

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL MEETING
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 3 PRIMROSE STREET, NEWTOWN, CT
WEDNESDAY, JULY 15, 2020**

MINUTES

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE: Jordana Bloom, Alison Plante, Chris Smith, Phil Carroll, Ryan Knapp, Judit DeStefano, Paul Lundquist, Chris Eide, Dan Wiedemann, Cathy Reiss, Andy Clure, Dan Honan

ALSO PRESENT: First Selectman Dan Rosenthal, Finance Director Bob Tait, BOF Chair Sandy Roussas, BOF Member Ned Simpson, 17 public, 1 press.

CALL TO ORDER: Mr. Lundquist called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance at 7:32 pm.

VOTER COMMENT:

Gary McRae, 89 Boggs Hill Road – As a member of the Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee, he spent nearly a year soliciting input and active participation from the community. The Committee progressed through three steps in the process - they first became informed on the 2013 Master Plan, municipal needs and the ongoing realities of the property. They then launched a town-wide survey which was completed by 1,825 qualified respondents; and lastly they prepared recommendations by using their knowledge of an experience from the earlier steps, the Committee deliberated and reached the recommendations provided in their final report dated July 19, 2019. During a meeting held in October of 2018, Dr. John Reid, former Fairfield Hills Authority Chair was present. At that time, Dr. Reid expressed concerns with liabilities and noted Plymouth Hall falling apart – the Town is not able to tell when the buildings will come down. He found he became more flexible trying to get a business onto the campus. Thirdly, Cochran Hall which is the most expensive to take down, had a reasonably detailed proposal for apartments which was rejected. There was only an impact to the school district of 12-13 kids. The proposal would have been an economic incentive. Dr. Reid then told our Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee to be bold and articulate with a vision. He suggested to provide the citizens with facts regarding the campus and bring the community together for a vote to demolish the buildings. The group then discussed the cost for remediation and demolition. As a Committee, they continued forward with discussions and the town-wide survey resulting with their final report dated July 19, 2019. Their key recommendations related to housing on the Fairfield Hills campus included: 1. a supported uses change to allow commercial proposals that include a housing component provided that the proposal is no more than 2 existing buildings and the commercial component is consistent with the vision of the property; and 2. that buildings with no potential reuse be razed as soon as possible. Mr. McRae feels if we continue to wait, it will lead to more decay of these buildings and even higher future demolition cost and increased risk to public safety. He feels that Dr. Reid and all Newtown residents deserve your support to a well thought out referendum question in time for November 4th.

Ned Simpson, 42 Watkins Drive - In regards to the Fairfield Hills referendum question, he believes there is either a productive use which comes with housing, or demolition which comes with cost. He doesn't think our voting technology allows for an either or question on the ballot. The challenge will be to take the committee recommendations and translate it into a yes or no question which would inform and educate the voters.

John Boccuzzi, 57 Queen Street - On the same issue of Fairfield Hills and representing the Board of Friends of Newtown Seniors, you've been reminded of the report which recommended the addition of housing at Fairfield Hills, and you're also aware of the continued liability Newtown faces in maintaining an attractive nuisance at this site. You're also aware of the cost of removing the large deteriorating buildings and the effect that the presence of those buildings have on any interest of developing at Fairfield Hills. Developing housing there will mitigate these issues and provide some financial reward for the town, however, his point is to emphasize the need for housing. The most livable communities offer a range of housing options which respond to the needs of young people just starting out, essential workers who are employed but make below average wages, seniors and middle

aged individuals who are right-sizing. The accessibility, affordability and variety of housing options will attract families and individuals across the spectrum of age and income which make up a community.

Stephen Rosenblatt, 50 Watkins Drive - See attachment A.

Curt Symes, 36 Lake Rd. - See attachment B.

MINUTES: Mr. Honan moved to accept the minutes of the June 17, 2020 Legislative Council Regular Meeting with the below amendment made. Seconded by Ms. Reiss. Mr. Clure abstained. Motion passes (11-1).

The minutes of the June 17, 2020 meeting were approved and accepted with a correction made at the meeting of July 15, 2020. The correction states that Mr. Dan Honan was in attendance.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE: Jordana Bloom, Alison Plante, Phil Carroll, Ryan Knapp, Judit DeStefano, Paul Lundquist, Chris Eide, Dan Wiedemann, Cathy Reiss, Chris Smith, *Dan Honan*

ABSENT: Andrew Clure, *Dan Honan*

COMMUNICATIONS: Mr. Lundquist received and shared the inaugural edition of the BOE district highlights newsletter. *See attachment C.*

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Education Committee – None

Finance Committee – None

Municipal Operations Committee – None

Ordinance Committee – None

FIRST SELECTMAN’S REPORT: First Selectman Dan Rosenthal began his report on the reopening of the Municipal Center. It has been going well so far - some external access has been created for the Tax Department, with appropriate markings on the floor and traffic has been fairly light. From an amenity standpoint, most everything we offer is online such as parks and pools. Edmond Town Hall continues to offer outdoor movie screenings, and will soon begin indoor space rentals keeping within the 25 person guideline. They will delay bringing back indoor movie showings for now. The library is still offering remote services. From a BOS standpoint, at the last meeting, they mostly discussed roadwork - we are closing in on 25 miles of work this season. The Department of Public Works crew continues to do patch work on roads. In anticipation of potential revenue shortfalls, we've staggered the roadwork in that we've been doing internal with labor covered by the Town operating budget. The contracted work like milling and paving which are slated to be done won't come until later on in the season so it lines up well by allowing more time to address revenue as it comes in from a tax collection standpoint. After this year, we will bring total completed roadwork to about 65 miles. As BOS, we have two contracts to ratify - the Police contract and the Parks and Rec retainer contract. It is anticipated that the police contract will be on the next BOS meeting agenda. There is still some language to confirm with the Park and Rec union but it is in the works. The technical services grant for the affordable housing plan which was ratified at the last LC meeting has been approved.

Mr. Tait briefly reported that he took an early look at tax receipts thus far and compared them to last year's during the same time. This year, we have collected \$10.6 million, and last year we collected \$10.4 million. The collections appear to be coming in on time so far. The banks report on deposit type, and are sorted by how people are paying their taxes: over the counter, credit card or by mail. Habits have changed since last year - more people are mailing it in or paying online.

Mr. Carroll asked why we mail our taxes to the address in Woburn, MA. Mr. Tait explained that it is a company related to Newtown Savings Bank which had the lowest price to help manage the volume of payments.

OLD BUSINESS

Discussion Only

- Discussion of potential referendum question to consider allowing housing within existing buildings at the Fairfield Hills campus as part of Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee recommendation.

See attachment D. Mr. Lundquist stated that we are targeting the November ballot on this topic. This discussion is only an initial step to begin the process in considering a residential option at Fairfield Hills. Based on the discussions we have had on this topic thus far, the main focus of this is how we ask it.

Ms. Reiss questioned the timeline and review process. Mr. Lundquist responded that it needs to be accounted for in any absentee ballots going out, but from a Council perspective it should be resolved within the next two meetings. The First Selectman stated that we need to make sure that the question is as specific as possible and keeping it along the same lines as initially recommended by the Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee. The First Selectman is planning to hold another in-person meeting at the end of September or beginning of October to follow through with some information gathered from some of the developers. Even after the Legislative Council moves forward on finalizing the question, there will still be public engagement between now and November. Ms. Reiss clarified with Mr. Lundquist that only two buildings would be considered to also have a housing component. She feels this needs to be made clear and suggests that some explanatory text be made available.

Ms. DeStefano spoke to the explanatory text and pointed out that there's always background information to ballot questions and is really just meant to be informative so that the finer points can be relayed to the public.

Mr. Knapp expressed that he likes the text as it is now. He feels that if we start adding information into the question, we will confuse the question. The real core of it is whether you support the recommendation of housing and the other items really needs to live within the explanatory text.

Mr. Honan supports the question as it is now, and asked, hypothetically, what happens if a developer comes in with intentions of putting apartments in, but is then told he can't do it – would the developer be responsible for the demolition himself. First Selectman Rosenthal responded that the proposal is not to demolish or to build anything new. This is just to gauge public support on whether we can move forward for a housing option. The discussions he has had with developers is that the town will put no money into it.

Mr. Wiedemann asked if it is our intent to make the response to this question a binding response and, if so, would that mean we are invalidating the previous survey. Mr. Lundquist and the First Selectman confirmed that it is binding in its intent but not legally, and that we should treat it as binding.

Mr. Smith also agrees with the verbiage of the question as is. He feels everyone needs to know that by voting yes to having a residential component, it is no more than two buildings, which is significant in and of itself.

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion and Possible Action

- Recommended Fund Balance Policy from the BOF

See attachment E. Ms. Roussas reviewed the recommended General Fund Balance Policy from the BOF. To summarize, the document was reorganized to have more clearly defined sections within the policy in order for it to make sense.

Mr. Simpson further explained that the definitions in the old policy were scattered around and his intention to changes in Section II and III which are definition sections were to match what we're reporting on financial.

Mr. Eide asked for clarification on what procedures should be done on transferring unspent funds at end of fiscal year, specifically referring to Section IV-C. Ms. Roussas confirmed that this section had not been changed from the old policy. First Selectman Rosenthal recalled that there was some discussion of making the fund balance max higher of 16%, but that rating agencies are not looking for that number to be higher. In reality, the best way to reward the tax payer is to maintain our fund balance at 12% and use any excess to go to capital non-recurring which can then either be used to reduce debt and/or reduce next year's budget.

Mr. Knapp asked if it was the auditor that suggested we have two months worth of expenditures in fund balance which is where the 16% came from. Mr. Tait answered that didn't seem likely and that we had just discussed the possibilities.

Ms. DeStefano moved to send the Board of Finance recommended Fund Balance Policy to the Legislative Council Finance and Administration Committee for review and consideration. Seconded by Mr. Wiedemann. All in favor. Motion passes (12-0).

- Transfer \$9,245 from Contingency to Legislative Council - Other Expenditures

Ms. DeStefano moved to transfer \$9,245 from Contingency to Legislative Council - Other Expenditures. Seconded by Mr. Honan. All in favor. Motion passes (12-0).

See attachment F. Mr. Tait confirmed this would go to the company that updates and maintains code for eCode360, which generally comes out of the Legislative Council's other expenditures account.

VOTER COMMENT: None

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Mr. Lundquist announced that the Newtown Board of Education is starting their negotiations with the Administrative Bargaining Unit and the Legislative Council is allowed to have a representative take part as an observer. Mr. Wiedemann has agreed to represent the Council and be a part of these negotiations.

Mr. Lundquist also wanted to let the Council know to be prepared to begin meeting again in person at some point soon.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, Mr. Wiedemann moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:43 pm. Seconded by Ms. Reiss. All in favor.

*Respectfully submitted,
Rina Quijano, Clerk*

**THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
AT THE NEXT MEETING.**

Your name: Stephen Rosenblatt
Your e-mail address: stevedot213@gmail.com
Subject: Wording of FFH voter question

Last fall I attended the three presentations by the First Selectman on the history of Fairfield Hills. I look forward to the fourth meeting when a historic restoration builder makes their presentation.

What I learned from these meetings was there are two alternatives offered for Fairfield Hills.

- 1- Demolish all unused buildings,
- 2- Restore two buildings for rental apartments, and demolish the remaining buildings.

Demolition of all unused buildings would result in immense added taxes for Newtown taxpayers. The bonding required to fund this alternative would impact taxpayers for twenty years.

Converting two buildings for housing avoids the cost of their demolition, and produces new and ongoing revenue for the town to help fund the demolition of all remaining unused buildings.

Please consider this as the Council develops the wording of the ballot question: either a costly total demolition of all unused buildings or restoring two buildings for residential housing, a productive cost saving measure to the benefit of all residents of Newtown.

Thank you.

Stephen Rosenblatt
50 Watkins Drive
Sandy Hook

Attachment B

From: curtsymes@aol.com
Date: July 15, 2020 at 8:07:35 PM EDT
To: dan.rosenthal@newtown-ct.gov
Cc: prock5@aol.com, jboccuzzi@yahoo.com, neds2124@gmail.com, natalie.jackson@newtown-ct.gov
Subject: LC Mtg. Comm. ISSUE - 7/15/20

Dan,

I called in to the LC Mtg. this eve. at 7:30 to both listen and make a public statement but was never recognized after John Boccuzzi spoke. I tried numerous times to identify myself and speak up despite numerous other people calling in or having called in and identified themselves.

As a 50 yr. Resident of Newtown, Small Business Owner and Taxpayer, I had information to communicate that was never given the chance to be communicated/recorded.

I called in, listened and planned/wanted to echo the comments made by both Gary McRae and John Boccuzzi and express my views as a long term resident of Newtown, as well as, a past Chair of the COA and Vice-Chair of FONS. After years of analysis, it is time for Newtown to seriously deal with Affordable Housing at FFH for both Seniors and the younger generation. The continued procrastination on moving forward with these building eye-sores is a “Detriment to Realistic Developers & Development” willing to invest in FFH.

AARP just recently published an electronic article “the Housing that’s Gone Missing” highlighting the need nation-wide (and CT Newtown certainly is an example) stating this need for Affordable Housing and the exodus from both Newtown and CT due to high living costs of housing.

I had planned to say more but this is the essence of what I would like included in Voter Comments, given whatever Technical Difficulties ensued in precluding my communications to the LC.

Curt Symes
Professional Senior Advisor
CS consultoing & Services, LLC
36 Lake Rd.
Newtown, CT

Attachment C

From: Cruson, Daniel <crusond_boe@newtown.k12.ct.us>
Date: Thu, Jul 9, 2020 at 10:13 PM
Subject: Board of Education District Highlights Issue 1
To: <Plundquist.Newtown@gmail.com>

Dear Mr. Lundquist,

The Newtown Board of Education Communications Sub-Committee decided earlier this year that we would begin publishing a quarterly newsletter highlighting topics within the school district. We wanted to go beyond our yearly budget newsletters and bring information around a variety of topics to the attention of both the school community and the town at large.

Attached please find our first issue, which focuses on the Alternative Learning Plan. It was not our original plan to focus on this topic, but because of the circumstances we decided it would be timely and appropriate. This issue will be going out through School Messenger tomorrow but we felt it was important to provide it to you ahead of time. We would appreciate it if you would share it with the rest of the Legislative Council and anyone else you feel would enjoy reading it.

Thank you very much for your time,

Dan Cruson Jr
Chair - NBoE Communications Sub-Committee
Newtown Board of Education, Secretary
<http://www.newtown.k12.ct.us/>

District Highlights

Newtown Public Schools

Welcome to the inaugural issue of District Highlights from the Newtown Board of Education. District Highlights will be our new quarterly newsletter, constructed by the Board of Education Communications Sub-Committee for the Newtown community at large. We are a bit late with this issue which was supposed to be out in June due to the pandemic that descended on us in March, right before we were supposed to start work on this issue. However, while it delayed us it also gave us a chance to highlight major accomplishments within the Newtown Public Schools, namely the creation and roll out of our Alternative Learning Plan (ALP).

At our first virtual sub-committee meeting, we discussed what this newsletter should be about. The Alternative Learning Plan, ALP, was our mountain to climb - and what a mountain it was! All of the staff throughout the Newtown Public Schools, from teacher to Superintendent, found themselves coming up with new ways of providing instruction to thousands of students with only a little bit of lead time to prepare. We have met with staff through various areas of the school district to present a picture of what this task was like, including (but certainly not limited to): learning new technology, adjusting curriculum, creating new procedures, and finding creative new ways to engage learners of all ages.

So please join us in learning about our challenges and achievements that members of the staff have gone through over the past couple months.

Daniel Cruson Jr. and Deborra Zukowski
BoE Communications Subcommittee

Curriculum Delivery

By Daniel Cruson Jr.

On March 13th, 2020 Newtown Public Schools closed down for an indefinite period of time, leaving parents, students and staff wondering what education would look like for the foreseeable future. Prior to that point preparations had been underway on an Alternative Learning Plan (ALP) that could be leveraged if this exact scenario occurred. March 13th had been scheduled as a Professional Development day for focused work on the plan, and on that day the need to implement the in progress plan suddenly became a reality.

I recently had a chance to sit down (virtually) with 3 teachers from across the district to discuss how they went about implementing the plan, and what challenges and successes they have had during the journey. The three teachers that were kind enough to spend an hour of their day talking to me were:

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Vol 1 Issue 1

**Board of Education
Communications
Sub-Committee**

Members:

Daniel Cruson - Chair
Deborra Zukowski

You can email the board at:

newtownboe@newtown.k12.ct.us



- Karen Dreger, a 2nd Grade teacher at Head O' Meadow Elementary
- Jill Gonski, a Special Education teacher at Newtown High School
- Bonnie Hart, an 8th Grade Math Teacher and Coordinator at Newtown Middle School

The three have very different backgrounds and skill sets, but they also had some very similar challenges and successes to share with me.

Technology was something that all three mentioned as an early challenge to implementing the plan. Ms. Dreger shared that prior to the closing of school her grade level didn't make use of Google Classroom so it was unfamiliar to not only the teachers but also their students. This led to a steep learning curve for all involved in using the technology. This challenge was echoed by Ms. Hart whose class did not use Google Classroom as part of their regular curriculum for teaching Math. She also mentioned a challenge of converting some areas of the curriculum to digital from the normal pen and paper approach, areas such as graphing which students would normally do with pencil and graph paper. Both indicated that their students managed very well making the transition to Google Classroom and now feel comfortable using it every day.

Ms. Gonski's two sections of Life Skills, an interactive curriculum that connects General Education students to Special Education students as mentors as well as that teaches vocational skills through practical applications. However it is difficult to facilitate lessons involving social connections and in person work when students and teachers are required to remain physically distant. Additionally her students have a variety of special needs that make it hard for them to work virtually, such as some being non-verbal. While Google Meets gives a way to meet with her classes on a regular basis, the district has also purchased other platforms geared toward special education learners that have been successful in helping to overcome the barriers that were originally present.

All three teachers echoed that they could see continuing to use these new tools in the course of regular learning once school is back in session. All have found benefits to the platforms that would be able to supplement their regular lessons and how they interact with students that might need some extra help. Ms. Hart said she had become a tremendous fan of Google Classroom and Ms. Dreger said she was surprised at how quickly the students succeeded with a brand new platform.

A second challenge that all three shared was they recognized early on that the lack of social interactions was a problem for their students. Ms. Dreger saw in her 2nd Grade classroom the need for the kids to be able to see each other and be kids. Additionally she noted that teaching lessons like reading to students is a challenge when you are not physically there. Further up the grade ladder Ms. Hart saw her 8th graders lose the benefit of real time interactions through questions and answers with each other and the teacher. Finally Ms. Gonski's class was built on the interactions of Mentor's and Mentee's which could be accomplished through email but just wasn't the same. Once they got rolling with Google Classroom though they saw the students begin to benefit from virtual meetings with fellow students. They noted that full class lessons in that format were a challenge, but smaller groups with a shared screen could be beneficial at higher grade levels. Meanwhile at lower grade levels, it was more about letting the kids be social with each other through the use of snack meetings or sharing time, than trying to teach full lessons - until they got used to the technology.

The third big point to come from our discussion was the importance that staff collaboration played in getting through the challenges of this new learning environment. Ms. Hart talked about how her fellow grade level teachers used a Google Doc to share their progress through their shared curriculum and how they all could see that they are going to finish up the year where they would have hoped to be normally.

They also worked together to share ideas for lessons and used Google Forms for common assessments.

Ms. Dreger told me about the fact that the elementary grade levels were collaborating not only amongst the teachers in the same building, but also across all 4 elementary school buildings to share ideas and resources. A representative from each building would meet weekly with representatives for their grade level at other buildings to ensure a close alignment among all 4 schools.

Meanwhile, within the individual buildings, the grade level teachers continue to work closely within their cohort like they would during a normal school year. However, the individual teachers have taken on the responsibility of focusing on a given subjects for the entire grade, instead of each teacher teaching all subjects to their own classroom. For instance, one teacher would take on delivering the writing lessons while another would take on the math lessons. Ms. Dreger shared that the students have shared being excited by this approach to teaching, they enjoy (and some even look forward to) seeing different teachers for different subjects.

Being a special education teacher and the only one teaching her class, Ms. Gonski's collaborations took on a different form. Instead of having fellow classroom teachers to collaborate with, she meets with the service providers like the Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, etc., who work with her students on a regular basis. She works with them to develop strategies and resources that she can use with her students when delivering her lessons virtually. She also regularly collaborates with her students' parents to find the best way to help deliver lessons and meet the variety of needs they have.

In the end, it was clear that Ms. Dreger, Ms. Hart and Ms. Gonski all felt that the students, parents and staff had risen to the occasion and overall had succeeded despite the odd circumstances in which they found themselves. They all saw positive takeaways from the experience of having to build and implement the ALP over the past few months. They see that not only staff, but students and parents have learned new things that will be of use to everyone now and into the future, regardless of where we may have to go from here.

Special Education

By Deborra Zukowski

Quickly pivoting to distance learning is difficult for most students, teachers and families, but especially so for many with special needs. During the traditional school day, students with special needs are eligible for individualized access to educational, functional, and social services provided by highly trained special education teachers and specialists along with assistive technology when needed. Depending on their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), students may be provided with one-on-one and small-group instruction for reading, writing, and mathematics. They may also have instructional materials adapted when part of mainstream classes. In addition to educational support, some students are provided with functional and social services including speech and communication therapy; physical therapy for access to and use of facilities throughout the school; occupational therapy to better participate in classroom activities and learn general life skills; and social/behavioral support and counseling.

The move to distance learning was especially challenging for special education students and teachers since much of the support provided required face-to-face interactions, often assisted by specialized materials and tools. These interactions build close bonds between a student and his/her teacher that also improved the student's overall educational experience. Unfortunately, the speed with which the district had to move to distance learning left little time to fully develop the practices needed to

digitally model such interaction and some of the services that required close contact or specialized equipment were not able to be provided outside of the school setting.

Since distance education started, special education teachers, specialists, and Newtown special education administrators have been working together with families to make the educational experience as successful as possible. One of the major efforts was to try to emulate teacher “presence” so that the very important student/teacher bond could be maintained. A focus for all grades was to ensure that teachers were there in voice and/or video. Depending on the type of content, the special education teachers now complement instructional materials with audio recordings that students can play back as many times as needed, hearing their teacher’s voice each time. In some courses, like math, it is possible to go a step further with virtual whiteboard-like videos that include voice overlays and so provide the content both visually and audibly. And for other courses, such as science labs, the teacher records a full video with step-by-step demonstrations that students can work along with and/or play back later.

While the lessons are prerecorded and not interactive, the teachers supplement the lessons with small group video review sessions and individual check-ins. For the latter, some special education teachers personally talk with every student they support for up to 30 minutes at least once per week, and sometimes more. During the call, the teacher helps the student and his/her family with goal-setting and instructional follow-up as well as checking to see how they are doing overall. For some teachers and students, this weekly method of individualized attention works even better in the distance learning mode than it did in the classroom because the teacher is able to solely, and regularly, focus on the needs of the student and his/her family.

As of May, the overall feedback from parents/guardians has been positive. They appreciate the care and work that teachers are providing their child(ren). However, knowing that many students and families are still overwhelmed, the district is striving to further improve the distance learning experience. Teachers and specialists are holding frequent video conferences and sharing ideas to improve their outreach. Special education administrators are constantly reviewing their guidance for their staff. With collaboration among the district staff and suggestions from families, Newtown’s support for students with special needs is expected to continue to improve.

Thank you to Chelsea Ciccio – special education teacher at Middle Gate, Marcia Stiman-Glacier – special education teacher at Newtown High School, and Maureen Hall – special education supervisor at Reed and Newtown Middle School for helping us better understand what they do and how distance education has affected their work. Their love of the students and zeal for teaching were abundantly apparent, and only partially conveyed in this article. Also, thanks from all of us to the special education administrators who are working shoulder to shoulder with the teachers to improve the overall experience for their students, including Deborah Mailloux-Petersen, Sonia Raquel, Maureen Hall, Dr. Paula Grayson, and Dr. Bonnie Voegeli. To contact a special education administrator, go to: <https://www.newtown.k12.ct.us/SpecialEducation>.

Student Voices


By Milan Chand and Hannah Jojo - 2019-2020 Student Representatives to the Board

In these unprecedented times this pandemic has shaken up the world, but Newtown High School and all the Newtown Public Schools have adapted expertly to the new Distance Learning Model. As students from NHS, we have experienced this fashion of learning first hand and although there are some challenges, the versatility and vigor of our student body has been unmatched. Moreover, teachers and parents are working harder than ever to make this “new normal” a little easier.

By utilizing the platform Google Classroom, teachers are sending student assignments, creating videos to explain topics, setting up office hours, and adapting with this new way of schooling with novel ideas. On a regular day, assignments are due at 11:59 each night giving students time to complete their work and manage their own time during this quarantine. Google classroom allows students to see all their assignments and due dates laid out on one screen, furthermore the application allows for multiple types of assignments to be submitted, giving teachers various ways to communicate and give work. For example, one piece of new technology many teachers are using is called EdPuzzle, which is a learning tool that shows a video and provides questions to submit along the way. Having experienced all of these types of distance learning, we can say that each teacher has figured out what works best for them as well as for their students.

The styles of distance learning, as well as the grading policy, have changed from the beginning of this journey. At the beginning, many teachers were unsure how to use google classroom and other tools of learning. As time went on, they started to figure out the details of how they would teach their students and developed a set routine for each week. For example, after the first couple of weeks, many teachers started learning how to post a video of themselves explaining a powerpoint. However, since this has been a learning process, everyone has truly found the best way to teach and learn, as well as be fair. When looking at grading, the new system puts less weight on this final quarter and gives students an option to change to pass/fail, while still maintaining a GPA value for the year. This system is a perfect balance for students and teachers alike by reducing stress, while also keeping everyone accountable.

Throughout this journey of distance learning, teachers of Newtown Public Schools have kept an open mind and continue to be enthusiastic and willing to try new types of teaching. It has been a trial and error process, but the teachers and students have stayed resilient and hard working. Students know what to expect from each teacher and can contact them if there are any issues or concerns. From our experience, we would say that distance learning is working very well and we are fortunate to be in a school district that is so dedicated to making sure this experience runs as smoothly as possible.



DID YOU KNOW?

We distributed over 650 chromebooks and hotspots to students that needed them to learn from home.

Unified Arts

By Daniel Cruson Jr.

The Arts is an exciting part of many student's school day, and something that many have come to recognize as an important of life in general during the past couple of months. Whether it is fine arts, musical arts or theater arts, many students in Newtown Public Schools look forward to spending time working with their teachers in these subjects. But how do you participate in a subject that thrives on collaboration with peers when you can't be in the same room as them? How do you instruct largely home-bound students in using materials that aren't available in a normal household? The answer is with a lot of creativity and cooperation with fellow teachers.

I had the chance to sit down (through a Google Meet) with a number Unified Art teachers throughout the district to learn how they have managed to convert their programs to fit within the Alternative Learning Plan (ALP). Janice Gabriel (Theater Arts at Newtown High School), Michelle Hiscavich (District Arts Coordinator), Kim Hosler (Elementary Art at Sandy Hook & Hawley), Tina Jones (Elementary Music at Middle Gate), Carol Skolas (Art at Newtown High School) and Mardi Smith (Orchestra at Reed Intermediate School).

Despite everyone having their own challenges, the focus of our Unified Arts teachers throughout this whole time has been finding a way to implement their lessons and curriculum with fidelity and quality. Many of the staff talked about collaborating with teachers throughout the country and even across the world to share ideas for ways to provide the best curriculum for their program despite having to do so remotely. Ms. Gabriel mentioned that even before schools closed down in Newtown, she was finding groups on Facebook and other platforms that were sharing their experiences with others to help them prepare for what was coming.

Ms. Gabriel was the first to mention the challenges of running a class that normally requires collaboration between students. She teaches acting class and while she could teach pieces remotely one on one with students, many times acting requires the energy from your fellow actors as well as the audience. The nature of a performance changes just by being in a one on one environment. Ms. Smith faced a similar challenge when teaching orchestra. Part of the pleasure of music is working with a group and hear the harmonies that are made by many instruments playing together.

Both Ms. Gabriel and Ms. Smith cited challenges with technology. In Ms. Smith's case, technology could have helped a bit with multiple students playing music together, but the technology and connectivity was not optimal for this use. Ms. Gabriel ran into slightly different issues because many of the apps that would have let her make up for the lack of the normal equipment used to teach Theater Production (such as virtual light and sound boards) did not meet the state mandated security standards that they must follow.

Ms. Skolas encountered a variation on Ms. Gabriel's issues of needing to teach without the normal materials to do so, except in her case it was trying to teach ceramics without the materials normally used for craft projects. These are not materials that a student would normally have access to at home and not obtained easily. Additionally her work was normally done in 3D but because it had to be reviewed remotely and couldn't be done in person she had to convert her normal lessons to a 2D medium.

When it came to getting past the challenges, the common theme was creativity. Every teacher found ways to adjust their curriculum in new ways, not only getting the lessons done but embracing the

new situation the students and staff found themselves in. Ms. Skolas, Ms. Hosler and Ms. Jones all spoke about getting the students outside with their projects. Ms. Skolas created a lesson around the history of cairns and even branched off into science with a lesson on why environmentalists don't like them. Ms. Hosler created an "elements of art" scavenger hunt that sent students outside to find artistic materials and do projects with them. They also spoke about encouraging the students to do these projects with their families, promoting togetherness during this time of community isolation.

Ms. Hosler and Ms. Jones both noted seeing a new side to some of their previously quiet or shy students. These students were more likely to reach out to their teachers when they could do so through email or other technology, and started to show more confidence. Ms. Jones also shared the way she used technology to bring back one of her students' favorite class starters. In the classroom she would start with a guess the song icebreaker using a song they had learned in a previous class. She did this via video, but to add another element of fun to it for the reveal she used an Instagram filter to change her appearance in a way that related to the song and give her students a laugh.

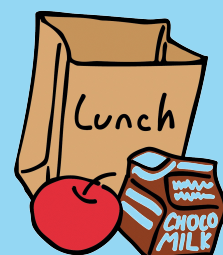
By the end of our discussion, it was clear that everyone had put a lot of effort into finding a way to make the arts a part of every student's school experience despite the challenges presented by distance learning. As a positive to going through this whole experience, the teachers all mentioned learning new things that they look forward to incorporating into their classrooms when the students return. Ms. Hiscavich did share that discussions around next year are already happening in her department, so they can be prepared with needed resources should the ALP continue into the next school year.

To paraphrase something that Ms. Skolas shared with us during the call, everyone seemed to be excited about the possibilities of the new normal instead of waiting for the old normal to come back. It is clear that this new normal will be enriched by the experience gained over the last few months.

I would like to thank the unified arts staff for taking an hour from their day of teaching to speak with me for this article.

DID YOU KNOW?

Since schools closed, Newtown Public Schools has provided 12,301 meals between Head O'Meadow, Newtown Middle School and Newtown High School (Data as of June 3rd)



A Closer Look

with Carla Tischio, Grade 5 Reading and Language Arts Teacher

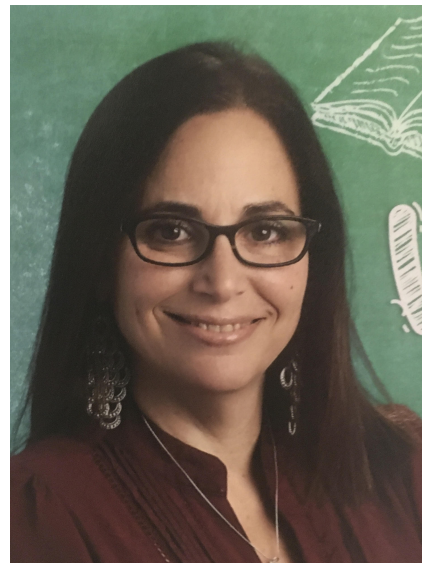
By Deborra Zukowski

Please give a brief history of your time with the Newtown Public School District.

I joined the district in 1996 as a kindergarten teacher. From there, I moved to second grade for one year. When Reed was set to open, I volunteered to move to fifth grade because the thought of opening a new building sounded exciting to me.

Has the way you prepare for your classes changed because of distance learning?

Yes. While fifth grade teachers always worked from the same curriculum, we never had to be so "in tune" with each other before. Over the last couple of months, planning and creating lessons that were close to identical was a shift because we all have our own personalities and ways of doing things. It has been difficult but also a necessary part of supporting each other and families through this.



Prior to the move to distance learning, what were some techniques you used to engage students in the classroom? Did you change the techniques when initially moving to distance learning and how have they evolved since then?

In school, one technique that we all used a lot was conversation. "Turn and talk" was a phrase that could be heard in almost any classroom. Losing the "good peer pressure" that comes along with in-class learning has challenged teachers to come up with other ways of engaging students. New platforms like Peardeck and Jamboard that give students the ability to interact with the content through drawing and audio lessons have been powerful tools. In addition, offering live Google sessions, while not the best for whole class teaching, have been a means to provide some messy, chaotic and beautiful human interaction that is so reminiscent of a fifth grade classroom. The meetings start out awkward, but ice breakers like a quick game on Kahoot relax everybody into their authentic fifth grade selves.

Have you had to change the way you present the material (teaching technique/emphasis as well as use of technology)?

Earlier, I mentioned Peardeck and Jamboard. Those are two tools I have learned about since distance learning began. They are mostly for engagement. The most powerful teaching tool I've come across is Screencastify. With this Chrome extension, I can record a whole class, small group, or individual lesson that targets a specific skill. Additionally, when students turn in writing, I can give timely and meaningful feedback using the writing tool and the voice over recording together. It's powerful because the students can hear my voice and see the suggestions I am making on their work. Inflection matters. Writing the same words in an email or Google comment box, it would be very difficult for the students to hear how appreciative teachers are of their hard work and/or how supportive they are of the work ahead. Repetition matters. In addition, students can play it and replay it to increase understanding. Unlike sitting in a small group, when the lesson is over, it's over.

How did you facilitate teamwork among the students in the classroom? Are you still able to encourage such teamwork and if so, how? Also, do you know how your students manage to build effective remote teams.

I haven't explored this fully yet. However, shared Google docs have been an effective way of asking students to support each other. After a Google Meet, I set students up with a document or slide show they can all contribute to, then copy and paste the work into their individual submissions. Next week, I plan to put them in teams to complete an at-home scavenger hunt. They can use email to communicate the items they find. Then take pictures and insert them into a shared Google Slides.

Has the way you evaluate your students' efforts and work changed?

We definitely held them to a standard over this period of time, but we kept the work consistent, so everyone knew what to expect. In addition, we gave a lot of flexibility to families as to when and how they get the work done. It's hard to believe, but a lot of growth can be seen in the work of our students. I'm sure the independence and perseverance needed to complete the work has grown them in ways we may never be able to measure.

If you could change anything related to distance learning (whether feasible or not), what would it be?

I'm not sure if it's feasible or safe, but I wish my students could have a semi-private Google Meet to work on projects together. If I could somehow have five Google Meets going at the same time, so that I could switch from screen to screen to check on them. That would be an excellent way to pull in some of the students who are reluctant to join in on the distance learning and add back some of that positive peer pressure I mentioned earlier.

Is there something you are doing differently now that you plan to continue to do once the schools reopen?

As I mentioned, Screencastify is a power tool. Used effectively, it can allow teachers to literally teach more than one small group at a time. An interventionist on Google Meet could meet with children across the building without anyone having to leave their rooms. On both platforms, teachers can record their computer screens and send home lessons that mirror the day's work--making school accessible to students who are home sick or out for any reason. These lessons can also support students (and parents) that might be struggling with homework. Like everyone else, I have had my struggles through this time. But mostly I am excited about what I have learned and can't wait to see the impact my new virtual teaching skills have in my actual classroom.

Is there anything else that you are now doing differently that you feel should be included in this conversation?

This experience has exposed many weaknesses and strengths in our system. The weaknesses were obvious and probably pointed out enough. However, the strengths were more subtle and were the actual backbone of our success. First of all, the power of the interdependence of our community--parent to classroom, classroom to classroom, administration to teacher, and Newtown to the world--can't be underestimated. If we didn't know before that "it takes a village", we know now. Many of the technologies I spoke of earlier were made free and available to teachers just to support us through this time. In addition, communication among all parties had to be clear and timely. Everyone needed to bring their A game. We had to trust and support each other in ways we never have before. I could not have taught my students through this crisis without the absolute trust and support of their parents. Moreover, through this ordeal the reciprocal nature of our education system became crystal clear. Everyone has a role to play. When we take on those roles with love, bravery, (and technology), we can move mountains together.

DRAFT

LOCAL QUESTION WORDING FOR REFERENDUM:

Should the Town of Newtown consider commercial development proposals at the Fairfield Hills campus that include a housing component, provided that any given proposal is for no more than two existing buildings and that development is consistent with the vision for the property?

Yes

No

TOWN OF NEWTOWN, CONNECTICUT General Fund Balance Policy

I. PURPOSE

This Policy is established by the Board of Finance under is Charter Chapter 2 Section 125, responsibility for establishing preferred financial practices and obligations. This policy reflects GASB54 Fund Balance Reporting and Governmental Type Definitions.

A positive fund balance serves three important functions:

1. eliminates the need for short term borrowing to handle cash flow between the start of the fiscal year and receipt of revenue from taxes;
2. can be periodically used to lower taxes to smooth out major fluctuations in the property tax rates; and,
3. serves as a contingency fund that enables the Town to respond to unanticipated emergencies or opportunities.

Credit rating agencies determine the adequacy of the unreserved fund balance using a complex series of financial evaluations. The size of the fund balance is an important, but not the only consideration in the Town's rating. Other important factors are the reliability of a government's revenue sources, economic conditions, community wealth factors, cash position, debt ratios, management performance, and fiscal decisions made by the legislative body.

A town's ability to accurately plan and develop sufficient fund balance is a common characteristic of highly rated municipalities.

This policy is intended to provide for a fund balance which satisfies the cash flow and contingency needs of the community, supports our positive bond rating with the rating agencies, and at the same time avoid over taxing the citizens through an excessively large fund balance.

II. GOVERNMENTAL FUND TYPE DEFINITIONS

The books of account of the Town are subject to the regulations adopted by the Board of Finance and approved by the Legislative Council. Charter Chapter 4 Section 05 Finance Director.

- A. General Fund** – This fund is the Town's primary operating fund. It accounts for all funds not reported in another fund. Funded principally by property tax, user fees and grants from other government units.
- B. Bonded (Capital) Project Funds** – Used to account for and report financial resources that are restricted, committed or assigned to expenditures for capital outlays, including the acquisition or construction of capital facilities and other capital assets.
e.g. High School Auditorium, Police Facility, Road Program, and Hawley School Boiler.

TOWN OF NEWTOWN, CONNECTICUT

General Fund Balance Policy

- **Bonded Projects (various)** – to account for bond proceeds, grants, and other resources used for the acquisition or construction of major capital projects as authorized through the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

C. Other Governmental Funds

1. **Special Revenue Funds** – Used to account for and report the proceeds of specific revenue sources that are restricted or committed to expenditures for specific purposes other than debt and capital projects. Restricted or committed revenues are the foundation for a special revenue fund.

e.g. Children’s Adventure Center, Edmond Town Hall (movies etc.), Eichler Cove, School Lunches and Dog License.

2. **Capital Projects and Capital and Nonrecurring Fund**

- **Capital and Nonrecurring Fund - Town**– A multiyear fund where funding can accumulate enabling the Town to acquire larger capital assets on a pay-as-you-go basis. Mainly funded are transferred from the General Fund in the Annual Budget or budget transfer.

- **Capital and Nonrecurring – Non-Lapsing, also known as Board of Education Non-lapsing Education Fund**– An account established under CT Chapter 171 Section 10-248a. Board of Finance may deposit into a non-lapsing account any unexpended funds from the prior fiscal year from the Board of Education budgeted appropriation.

- **Land Use – Open Space**

- **Parks & Recreation Surcharges**

3. **Debt Service Funds** – Used to account for and report financial resources that are restricted, committed or assigned to expenditures for principal and interest, including resources being accumulated for principal and interest maturing in future years. Excess bond proceeds are deposited into this fund.

4. **Permanent Funds** – Used to account for and report resources that are restricted to the extent that only earnings, and not principal, may be used for purposes that support the reporting government’s programs – that is for the benefit of the government or its citizenry. Permanent funds do NOT include private purpose trust funds.

e.g. Hawley School Trust, Edmond Town Hall Endowment and Newtown Flagpole Fund.

III. FUND BALANCE DEFINITIONS

A. Fund Balance - The difference between the Town’s current assets (cash, short-term investments, receivables) expected to be available to finance operations in the immediate future less its current liabilities and less Deferred Inflows of Resources.

B. Fund balance is initially characterized as being Restricted and Unrestricted.

TOWN OF NEWTOWN, CONNECTICUT
General Fund Balance Policy

C. Restricted Fund Balance Categories

1. **Non-spendable Fund Balance**– Amounts that cannot be spent because they are (a) not in spendable form (such as inventory, prepaid items, long term portions of notes receivables), or (b) legally or contractually required to be maintained intact (such as the corpus of an endowment fund).
2. **Restricted Fund Balance** - Amounts constrained to specific purposes by their providers (such as grantors, bondholders, and higher levels of government), through constitutional provisions, or by enabling legislation.
3. **Committed Fund Balance**– Amounts constrained to specific purposes by The Board of Finance to be reported as committed, amounts cannot be used for any other purposes unless the Board of Finance approves removal or change to the constraint.
 - a. The decision-making authority for purposes of this policy is the Board of Finance.
4. **Assigned Fund Balance**– Amounts the Town intends to use for a specific purpose; intent can be expressed by the Town or by an official or body to which the Town delegates the authority, i.e. open P.O.s at the end of the year.
 - a. Appropriations of existing fund balances to future budgets are considered Assigned Fund Balance. The Town shall not report an assignment that will result in deficit in Unassigned Fund Balance. Negative fund balances cannot be considered assigned.
 - b. The body authorized to assign amounts to a specific purpose for purposes of this policy is the Board of Finance.
 - c. When an expenditure is incurred for purposes for which both restricted and unrestricted fund balances are available, the Town considers the restricted fund balance amount to have been spent first until exhausted and then any available unrestricted fund balance.

D. Unrestricted Fund Balance Categories

1. **Unassigned Fund Balance** amounts that are available for any purpose as defined in this policy; these amounts are reported only in the general fund. In other governmental funds, if expenditures incurred exceeded the amounts restricted, committed or assigned it may be necessary to report a negative unassigned fund balance.
2. **Unrestricted Fund Balance** and Unassigned General Fund Balance are synonymous.
3. When an expenditure is incurred for purposes for which committed, assigned, or unassigned amounts are available, the Town considers the fund balance to be spent in the following order: committed, assigned, and then unassigned.

TOWN OF NEWTOWN, CONNECTICUT
General Fund Balance Policy

IV. GENERAL FUND POLICY STATEMENT

- A.** The Unrestricted (Unassigned) General Fund Balance shall be no less than eight (8) percent nor more than twelve (12) percent of the Town Budget (Charter 6-25).
- B.** The Board of Finance Consolidated Budget (Charter Section 6), shall provide for an Unrestricted General Fund Balance within the range above.
- C.** In the event the Unrestricted General Fund Balance is greater than the range in IV.A. above at the end of any fiscal year, , the Board of Finance shall, in consultation with Town Executives, and in coordination with the Finance Director, prepare and submit to the Legislative Council for approval, one or a combination of the following means to account for the excess:
1. Transfer such excess to the Capital and Nonrecurring Fund - Town for future capital projects.
 2. Transfer such excess to the Debt Service Fund for future debt payments.
 3. Use directly to reduce the tax rate in the subsequent year provided that care is taken to avoid a major fluctuation in the tax rate in succeeding years.
- D.** If at the end of a fiscal year, the Unrestricted Fund Balance falls below the range in IV.A. above the Board of Finance shall in consultation with Town Executives, and in coordination with the Finance Director, prepare and submit a plan for expenditure reductions and or revenue increases. The Board of Finance shall take action necessary to restore the Unrestricted Fund Balance to acceptable levels determined by this policy.
- E.** The following circumstances may justify a significantly higher minimum target levels:
1. Significant volatility in operating revenues or operating expenditures.
 2. Potential drain on resources from other funds facing financial difficulties.
 3. Exposure to natural disasters (e.g. hurricanes).
 4. Reliance on a single corporate taxpayer or upon a group of corporate taxpayers in the same industry.
 5. Rapidly growing budgets.
 6. Disparities in timing between revenue collections and expenditures.
- F.** The use of Unrestricted General Fund Balance will be allowed under the following circumstances:
1. Operating emergencies
 2. Unanticipated budgetary shortfalls
 3. Over the limit in IV.A

TOWN OF NEWTOWN, CONNECTICUT
General Fund Balance Policy

V. Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed by the Board of Finance at a minimum, on a bi-annual basis, during the month of January in each odd numbered year. Recommendations for change, if any will be presented to the Legislative Council for approval. The Board of Finance in this review process shall collaborate with the Board of Selectmen, Board of Education and Legislative Council.

Adopted by Board of Finance: **June 8, 2020.**

Approved by the Legislative Council: _____



A Member of the ICC Family of Solutions

Estimate

TO: Debbie Halstead, MMC, MCTC
debbie.halstead@newtown-ct.gov

FROM: Kayleigh Westermann, Client Care Advocate
kwestermann@generalcode.com

CLIENT: Town of Newtown, CT
(NE0077)

DATE: 05/22/2020

PHONE: (203) 270-4210

Supplement No. 7 Estimate – Revised Quantity

Source Files:

We have reviewed the amendment to Ch. 595 for an update to the Town Code.

Supplementation:

General Code will codify and supplement the legislation listed above which includes but is not limited to:

- Analysis of the new legislation and proper placement in the Code
- Removal of repealed or superseded provisions
- Updates to the Officials Page, Table of Contents, Disposition List, Appendixes, Index, Histories, Tables, Charts, and other items as necessary
- Review of statutory citations regarding the new legislation
- Any conflicts, inconsistencies, issues or questions identified at this point will be brought to the attention of the municipality for resolution prior to publication
- Insertion of cross reference and editor's notes, as appropriate
- Creation of instruction page for removing and inserting revised Code pages
- Printing of up to 4 sets of supplemental pages
- Update to eCode360

Additional Information Requested:

Please provide the Legislation No. and adoption for the Amendment to Ch. 595:

Leg. No.: _____

Adoption Date: _____

Price:

Between \$8,435 and \$9,245, which includes shipping and handling.

The final invoice will follow completion of the supplement.

- Any missing legislation received may result in additional costs.
- Any newly adopted legislation received after authorization for this supplement will be held until the next supplement, unless otherwise noted.

Payment Terms:

Available upon request

Authorization:

To authorize the supplement, sign this ESTIMATE and EMAIL (ezsupp@generalcode.com) it back to us.

I authorize General Code to proceed with the supplement as outlined above. This order is subject to General Code's Codification Terms and Conditions, which are available at www.generalcode.com/TCdocs.

Signature _____ Date _____