

# Newtown, Connecticut

## 3-21-11 Education Committee

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**Minutes of the Meeting of the Education Subcommittee of the Legislative Council  
Held in Conference Room #1 and moved to the BOE Conference Room in the Newtown Municipal Center,  
3 Primrose Street, Newtown, Connecticut  
Monday, March 21st, 2011**

\* These are draft minutes and as such are subject to correction by the Legislative Council Education Committee at the next regular meeting. All corrections will be determined in minutes of the meeting at which they were corrected.

Council Chairman Kathy Fetchick called the meeting to order at 7:37 pm.

**PRESENT:** George Ferguson, Kathy Fetchick, Kevin Fitzgerald, Benjamin Spragg and Jeff Capeci

**ALSO PRESENT:** Bill Hart, Janet Robinson, Chip Dumais, Ron Bienkowski., Dr. Linda Gejda, three members of the public and one member of the press. Due to the unanticipated number of attendees, the meeting was moved to the BOE Conference Room and a note was left on the door of Conference Room #1.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:** Chuck Hepp of 4 Winter Ridge Road presented district and region comparison data to the committee including performance trends on SAT scores, HS testing, Reading and Math scores as well as data assumptions on what the district's average SAT scores buy the students with respect to college admissions. His data also included comparison of "true" educational spending by towns after removing non-educational costs.

**ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES:** George Ferguson made the motion to approve the minutes of January 6, 2011. Ben Spragg seconded the motion and the motion was approved unanimously.

**COMMUNICATIONS:** Kathy shared that she had forwarded to Bill Hart and Janet Robinson the approximately 50 questions prepared by the members of this committee which would be addressed in this meeting and likely at the following meeting as well.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

Bill Hart, Chairman of the Board of Education, Janet Robinson, Newtown District Schools Superintendent, Chip Dumais, principal of Newtown High School and Ron Bienkowski, Finance Director for Newtown District Schools addressed the questions provided to them by the Committee. Answers were also provided in hard copy and those will be posted along with these minutes.

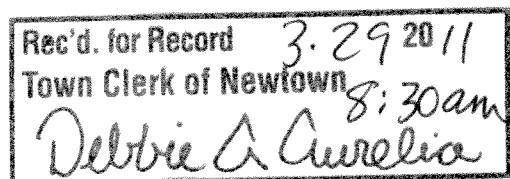
Questions 1-18 were addressed during the meeting and in the interest of time, the Committee has agreed to reduce the remaining questions for the next meeting to those which it believes to have the greatest impact on the 2011-2012 budget.

Kathy asked for additional financial detail from Ron Bienkowski and Ron agreed to provide an excel spreadsheet to the committee.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:** None

**ADJOURNMENT:** Having no further business, Ben Spragg moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:24 pm. George Ferguson seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Kevin Fitzgerald



## BOE Budget Questions from Legislative Council Education Committee

1. What processes are in place to encourage or seek spending reduction recommendations by staff and others? What yet-to-be vetted opportunities for savings do you have in mind for the next few years and what would be needed to move those forward, if possible?
2. Describe the district's contingency planning. What events could drive contingencies in 2011-2012 and how might they be addressed and how would funding be provided if not yet considered in the budget?
3. Explain spending on items in 2009-2010 on items that may not have been itemized or considered in that year's budget, or were unplanned, i.e. pool repair, additional staff, etc., and how will spending of that nature be managed in 2011-2012?
4. What has been the net headcount of all paid personnel (staff, teachers, etc.) for the past five years and how might the differences such as the cost of a new teacher versus a tenured teacher impact that?
5. Recognizing that linking changes in spending increases with improved overall performance is challenging, where inside the entire program might taxpayers (and administrators) look to or measure to see how increased funding delivers improved results? If none, what can be done to create such a link in the future?
6. Are the district's objectives reasonable and if so, how does the district plan to achieve them and in what period of time?
7. Please share your thoughts on the presentation made by Chuck Hepp. How do you explain this district's performance versus others and what is needed most to make the improvements you'd like to see?
8. As the town and school district look to consolidate services and resources in an effort to control or reduce spending, what do you see as the biggest challenges in that plan if any?
9. Please provide an update on the district's external communication strategies and what resources or funding would be needed to reach your goals? How are you measuring effectiveness?
10. What would you do with additional funding? What would you change with less funding?
11. What keeps you up at night?
12. I'm particularly interested in the teacher observation efforts that High School Principal and the Assistant Principals have been undertaking for several years at the High School. I'd like to learn about the results we've achieved through this process. Please give some examples of the actions and outcomes that have resulted from this important managerial effort. I would also like to learn more about the process and procedures undertaken, discuss the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the rubric or algorithm and would like to see a copy of the information gathering instruments used in measuring teachers efficacy.

BOE Budget Questions from Legislative Council Education Committee

13. There is a unfunded mandate to increase the number of graduation credits required now on the books as a result to the State's failed effort to apply for Federal Race to the Top funding. I recall Janet Robinson indicating a year or so that most of our students are already meeting the new standard. I'd like to know the metrics regarding the credits earned by the class of 2009, 2010 and enrolled and anticipated for 2011.
14. College in high school. Increasingly AP classes have become popular in High Schools across the Country. There are a number of drivers of this including High School Ratings like U.S. News and World reports "Best High Schools in America", whose measuring algorithm heavily weights the number of AP classes taken in the aggregate as a key quality rating, and the desire of parents and students to escalate the competition for entry into prestigious Colleges. I'd like to see the metrics for our own school system in terms of growth in this area (# of AP Classes and students and their test scores) over the past five years. I'd also like to know what if any are the BOE's policies and goals in this area over the next five years.
15. I'd also like any comments about how this escalates the stress level for Teachers and Administration, as well as students and families. By the way I am signed up for the "Race to Nowhere" showing being hosted by the District.
16. Increasingly, Universities are expanding their online offerings in response to student demand and recognition that it is more cost and educationally effective (student demand) to deliver interactive educational programming and content. There is a significant movement within the Higher Education community to transition from "Building Centered" educational program delivery to "On Demand" programming. Connecticut Virtual Learning now offers full year and half year AP Courses taught by CT Certified Teachers and price at \$320 and \$640 respectively including free supplemental AP test preparatory courses. Please outline any plans that the BOE or District management has for utilizing these services.
17. As our District has grown qualitatively we have added more course offerings and segmented them by level. I'd like to know more about what we've added over the past five years and what we've dropped.
18. As proposed by the BOF, please provide a detailed document listing the new positions, programs and associated costs for implementation.
19. What is the status of the current budget (surplus or deficit) and what are their plans to use or address accordingly.
20. Project Succeed
  - a. What is the reasoning behind bringing this program to the district?
  - b. What is the total staff required for this program and what are the associated costs with this program (including "loss of rental credit").
  - c. How many students are enrolled in this program (both in and out-of district).

BOE Budget Questions from Legislative Council Education Committee

- d. What are the savings associated with moving this program to the district?
  - e. Please provide financial data associated with adding/subtracting students from this program.
  - f. What is the plan for this program if outside districts are interested in being served by our program. Are there any plans to expand the services.
  - g. What grants are available to offset the costs of this program in the current year and in the future?
  - h. Did the Board of Education vote to bring this program into the district?
21. Please provide the following information by cost center (ie Hawley School, Sandy Hook School...) – similar to the “Bob Tait” report:  
original 09-10 budget/actual 09-10 expenditures/original 10-11 budget from July 1 (no transfers)/actual 10-11 expenditures/11-12 requested budget
22. What is the plan regarding bussing?
23. Please provide an explanation for the role of the new assistant high school principal and the priority with respect to all other needs in the district.
24. What is the plan moving forward if there is a surplus in the current year? How is surplus is addressed per school?
25. Please illustrate staff, position and associated costs for those positions not planned for in the current 2010-11 budget year. Also, illustrate the same for any other positions to be hired but not yet hired that were not planned for in the current 2010-11 budget year.
26. Please provide the cost for the two consultants hired to work at Reed.
27. What is the plan (time, financial support, and staff requirement) to address the difficulties at the Reed School.
28. There is financial support added to the High School budget to provide equipment and training for Project Adventure. What is the overall district plan for Project Adventure? Why was it removed from the Reed School but added to the High School?
29. What is the status of the district’s strategic plan? How does the general public know where we are in reaching our goals?
30. What are the staffing policies regarding the high school? How is it determined to add/remove a section/program? What is the policy regarding the responsibilities of department chairs.
31. What accounts address building facilities and what is financial total?

BOE Budget Questions from Legislative Council Education Committee

32. Why is the visitor's bleachers at the high school a priority over teaching staff or any other need in the district
33. Have there been any discussions with the Town regarding a long-term goal of consolidating our benefit offerings?
34. Please clarify costs to the district if a student is placed in our district by the Department of Children and Families.
35. On page 6 of the budget book, there is a comment in the TEXTBOOK section that there funds "for increased enrollment". What are would that be in?
36. Why is there an increase in principal salaries at Sandy Hook School?
37. The most recent financial report talks about "three more special education students" joined us. Are these the students from Project Succeed? Are they all Newtown students? Are there any students from "out-of-district"?
38. There are many references in the budget data which reference funding from the ARRA grant (see page 56 as an example). What is this in reference to?
39. Please provide the staff numbers for General Support Services in the years 09-10, 10-11, 11-12 as described on page 70 of budget book.
40. In General Support Services, there is \$101,221 increase in Non-certified salaries. Can you provide some information on this?
41. Please provide the backup data for the budget request of regular substitutes.
42. Please provide the backup data for professional services – shows an increase of 43.34% (\$145,685).
43. Please provide the backup data for contracted services– shows an increase of 20.66% (\$67,312).
44. Please provide the backup data for property and equipment – shows an increase of 88.18% (\$203,285).
45. Are there more recent estimations regarding dental insurance (shows a 9% increase)?