

## **Chairman's Response to IPN Member Letters to CRC and BoS**

Yesterday, I received two letters signed by Mr. Fitzgerald, Mr. Davis and Mr. Belden. The first was addressed to the Board of Selectman, the second to the Charter Revision Commission currently doing their diligence on the charge provided by this council when it was formed. The concerns I have with the two pieces of communication are similar. The first Selectman will discuss the letter to the Board of selectman. As chairman of this body, I will express my concern with regard to the letter sent to the Charter Revision Commission.

Both letters were signed by the three council members mentioned and following each of their names they included "Legislative Council" and their respective district. When not seated around this table during a meeting or acting on business specifically charged to us by a vote of a quorum of the Legislative Council, members are nothing more than Newtown residents. This is not a new concept; this council has discussed this issue in the past. Nowhere in either letter did the signatories disclaim that they were writing on their own behalf. It was left to the reader to decide whether the correspondence was official council business or something less. The inclusion of their elective titles could be interpreted as cause to confer greater influence on their letter than that given to a letter from another resident.

In the case of the CRC letter, the authors' action could circumvent the amendment process defined in state statutes by unduly influencing commissioners as they deliberate on recommendations that will ultimately come back to this council. If these individuals harbor strong convictions with respect to items in the charge, it is appropriate to speak as citizens during the public hearings or during voter participation at regular meetings. As council members, they will have at least one opportunity to influence the outcome of the process. It was completely inappropriate to insert themselves into the process at this time. Their actions demonstrate a lack of respect for the process and an "ends justify the means" attitude. I'd like to use this as an opportunity to remind all council members that this type of communication is inappropriate and I do not want it to happen again.

Dear Charter Revision Commission members:

Thank you for the time and effort you have spent on this important Commission serving the taxpayers of Newtown.

We have always believed that the taxpayers, not town government, are the ultimate fiscal authority in Newtown. This year, the Charter Review Commission was established to play an important role in addressing a significant issue that arose again during budget deliberations: clear voter intent. For the first time, voters who support education fought the recommendations of the Board of Finance and the majority of the Legislative Council and successfully voted against the budget because they felt funding for education was too low. Some of our elected officials had difficulty understanding this message until the third referendum, when the budget passed after the LC increased the education budget by a modest \$200,000 over what the Board of Finance had recommended.

As a result of the past budget process, the Legislative Council unanimously supported creating the Charter Review Commission to address three specific issues:

1. **Sec. 6-14 (a) Consider including the requirement for a bifurcated budget, to include separate ballot questions for the Board of Selectmen budget and the Board of Education budget?**
2. **Sec. 6-14 or 6-15- Consider including non-binding advisory questions as to whether a negative vote is due to the budget being too high or too low.**
3. **Sec. 6-14 – consider a budget ballot requiring each voter to (a) approve the budget, or (b) reject the budget because it is too high, or (c) reject the budget because it is too low. One choice only. Advisory questions not necessary.”**

While we recognize you have made an initial decision on two of these issues, we would ask your further consideration on these points before forwarding your final recommendations to the Legislative Council.

**Allow the public to vote on the concept of bifurcation:** The input you have received in support of not bifurcating the budget has come from Newtown’s leadership, who want to maintain the status quo, and not from Newtown taxpayers, who we believe may be willing to try a new approach to the budget process that will be more able to convey their intent. It is Newtown’s taxpayers, and not Newtown’s leadership, who are the driving force behind the Legislative Council charging your Commission with the review of budget bifurcation and advisory questions. Newtown taxpayers have made it clear following another contentious budget season that it is time for Newtown to find a better way to understand voter intent at budget time. Many taxpayers believe that the current process is broken.

Bifurcation provides an option to easily understand voting results of the people for the town budget and education budget separately. As one of your Commission members

pointed out, we already have a bifurcated review process. The Republican controlled Board of Finance, through its actions, has made it clear that it distinguishes between the budget provided by the Republican controlled Board of Selectmen versus the budget recommended by the IPN/Democratic controlled Board of Education. The concept of one town/one budget is a ruse. It is supported only because it provides town officials greater control over the outcome of the budget process. Indeed, it appears that for many other towns' bifurcation of the two budgets creates a more responsive budget process for the voter. All boards involved in the budget process would need to be mindful of the support for each separate budget in order to have it pass on the first vote.

So far, the track record of the budgets that have been recommended by the BOF and rubber-stamped by the Legislative Council being approved on a first, or even second, vote has not been a good one. Town leaders seem to suggest that bifurcation will only "split" Newtown at budget time, but isn't that exactly what happens today without bifurcation? While bifurcation won't bring both sides together, it could reduce the overall frustration and contention by providing a channel for clearer communication and may make it easier to discern where voter support lies for each individual budget. Bifurcation has worked for other towns. We believe that the decision lies with the voters. Newtown voters deserve the right to vote on whether they want a different budget process than the one we have today, and we hope that you will consider such a recommendation to let the voters decide.

The Charter Review Commission charge given by the Council, and integral to the selection process for the Commission, was a clear directive to thoroughly research and analyze the options regarding bifurcation and advisory questions, including its effectiveness in other towns and how it could be applied in Newtown. Thus far, we have seen little evidence that serious consideration has been given to the issue. Any recommendation to the Legislative Council needs a well thought out and researched position on budget bifurcation. Our hope is that along with that information will be a recommendation to bring the issue to the voters so that they can decide.

**Create advisory questions that provide clear voter intent:** Two simple questions will not provide clear meaning as to why voters may oppose a budget, unless you are using them in the context of a bifurcated budget process. If we are voting on the town budget and the education budget separately, then asking if a person is voting no because it is too high or too low, makes sense. If we are to stay with the current budget process of voting on one combined budget, you must ask at least 4 questions to discern any credible information on voter intent:

- Is the education budget too high?**
- Is the education budget too low?**
- Is the town budget too high?**
- Is the town budget too low?**

This is the only way to really understand why voters are voting against our single budget. Without those four questions, you have failed to take the guesswork out of the budget process for the Legislative Council.

**Expanding the scope of the Board of Finance:** Beyond those questions with which the Legislative Council has charged your Commission, you have chosen to include a recommendation that the Board of Finance be required to make a recommendation to the Legislative Council after each failed budget referendum. We understand that this request came out of a conversation with John Kortze, Board of Finance Chairman, which occurred outside of your regular meetings. This item is not even on the list of recommendations that the public provided to the Legislative Council Charge Committee for consideration. And as you know, as demonstrated after the first referendum failed earlier this year, the Legislative Council Chair already has the discretion to invite the Board of Finance to participate in the Council's review. This does not need to be formalized in the Charter, which would only take any flexibility out of the process. Quite frankly, we see such action as detrimental to the process because it would allow the Board of Finance a bully pulpit to try to support its previous failed budget recommendation and give it more authority to second guess public intent. This would only add further angst to the budget process. Indeed, if you are to recommend added steps in the budget process, you would also need to address the inequity in the Charter's requirement that a super majority of the Legislative Council is necessary to increase the Board of Finance recommended budget, while only requiring a majority to approve a decrease to the Board of Finance recommended budget. This question was included multiple times on the list of issues the public wanted the Legislative Council to include in your review. A simple majority should be required for both increasing and decreasing the budget, particularly if the Commission is recommending the Board of Finance, by Charter, be involved in each budget revision before it goes to the Legislative Council. The Board of Finance makes its budget recommendation in good faith, but if its recommendation is rejected, then it is the Legislative Council's responsibility to craft a budget acceptable to the voters.

We thank you for considering our input into the process, and we look forward to seeing your final recommendations when they are made to the Legislative Council.

Respectfully yours,

Kevin Fitzgerald  
Legislative Council, District 1

Gary Davis  
Legislative Council, District 2

James Belden  
Legislative Council, District 3

October 26, 2010

Dear Dr. Epple,

Our group of Reed Intermediate School parents requested a dialog with you in September regarding our concerns about Cycle Day 6 and the schedule changes that occurred at Reed this year. We were pleased that you and Dr. Salvatore offered the Parent Forums to communicate the background and rationale for these changes.

Initially, our concerns revolved around the inconsistency and the lack of direction with instruction time on Cycle Day 6. Also, we were concerned with the large number of assemblies and their content every 6 days. These changes caused us to review the entire schedule. While we are not education specialists, the schedule is not benefiting our children and we find the current day 6 model to be unacceptable in carrying out the core curriculum.

In addition to the Parent Forums, you invited several parents to further clarify the issues and concerns with a hired consultant. Again, while we appreciate the effort on your part our goal for that meeting was to be involved in a scheduling collaboration with teachers and the administration rather than another venue for us just to voice our opinion to an outside party.

Our primary objective is to see a new schedule implemented at the start of the next rotation so our children will have an improved educational experience at Reed Intermediate.

The topics below are key to making what we believe would be meaningful adjustments to the schedule:

- 1.) **Accelerated Reader (A/R) Program** – Eliminate the A/R program as part of the schedule. Return the A/R component to library, learning lab and reading. This will eliminate the redundancy that is currently creating too much independent reading time and taking away from teacher directed instruction.
- 2.) **Grade Level Assemblies** – As noted in your forum presentation, assembly topics include everything from behavioral interventions to yearbook signing.— The number of assemblies should be reduced. Disruptions to instruction should occur only for culturally and educationally significant programs. The assemblies should be planned well ahead of time and published for parent review.

We do understand the need for a predictable schedule. One suggestion would be to change to an alternating cycle day 6A and 6B structure. This would allow for a reduced number of assemblies, more academic instructional time consistent in all classrooms, and provide sufficient time for teacher collaboration time. Additionally, students who are missing core classes on day six due to assemblies would have this instructional time made up. Bottom line...more direct instruction and time on task.

- As far as the emphasis on Bullying, we understand there are State requirements to promote better behavior. However, while it is important, the manner in which the Bullying or any Core Value instruction is delivered should be improved. Smaller focus groups would greatly enhance absorption of this topic and allow for greater interaction between students.
- 3.) **Special Teachers**-Utilize special teachers over 6-day cycle.
- Potentially alleviate overcrowded gym classes.
- 4.) **Learning Lab** – The guidelines for Learning Lab are inadequate (7 years old as stated in the Parent Forum meeting). New standards should be communicated and reviewed with the teaching staff. Instructional time should not be used for locker clean out and doing homework. There needs to be consistency across all clusters in how this time is utilized. Teachers and Reed Administrators need to be accountable for maintaining this consistency.
- 5.) **Equality and Consistency of Instruction Across Grade Levels** – The Superintendent has spoken about the need for Reed students to have skill proficiency when they move to the Middle School. Based on discussions between parents, teachers, and administrators we do not believe that is occurring at Reed. There is a need to have more monitoring into what is happening in the classroom and more clarification on what constitutes instructional time within our current schedule. Having a clear understanding of each teacher's schedule, unscheduled walkthroughs and sharing best practices may be a productive avenue that will allow for continuous improvement throughout the Reed teaching community.

We are interested in the best possible educational experience for our children and for those children that will arrive at Reed in the future. We expect to see schedule changes at Reed that focus the maximum amount of instruction time on core academics. We expect instruction to be delivered in a predictable and consistent manner across each grade level. With those suggestions in mind, we look forward to seeing your plan of action prior to the start of the next rotation.

Respectfully,

Signatures below

1	Avery-Calabrese, Christine	35	Duffy, Nancy	69	Pacchiana, Miranda
2	Badiola, Alexandra	36	Eurell, John	70	Parsons, Jeanine
3	Badiola, Joseba	37	Eurell, Wendy	71	Parsons, Jim
4	Baker, George	38	Fetchick, Jeff	72	Patrick, Barb
5	Baker, Stella	39	Fetchick, Kathy	73	Phaneuf, Jeanne
6	Baron, Barb	40	Finnegan, Jennifer	74	Phaneuf, Paul
7	Baron, Keith	41	Futterman, Breda	75	Pryor, Charles
8	Barrett, Jen	42	Futterman, Jonathan	76	Roche, Ken
9	Barrett, Kevin	43	Garner, Larry	77	Roche, Laura
10	Beardsley, Craig	44	Garner, Sarah	78	Sabillon, Sherry
11	Beardsley, Mimi	45	Grossano, Gerard	79	Santore, Lorraine
12	Begany, Bill	46	Grossano, Randine	80	Schickendantz, Leonardus
13	Begany, Janet	47	Harrison, Missy	81	Schickendantz, Leonie
14	Benson, Krista	48	Harrison, Tom	82	Sheridan, James
15	Bogdanoff, Liz	49	Holman, Bill	83	Sheridan, Lisa
16	Bogdanoff, Tod	50	Holman, Tracy	84	Smith, Michele
17	Buchler, Bill	51	King, Laura	85	Smith, Pat
18	Buchler, Pam	52	Kortze, Tara	86	Steinebrey, Jeffrey
19	Calabrese, Pat	53	Kost, Dan	87	Steinebrey, Rachel
20	Carriero, Joe	54	Kost, Nancy	88	Street, Mara
21	Carriero, Lori	55	Lambert, Eric	89	Street, Rick
22	Carson, Russell	56	Lambert, Melanie	90	Trede, Kelley
23	Carson, Stephanie	57	Leuci, Anthony	91	Trede, Michael
24	Celentano, Andrea	58	Leuci, Myra	92	Ursem, Kirsten
25	Celentano, James	59	Lombardo, Mary	93	Venezia, Joe
26	Chanko, Eric	60	Mason, Bob	94	Venezia, Kym
27	Chanko, Susan	61	Mason, Denise	95	Walsh, Kinga
28	Clifford, Lea Ann	62	Maturo, Fran	96	Weiland, Jim
29	Clifford, Pete	63	Melillo, Michele	97	Wellman, Andy
30	Collins, Suzanne	64	Melillo, Ron	98	Wellman, Caren
31	Conte, Dave	65	Mulligan, Shannon	99	Williams, Rich
32	Conte, Kelly	66	Muzzio, Tricia	100	Williams, SuZanne
33	Dubois, Chuck	67	O'Brien, Christopher		
34	Dubois, Judy	68	O'Brien, Susan		

Cc: Dr. Janet Robinson, Superintendent of Schools  
Dr. Dr. Anthony Salvatore, Reed Intermediate School Assistant Principal  
Mr. Bill Hart, Board of Education Chairmen  
Mrs. Debbie Leidlein, Board of Education Vice Chair  
Mr. Andy Buzzi, Board of Education Secretary  
Mr. David Nanavaty, Board of Education  
Mr. Richard Gaines, Board of Education  
Mrs. Lillian Bittman, Board of Education

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Dr. Epple,

As a parent at Reed Intermediate, I would like the new schedule to have the same amount of Core Curriculum Instructional times in Math, Reading, Language Arts, Social Studies and Science for each child.

Thank you,

**Reed Parents**

1	Alexander, James	41	Doyle, Stacie	81	Mulligan, Shannon
2	Alexander, Karen	42	Dubois, Chuck	82	Nuzzo, Dana
3	Ankers, Jo	43	Dubois, Judy	83	Nuzzo, Frank
4	Ankers, Mark	44	Duffy, Nancy	84	O'Brien, Christopher
5	Antous, Joe	45	Dunn, Nancy	85	O'Brien, Susan
6	Antous, Laurie	46	Dunn, Sean	86	O'Leary, Aran
7	Arnold, Brandy	47	Fetchick, Jeff	87	O'Leary, Paul
8	Arnold, Scott	48	Fetchick, Kathy	88	Phaneuf, Jeanne
9	Badiola, Alexandra	49	Finnegan, Jen	89	Phaneuf, Paul
10	Badiola, Joseba	50	Futterman, Breda	90	Pryor, Charles
11	Baker, George	51	Futterman, Jonathan	91	Roche, Ken
12	Baker, Stella	52	Garner, Larry	92	Roche, Laura
13	Barrett, Jen	53	Garner, Sarah	93	Sabillon, Jose E.
14	Barrett, Kevin	54	Groonell, Beth	94	Sabillon, Sherry
15	Bauer, Jim	55	Harrison, Missy	95	Santore, Lorraine
16	Bauer, Karen	56	Harrison, Tom	96	Schickendantz, Len
17	Beardsley, Craig	57	Hobar, Jim	97	Schickendantz, Leonie
18	Beardsley, Mimi	58	Hobar, Marsha	98	Shaw, Bob
19	Begany, Bill	59	Holman, Bill	99	Shaw, Sue
20	Begany, Janet	60	Holman, Tracy	100	Sheridan, Jim
21	Bergeron, Laurie	61	Kelleher, Patty	101	Sheridan, Lisa
22	Bergeron, Laurie	62	Kelleher, Thomas	102	Smith, Michele
23	Bogdanoff, Liz	63	Kelly, Luann	103	Smith, Pat
24	Bogdanoff, Tod	64	King, Laura	104	Stenz, Cheryl
25	Buchler, Bill	65	Kortze, Tara	105	Street, Mara
26	Buchler, Pam	66	Kretz, Jeff	106	Street, Rick
27	Burns, Steffan	67	Kretz, Sue	107	Sughrue, Bill
28	Burns, Stephanie	68	Leuci, Anthony	108	Sughrue, Rori
29	Burns, Stephanie	69	Leuci, Myra	109	Tousignant, Jeff
30	Carriero, Joe	70	Lombardo, Mary	110	Tousignant, Jennifer
31	Carriero, Lori	71	Luby, Brian	111	Trede, Kelley
32	Celentano, Andrea	72	Luby, Julie	112	Trede, Michael
33	Celentano, James	73	Marcinek, Joanne	113	Varnum, Jeanne
34	Chanko, Eric	74	Marcinek, John	114	Varnum, Rick
35	Chanko, Susan	75	Mason, Bob	115	Venezia, Joe
36	Clifford, Lea Ann	76	Mason, Denise	116	Venezia, Kym
37	Clifford, Pete	77	McCafferty, Dorothy	117	Walsh, Kinga
38	Conte, Dave	78	McCafferty, John	118	Weiland, Jim
39	Conte, Kelly	79	Meyer, Doug	119	Wellman, Andy
40	Doyle, Jim	80	Meyer, Jennifer	120	Wellman, Caren

CC: Dr. Anthony Salvatore  
Dr. Janet Robinson  
William G. Hart  
Debbie Leidlein  
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