

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

Minutes of the Board of Education budget workshop on February 18, 2020 at 7:30 p.m. in the Reed Intermediate School library, 3 Trades Lane.

M. Ku, Chair	L. Rodrigue
D. Delia, Vice Chair	A. Uberti
D. Cruson, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
D. Leidlein	3 Staff
J. Vouros (absent)	1 Press
R. Harriman-Stites	
D. Zukowski	
H. Jojo (absent)	
M. Chand	

Mrs. Ku called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 2 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the consent agenda which includes the minutes of January 28 and February 4, 2020, the Newtown High School Debate field trip, the donations to Newtown High School and Newtown Middle School, and the correspondence report. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Zukowski asked that the minutes of January 28 and February 4 be removed from the consent agenda.

Motion passes unanimously for the field trip, donations and correspondence report.

Item 3 – Public Participation

Item 4 – Reports

Mrs. Ku shared a list of voting guidelines for our meetings. She and Dr. Rodrigue presented the budget to the Board of Finance last week, had questions and asked us to attend this Thursday's meeting. They will finalize their vote on the budget on February 27. Mrs. Ku also attended the CABE Board of Directors Retreat. George Coleman was the facilitator and they discussed strategic planning for CABE, spoke about diversity and inclusion, and voted on a consultant to work with them on this. She attended the PEAC meeting last week. Mrs. Harriman-Stites will be our liaison around diversity. Mrs. Ku hoped to have a meeting in March for a self-evaluation and setting goals for next year and may ask someone from CABE to attend. She was also elected Interim Board of Directors President.

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Rodrigue is expecting to have school calendars at the next meeting for the next two years. She feels strongly that staff wellness and recognition are important. We do recognize staff in some ways but we are working on additional incentives for our staff members. For example, 10 years in our district would be a milestone.

The Partnership subgroup with PEAC wants to give students in other schools an opportunity to speak at Board meetings. The Budget subgroup of PEAC has supported a "Super Spotlight" to share clips of classroom activities. We are also working on a plan to start a community conversation on diversity. The State is working on a minority recruitment plan. She thanked Rebekah for her willingness to step in as a Board representative.

Committee Reports:

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said the Policy Committee was working on the rest of the 9000 series and will review the 5000 series.

Mrs. Ku said the Curriculum and Instruction Committee met and Statistics and Foundational Algebra I were presented by the high school. Mrs. Uberti gave an update on the textbooks.

Mrs. Zukowski attended the middle school PTA meeting. Their big effort is the Be Kind Ben's Bells mural and they are trying to raise money to help with the cost.

Newtown High School Student Representative Report:

Ms. Jojo was unable to attend the meeting.

Mr. Chand said there have been many recent athletics winners, senior nights events, and many clubs hosted events. There are new clubs starting this year and the English Department held a Poetry Out Loud Competition. We also hosted the eighth grade parent student night. Newtown High School was honored by a School Climate Committee Review Board who came in February to talk to everyone involved in the school environment. Regarding school climate there was a mental health fair in the lobby. At the State Board of Education meeting, the Commissioner asked him and another student to write a statement on something of importance. He shared his statement on mental health and education.

Mr. Delia reported that the CIP committee met January 29 and spoke about reviewing our responsibilities. We will have a meeting each month and address items on the CIP.

Mrs. Ku suggested the CIP committee address the non-lapsing fund.

Financial Report

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the financial report for the month ending January 31, 2020. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mr. Bienkowski reported that the Excess Cost grant offset is estimated at 74.8% based on the initial estimates done by the State. This represents \$357,431 more than was budgeted. Energy is looking great because of the mild winter.

Mrs. Zukowski asked when they are paying out the grant.

Mr. Bienkowski said in February and May and the amount in this report is the calculation we got from the State. This payment will equal half and they can adjust the May payment.

Mrs. Zukowski referred to the \$160,000 for special education and asked if the special education contingency could be used.

Mr. Bienkowski said it could if we get to that point. We don't make a decision until the end of the year.

Mrs. Zukowski asked when we would get a detailed report.

Mr. Bienkowski said with the new system our primary focus was for payroll. Encumbrances are not in the report so we had to do a manual calculation. The reports also look different. We are going to try to develop a detailed report from eFinance.

Motion passes unanimously.

Item 5 – Old Business

Item 6 – New Business

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education support the initiatives proposed for Newtown Public School's application for the Perkins IV Career and Technology Education Secondary Supplemental Enhancement Grant. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Dr. Rodrigue stated that this grant is to further develop the academic, career and technical skills of secondary students and postsecondary students who enroll in Career and Technical Education programs. It was developed from additional State funds. At Newtown High School, over 57% of our students take these courses. Thanks to Kristin Larson and Erik Holst-Grubbe we applied for this competitive grant to enhance our robotics program, support our future curriculum, site licensing for software and other technologies, and training.

Mrs. Larson summarized the grant and spoke about what the money would be used for. We can apply for funding between \$15,000 and \$50,000 and we are looking to update the computer lab for the video game design courses, purchase additional robotix supplies, purchase site licensing for software for computer science and coding courses, add new mobile devices, provide a stipend for a second FBLA advisor and expand the robotix curriculum.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites asked why this had to come to the Board.

Mrs. Larson said it's a requirement in the competitive proposal. Minutes need to be included.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites asked that after this one-time cost, how we would sustain it.

Mrs. Larson said most are sustainable because these courses are already running. The code licensing is \$5,400 and the advisor stipend is \$1,500.

Mr. Delia asked them to elaborate on how to update the curriculum for robotix.

Mr. Holst-Grubbe said Steve George teaches the major concepts. We had a robotix club and built a robot. Student Government paid for us to compete in the competition. To be competitive we will need better materials.

Motion passes unanimously.

First Read of Policies:

Mrs. Harriman-Stites spoke about each policy.

Policy 9326 Taping/Recording Board Meetings. A piece was added about notifying that meetings will be recorded by putting a permanent sign outside the door.

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Mr. Delia asked about privacy for students if a student has a non-photo agreement.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said that would be a separate issue and if the public was notified that the meeting was being recorded that would supersede the agreement.

Dr. Rodrigue spoke to Mr. Rosenthal and we are all set with a sign if this is approved.

Mrs. Zukowski asked about people like the press who record.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites stated this is just about our recording the meetings.

Mrs. Ku said anyone could be recording and we wouldn't know it. This would apply to subcommittee meetings also with the chair needing to say it was being recorded.

Mr. Cruson said regarding Board meetings, if there is a permanent sign the intent is to warn people that recordings are being made. It would also apply to subcommittees.

Mrs. Zukowski felt if people knew they were being recorded they might act differently. It would make sense to let everyone know they are being recorded.

Mr. Delia said we are focusing on our Board policy.

Mrs. Zukowski said the current policy says the presiding officer asks if anyone is recording. We are taking that out of the policy and she wasn't sure if that's what the Board wants to do.

Dr. Rodrigue said this is just a Board policy. The town didn't have to go along with having a sign. We wanted to be sure this was flagged.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites felt that with the availability of technology it's safe to assume you will be recorded.

Mrs. Leidlein said the current policy states we may be recording. It's not up to the Board to ask if anyone is recording. She was fine with the revision.

Mrs. Zukowski said as Mr. Cruson stated it would apply to our committee meetings also and she asked that the policy committee discuss this and get back to the Board.

Policy 9327 Electronic Mail Communications. We added pieces about security and language around Board members.

Mr. Cruson said we strengthened the wording around emails. If it's not a legal obligation to use the email service he feels it's best to keep the policy more flexible.

Mrs. Ku asked if they talked about Board members obligation to use the Newtown email account.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if it was legal to require us to use the Newtown email account.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said they checked to see if it was legal.

Mrs. Leidlein felt we can recommend it but didn't think you could require it.

Mr. Cruson felt if we put it in a policy it becomes a bigger chore if the Board decides it doesn't have to use school email. He is in favor of keeping the policy more flexible.

Mr. Delia agreed with Mrs. Leidlein. This sets the tone for proper communication from the Board.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said Board members should remember if they use their personal email that is also opened to FOIA.

Mrs. Leidlein suggested saying the Board's preferred method of communication.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites would come back with language.

Policy 9330 Board/School district Records. Mrs. Harriman-Stites said a lot was taken out of the policy after speaking with legal counsel. These are Rich Mills' suggestions.

Mr. Cruson said he also suggested striking the entire policy.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites stated that the pieces about Smart phones and hand held scanners are important for us. His concern was to ensure following the Connecticut Statutes.

Mrs. Zukowski requested to put the changes in red print.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said they do but the section on hand-held was not because there were numerous changes and that was not picked up.

Mr. Delia referred to item five regarding test questions and if parents have the right to see this information.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said those were not allowed. What is not allowed to share is in the Connecticut General Statutes.

Mrs. Zukowski asked if FOIA applied to minors and their parents and if parents have full access to tests.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said parents can access student records in another policy.

Policy 9350 Hearings to be rescinded. This policy is in conflict with some of the other policies and is not necessary. Some are in direct conflict with our policies and public hearings on the budget.

Mrs. Ku asked if parents can request hearings for transportation.

Mr. Bienkowski said those would be covered by the State statute.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said things not in our policies are covered in the State statutes.

Correspondence Report Discussion:

Mrs. Ku surveyed the Chair list through CABA and 15 responded. Eight Boards do not have a correspondence report and, of the seven that do, none indicated that they automatically include the entire text of correspondence in the minutes. Three districts did not indicate how they handle the report, three indicated that the secretary reports highlighted them at the meeting for the minutes, and one district lists the correspondence and the Board votes to receive and place the content on file.

Mr. Cruson wondered about voting on the correspondence report. It was more appropriate to have it in the report section of the meeting. We would still have a report but the secretary would speak to their report and highlight items for the record.

Mrs. Zukowski agreed.

Mrs. Ku was seeking everyone's opinion.

Mrs. Zukowski said voting on it doesn't make sense. She liked Mr. Cruson's suggestion because it gives the secretary a report at the secretary's discretion as to what is addressed.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said it's appropriate for the secretary to report on the correspondence and felt we could try to see how that works.

Mrs. Delia thought that would open a can of worms in how to decide what to share.

Mr. Cruson said he could choose to share things if there is a particular issue but also opens it up if someone from the public wants it shared.

Mr. Delia stated that if someone doesn't want something shared and they don't express that to the Board and it is shared, that would be a concern.

Mr. Cruson said it puts a lot of weight on the secretary but he wouldn't share the full text and we don't want to share something that the person doesn't want shared.

Dr. Rodrigue was concerned about this and felt that those writing need to know it will be brought more to the surface. .

Mr. Delia asked how it would be handled if someone wants to share but have it not be part of our agenda or be a complaint.

Mr. Cruson said that this gives a voice to someone not coming to a meeting and it wouldn't be open to action.

Mrs. Leidlein said the more details you give, the more precarious a position you put the secretary and the Board in. Someone from the district office should look at the report before it went out. If you release information that shouldn't be released it could be difficult to deal with and explain. She cautioned that this could make more work for the district in determining what should be released. The district would have to do a check on the content being released to the public because it could be about staff or students.

Mr. Cruson said this was changed in 2013.

Mrs. Ku said if we change it, we want to public to know.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said a simple response to the email would be to say the secretary would like to share this at the next Board meeting and they should let him know if they have an issue. We don't have to stay with this practice if it isn't working.

Mrs. Ku said it won't be put to the test until there is a hot issue. The way Mr. Cruson is handling the correspondence is very professional and she has a lot of trust in how he handles the emails. Dr. Rodrigue stated that parents have told her they receive timely responses thanks to Mr. Cruson.

Minutes of January 16, 2020:

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the minutes of January 16, 2020. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites noted that her name was not listed.

Vote: 4 yes, 2 abstained (Mrs. Leidlein, Mrs. Harriman-Stites)

Minutes of January 21, 2020:

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the minutes of January 21, 2020. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Minutes of January 28, 2020:

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the minutes of January 28, 2020. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Zukowski said she had changes to these minutes

Mrs. Ku stated that minutes should not be corrected to say what you meant to say and suggested they view the video.

MOTION: Mrs. Zukowski moved to postpone the acceptance of these minutes at the next meeting and would send the times they were discussed on the video. Mrs. Harriman-Stites seconded.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites noted that there was a lot that was not in the minutes that she said but wanted to be clear that the minutes are not word for word. The spirit of what we say should be captured.

Mr. Delia said it was her right to change the record but have to be careful we say what we mean when recorded.

Motion passes unanimously.

Minutes of February 4, 2020:

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the minutes of February 4, 2020. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Zukowski augmented what Mr. Delia said about the contract on our thought process in choosing EdAdvance.

MOTION: Mrs. Zukowski moved to amend the wording. Mr. Cruson seconded.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved to postpone the approval of these minutes and provide the times in the video. Mrs. Zukowski seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 7 – Public Participation

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

Item 8 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:13 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 “2-18-20 minutes” from the listing:

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