should be an adjustment but not with a number that high.

Mrs. Zukowsk asked what would happen if it's too aggressive an adjustment.

Mr. Bienkowski said we would have to manage our way thought that shortfall with a budget freeze on discretionary spending that can be delayed. We look at expenses every month. If it was right we could take control of expenses.

Mr. Delia called the question.

Mrs. Ku said that would require a second, was not debatable, and had a 2/3 member vote on the question

Mrs. Zukowski seconded the motion to call the question

Vote on motion ending debate passes unanimously.

Vote on amendment to reduce by \$97,000: 2 ayes, 5 nays (Mrs. Ku, Mr. Cruson, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Vouros, Mrs. Harriman-Stites) Motion fails.

MOTION: Mrs. Leidlein moved to adjust the allowance for turnover by \$50,000. Mr. Vouros seconded.

Mrs. Leidlein trusts Mr. Bienkowski's judgement. It is an unknown factor and would prefer to defer to his experience.

Motion passes unanimously.

Mr. Bienkowski said at this time the total adjustments are approximately \$80,000 with an overall reduction of approximately .11%.

Mr. Delia asked the discrepancy between building and ground repairs and emergency repairs.

Mr. Bienkowski said we budgeted these amounts over the past several years but we don't know what might break down. Right now we are 76% spent. Based on the history we will probably over-expend these accounts.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved to amend the original motion to adopt the Superintendent's recommended budget for a total of \$79,201,776. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Mr. Delia thanked Mr. Bienkowski, Dr. Rodrigue and Mrs. Vadas for their hard work on the budget.

Mrs. Zukowski thinks the budget is about as tight as it is comfortable to be and thanked everyone for their good job.

Mrs. Ku thanked all of the Board members and everyone who participates in this process. We've had difficult discussions and thoughtful decisions by everyone.

Mrs. Leidlein thanked the public who shared their ideas and thoughts as we reflected and discussed this budget.

Vote on main motion to adopt the budget: Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education direct the business office to prepare the final budget and authorize the Director of Business to make any technical and arithmetical changes. Mr. Cruson. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 7 – Public Participation – none

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

Item 8 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Daniel J. Cruson, Jr.
Secretary

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