

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

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting on March 3, 2020 in the council chambers at 3 Primrose Street at 7:30 p.m.

M. Ku, Chair	L. Rodrigue
D. Delia, Vice Chair	A. Uberti
D. Cruson, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
D. Leidlein	6 Staff
J. Vouros	2 Press
R. Harriman-Stites (absent)	2 Public
D. Zukowski	
H. Jojo	
M.Chand	

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

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Mrs. Ku spoke about Debbie Leidlein who has been on the Board of Education for 10 years which is an amazing accomplishment. She is kind, deliberate and an incredibly fair and thoughtful leader. We have been lucky to have her contributions and leadership these past 10 years.

Dr. Rodrigue thanked Mrs. Leidlein on behalf of the staff, students, and families for her service and important work on the Board of Education for the last decade. She went above and beyond in advocating for children and education.

Mrs. Leidlein stated that she believes in giving back to the community. Being an educator made her commit to the Board of Education as opposed to other boards to make a difference for her children and those in the community. She has enjoyed her time on the Board and will carry this the rest of her life. She appreciates the opportunity to serve Newtown in this capacity.

Item 2 – Celebration of Excellence

Item 3 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the consent agenda which includes the Newtown High School field trips, the donation to Head O'Meadow School, the donation to Newtown High School, and the acceptance of the correspondence report.

Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Leidlein asked to remove the high school trips from the consent agenda.

Mrs. Ku said they would be discussed at the end of the meeting.

Motion passes unanimously.

Item 4 – Public Participation

Item 5 – Reports

Chair Report: Mrs. Ku said that after the discussion about how to handle the correspondence report and after considering desires of the Board that were split, she was hopeful to limit the report but she consulted with the Board attorney and concluded because of the sensitive nature of emails it was not worth the sometimes legal risk that may come with it, including the first amendment rights. We will continue the way we have been doing it. It is prudent to air on the side of caution. The Board of Finance made a \$100,000 reduction to the Board of Education budget and will present to the Legislative Council the next evening. They will be talking about long-term budget planning. March 11 is the CAFE Day on the Hill when they host the board of education members to discuss legislation coming up. Mrs. Ku hopes to have another Board

self- evaluation in April after the budget passes. We received a letter from NEASC for the two-year progress report for Newtown High School and listed several points they were pleased to learn about.

Mr. Vouros asked her to read the items.

Mrs. Ku named a few from the list which included that they were pleased with our extensive work on the curriculum and the creation of the professional learning communities. They also need to be updated if we have any changes in the school including the name of the principal and/or superintendent.

Superintendent's Report: Dr. Rodrigue spoke about the letter she sent regarding the coronavirus and there are no reported cases in Connecticut but we continue to take our cues from the Health Department and CDC. The Town and school officials met this this morning and spoke about future concerns and what impact it will have on school and actions that might be needed to put into place if we consider closing a school or the district. We are asking everyone to stay calm, keep children home when sick, wash hands frequently and reach out to Donna Culbert in the Health Department. We decided to cancel overseas trips because the CDC said there should be no unnecessary travel.

She and Mrs. Harriman-Stites toured the agriscience program at Shepaug Valley and Megan Bennett, Superintendent, will be here at a future Board meeting with updates. This is the first evening of sharing the Superintendent's Spotlight which came out of our PEAC group. It is Mrs. Carla Tischio's fifth grade class at Reed.

Committee Reports:

Mr. Vouros spoke about the two math curriculum discussed at the recent Curriculum and Instruction Committee meeting which will be presented tonight.

Mr. Cruson said the Communications Subcommittee met on February 24 to define what the committee is doing going forward and while the schools and Superintendent are responsible for communicating with the parents and staff, they will reach out to the community. They will meet once a month and send a newsletter quarterly which the Board will review before it's sent. They also talked about the budget newsletter and will use the points of pride as the basis and expand on that. Mr. Cruson also went to Sandy Hook School for "Reading Across America" along with other Board members which was very enjoyable.

Newtown High School Student Reports:

Ms. Jojo reported the third quarter was in full swing and winter sports were wrapping up.

Mr. Chand stated that the production of Pippin will be held the end of this month along with the junior prom. Student Government hosted a talent show and the Science Bowl team is competing at UCONN this weekend.

Mrs. Jojo also stated that many clubs are holding fundraisers for charities of their choice with Unified Sports raising money for Special Olympics Connecticut.

Mr. Chand shared that the dance team won states on February 29 for the third consecutive year in a row. The gymnastics team finished third in the state championship.

Ms. Jojo spoke about the importance of educating students on the coronavirus. At the recent NICE meeting they talked about risk factors when traveling and the importance of keeping students informed.

Mr. Chand said seniors are hearing from colleges and have begun the decision process of where they want to go. They are also looking at scholarships and some are still visiting schools. Overall the morale at the high school is high.

Item 7 – New Business

Algebra 1 Foundations Part 1 Curriculum and Statistics Curriculum:

Gene Hall and Chris Pearson gave a presentation on these curricula.

Mr. Delia asked why this was just a high school class.

Dr. Longobucco replied that it was for special education students.

Mr. Delia asked if staff was being trained to implement the statistics curriculum.

Mr. Pearson said he taught this for the last four years and also took a class at Tufts to be able to teach AP statistics. We discuss the classes and put in the best qualified teachers.

Mr. Delia asked if any other resources were needed.

Mr. Pearson replied that the text we use is strong and also prepares students for the AP test.

Mr. Delia inquired if there was any crossover into business classes or Capstone Projects to which Mr. Pearson said the opportunity to cross into the Capstone Project is more in political science classes.

Mr. Delia said one part was writing a RAFT article.

Mr. Pearson said RAFT is an acronym we use when they get a project.

Mrs. Zukowski asked if there are viral models like epidemiology which would look at the coronavirus and the probability of it spreading.

Mr. Pearson said that would fall more into the exponential growth function of Algebra I or II.

Mrs. Zukowski asked if former students come back and talked about that class.

Mr. Pearson said he has had students come back who took statistics in college and knew a lot of what they were taught.

Dr. Rodrigue said RAFT was the writing strategy and stands for Role Audience Format Topic.

Mr. Delia said this type of math class could guide them in a direction almost to a career and thanked them for their hard work.

Action on Policies:

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve Bylaw 9326. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Zukowski noted that the Policy Committee was supposed to come back to the Board after reviewing this policy. The new policy says a sign will be posted on this room but not the room where the subcommittees meet. The other change was the presiding officer would ask if anyone would be recording, which was removed. Her question was if this policy meant to protect the Board to say we will tell them of all recordings we know of, or to reassure people that when they speak they have a good chance of not being taped if they are expecting not to be taped.

Mr. Cruson said it was next to impossible to police what people are doing at meetings even if we adjusted the policy to say people should make it known.

Motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve Bylaw 9327 Electronic Mail Communications. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mr. Cruson said the previous discussion was to make a change and Mrs. Harriman-Stites went through the chair to add the sentence "Board members are encouraged to use district provided or approved electronic mail accounts" which would be at the end of the first paragraph.

MOTION: Mr. Cruson moved to add the sentence "Board members are encouraged to use district provided or approved electronic mail accounts" at the end of the first section. Mr. Vouros seconded.

Mrs. Zukowski wondered if it should be the "district provided and approved" or "Board of Education provided and approved" if in the future the Board of Education members would not continue on the district email system. It might be more appropriate for the district to suggest an email system and have it be a Board of Education vote, as opposed to a district vote or the Superintendent would suggest the preferred email system.

Mr. Delia agreed to change the wording to Board approved email service rather than district approved.

Mrs. Leidlein said the Board of Education is doing the work of the district. Also, if there is an FOIA request, that often times goes through our IT department and if we are not using the district email it could cause a difficult situation for the district to assist us in gathering those emails.

Mrs. Ku agreed with the motion that the district provides an email for the Board and we are encouraged to use it.

Dr. Rodrigue said the Newtown Public Schools is the district and agreed with Mrs. Leidlein. District is used throughout policies and it means Newtown Public Schools.

Vote on changing the wording: 4 ayes, 2 nays (Mr. Delia, Mrs. Zukowski) Motion passes.
Vote on policy: 5 ayes, 1 nay (Mr. Delia) Motion passes.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve Bylaw 9330 Board/School District records. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Zukowski referred to the bottom of page "b" new text added regarding scanners to copy a public record and made the following motion.

MOTION: Mrs. Zukowski moved to amend the motion for the Board to move the words at the top of page "c" to the end of the previous paragraph and remove the wording on the \$20 flat fee. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Vote on the amendment: Motion passes unanimously.

Vote on policy: Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve Bylaw 9350 Hearings to be rescinded. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Cruson said we are rescinding this policy because it's covered in other policies. Motion passes unanimously.

Minutes of January 28, 2020:

Mrs. Ku stated that a motion was made by Mr. Delia and Mr. Cruson on these minutes so we would pick up the discussion. We have Mrs. Zukowsk's changes. Overall, the minutes only need to reflect the motions and votes required by law. The essence of a discussion is important

but not sure if it's more important than individual discussions by people needing to be part of the minutes.

Mrs. Zukowski provided changes to these minutes and said she had never been called into question when on other boards and believes the minutes are the main place people go to get information about meetings and she wants to be represented true to who she is and what she contributes. She stated that sometimes she says the wrong word from what she wanted to say. Mrs. Harriman-Stites said the spirit of what we say should be captured. She stood by her requested changes which she reviewed.

Mrs. Ku suggested a motion for all of the changes.

MOTION: Mrs. Zukowski moved that the Board of Education accept the three requested changes to the January 28, 2020 minutes. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Zukowski believed these changes better reflect the spirit of what was said. One was a factual error that needs to be corrected.

Mr. Delia said that capturing the spirit he worries would open up a can of worms. Minutes should reflect what was said. It's not the job of anyone to try to figure out what someone means when they said something. It's just the best recollection of what was said, written down and then moved on.

Mrs. Zukowski said her recommendations reflected the words actually said in the transcript. Mrs. Ku looked at the transcript and there were some things Mrs. Zukowski asked to remove from the minutes that are not what she was proposing to replace, which concerns her. She was using "in today's business environment" but that was not in the transcript. Mrs. Zukowski explained why she wanted to add those words.

Mrs. Ku said that using the money from the special education fund is being removed from what she said.

Mrs. Zukowski said she was talking about a business model of having a 7-12 program at Chalk Hill in a separate building and think regionally to ensure sustainability of the program. It's not the words but the concepts.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if we are re-discussing the entire topics or discussing the minutes and what was discussed at the meeting which isn't on this agenda. We are just trying to clarify what was actually said at the meeting and what is represented in the minutes. It isn't up to Ms. June to try to determine what concepts are being discussed at a given time. We try to represent our thoughts at that time. We can't do this with minutes of every meeting. If that were to be the case, then she would recommend just recording in the minutes the motions and votes.

Mr. Vouros said it was important to recognize that the passion Mrs. Zukowski brings to the table will come through and doesn't necessarily have to be pages of transcript. The trust factor will increase as her tenure on the Board increases. It is not necessary for us to say everything we feel we need to say.

Mr. Cruson said these motions are legitimate corrections to the minutes.

Mrs. Zukowski honestly believes her changes are more reflective of her words. There were some complicated topics she wanted reflected properly.

Mrs. Leidlein said she wouldn't be opposed to adding words actually said if there weren't words actually said that were removed from the minutes and also the idea we are rearranging words to fit in certain areas that may have been implied in other areas.

Mr. Delia asked Mrs. Zukowski if she said “in today’s business environment.”
Mrs. Zukowski said she did not.

Vote on amendment: 2 ayes, 4 nays (Mrs. Ku, Mr. Cruson, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Vouros) Motion fails.

Vote on minutes of January 28, 2019: 5 ayes, 1 nay (Mrs. Zukowski) Motion passes.

Minutes of February 4, 2020:

Mrs. Ku said there is a motion on the table from the last meeting.

Mrs. Zukowski explained her changes.

MOTION: Mrs. Zukowski moved to accept the two corrections to the February 4, 2020 minutes.
Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Zukowski said on page 2, paragraph 3, she wanted to change “art and science” to “art and music” because she meant to say “music.”

Mr. Delia said she said “art and science” other times too and it makes sense to say that. We can’t change minutes to reflect what we meant to say.

MOTION: Mr. Delia made a friendly amendment to split the motion to discuss each one individually. Mr. Cruson seconded. Vote: 4 ayes, 2 nays (Mrs. Ku, Mr. Vouros) Motion passes.

Mrs. Ku said we are here to talk about the district and the time doing this takes away from that. If we do this, it takes hours to go back at videos to make sure every word is correct. She was not in favor of changing things.

Vote on page 2 changes as proposed: 1 aye, 5 nays (Mrs. Ku, Mr. Delia, Mr. Cruson, Mrs. Leidlein, Mr. Vouros) Motion fails.

Mr. Cruson feels that page 1 changes are accurate and is a fair change to make.

Vote on page 1 changes: 4 ayes, 2 nays (Mrs. Ku, Mrs. Leidlein) motion passes.

Vote on February 4, 2020 minutes as amended: Motion passes unanimously.

School Calendars:

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school calendars. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Dr. Rodrigue decided on calendars for the next two years and these have been through multiple discussions with the leadership team, Teacher Forum, Climate and Culture, and PTA Presidents. Positive feedback was the flexibility of the April professional development day if weather was not favorable during the year and using it as a full day of school instead. We also made it more consistent to have mornings be two-hour delays and afternoons three-hour dismissals for professional development.

Motion passes unanimously.

Minutes of February 18, 2020:

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the minutes of February 4, 2020. Mr. Cruson seconded. Vote: 5 ayes, 1 abstained (Mr. Vouros) Motion passes.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the high school field trips.

Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mrs. Leidlein supports that the Superintendent be in touch with the Health Department, the State Board of Education, and the CDC because she was concerned about how things are changing at a rapid pace and even if we approve these trips we give the Superintendent the authority to cancel them without the Board needing to reconvene and vote. This decision would be with the recommendation provided by our community or State Health Department.

Mrs. Zukowski seconded.

Dr. Rodrigue appreciated that and it would be in alignment with her decision for overseas travel. The Board agreed.

Motion passes unanimously.

Item 8 – Public Participation

Keith Alexander, 8 Fawnwood Road, spoke as a former Board member and said that Mrs. Leidlein has a particular way of making it clear about trying to get everything done for the children. He appreciated that when he was on the Board.

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

Item 9 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:46 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>

