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Paul Lundquist, Vice Chair  
George Ferguson  
Tony Filiato  
Dan Honan  
Bob Merola



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## TOWN OF NEWTOWN

Draft Minutes of the Legislative Council Education Committee Meeting.

The Education Committee met on Wednesday, March 26, 2014 in Council Chambers, Newtown Municipal Center, 3 Primrose Lane, Newtown. Chairman Neil Chaudhary called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

Present: Neil Chaudhary, Paul Lundquist, George Ferguson, Tony Filiato, Dan Honan, and Bob Merola.  
Also present: Mary Ann Jacob, Debbie Leidlein, Dr. John Reed, Dr. Linda, Gjeda, Ms. Carmella Amodio, Ron Bienkowski, Bob Tait, Kathy Hamilton,

PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

Mr. Ferguson moved to accept the minutes of the January 30, 2014 meeting. Mr. Lundquist seconded. The motion passed without objection or abstention.

Mr. Chaudhary reminded the Committee that it could not add monies to the budget above the figures passed along by the Finance Board. Further, it was noted that the Committee and Council could take no action until after the Public Hearing was held.

Mr. Chaudhary asked Dr. Reed to address the issue of the \$400k increase to the Health Insurance Self Insurance Fund. Dr. Reed asked Mr. Bienkowski to respond. Mr. Bienkowski explained that the recommendation was made by the Insurance Committee, which in turn relied on the advices of Blue Cross and the administrator. However, it was noted that the recommendations from Blue Cross were much higher and that the \$400k represented a compromise figure. Ms. Jacob inquired as to whether the actuarial projections employed could be for a period that does not cross budget periods. Mr. Bienkowski responded that it was not practical in that they would always use the latest figures available. Mr. Tait added that the underlying projections were close to his own and explained some of the line items including the Stop Loss insurance cover. In response to a question from Mr. Ferguson, Mr. Tait noted that the aggregate cover from Blue Cross has not been utilized although the individual cover which attaches at \$125k is used quite frequently.

Mr. Chaudhary next turned to the issue of new textbooks, the line item for which to be found on page 224 of the Education Budget. Ms. Gjeda responded that some of the funds offset a reduction to two programs the year prior. Ms. Jacobs commented that the reduction should have been in the last budget. Mr. Reed replied that they were not as the reductions occurred after the initial budget was reduced. Ms. Gjeda noted that the textbooks involve the math program for the K-4 level, which has been agreed and that the 5-6 grade program was under review. Mr. Lundquist inquired as to whether the line item would drop next year after the purchase. Ms. Gjeda replied that likely it would not because the 7-8 grade program would be under review by that time. Dr. Reed added that no assumptions can be made to textbook expenses as they constantly fluctuate.

A discussion was next held regarding the purchase of iPads. Ms. Amodio noted that currently iPads are split between staff and students. Specifically, there are 1,045 in the District split with 368 going to staff and 677 to students. Ms. Amodio was not certain if the new Sandy Hook iPads were included in these figures. Mr. Lundquist inquired as to whether staff was bringing their own tech to the classroom. Ms. Amodio responded that some are, but that most employ District tech. A survey of 4 years ago showed that 80% of students have computer access in the home, but that it was often limited due to other family members also using it. Mr. Lundquist then inquired as to whether the iPads could be offered in a manner more weighted toward students. Ms. Amodio noted that when Apple donated the iPads many were required to go to staff so that they could learn the usage and be prepared to help the students learn in turn. Ms. Amodio further noted that discounts offered by Apple have been passed along to staff and could possibly be passed along to

students. Ms. Jacob commented that the Finance Board would prefer that technology purchases such as forthcoming obsolescence be paid over a period of time rather than in large sums in a single year.

Mr. Chaudhary next asked Dr. Reed to respond to Mr. Merola's inquiries as to staff reductions at the high school. Dr. Reed reminded the Committee that a budget is a snapshot in time and that much depends upon the on-going needs of the principals and staff at each school. Class sizes vary year to year and some grades present a challenge due to unusual size. Head O'Meadow is currently in such a position. Dr. Reed stated that the education community made a decision in the 1950s that high schools should be general and cover everything; the 1990s saw high schools measured in graduation rates. Therefore, there was a trend to offer a greater variety of course offerings to attract students to stay longer in school. This was further impacted by the growth in mandated Special Education mandates. Moreover, once a course of study is established, a commitment to students is made that the course will remain an option throughout the student's time at the school.

Dr. Reed does not believe that the High School is over-staffed. Some classes, such as science labs, are capped at 24 students due to equipment and safety concerns. In fact, a line of Art classes have been discontinued due to perceived lack of interest. Comparative data from schools falling within Newtown's DRG shows that Newtown is not unique in its staffing. Dr. Reed noted that he has already asked the Temporary Principal at the High School to look more closely at staffing and especially after students request their courses for next year.

Mr. Merola noted that although he may not agree with the some of the answers, that this was the first time in three years that he had received a response to these questions and thanked Dr. Reed accordingly.

No voter comment.

Mr. Ferguson motioned to adjourn at 6:55 pm. Mr. Lundquist seconded.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Anthony R. Filiato, Esq.  
Legislative Council Education Committee

Attachments: Questions sent to BOE

*These are draft minutes and as such are subject to correction by the Education Committee of the Legislative Council at the next regular meeting.*

## ATTACHMENT

### Questions/Request:

#### **Insurance Increase**

Can you supply us with the actuarial analysis/documentation for the increase in the health self-insurance fund that was added into the budget by the Finance Board?

I assume that the insurance increases were after staff contributions but just want confirmation.

#### **Curriculum & Technology:**

p221 - Staff Contracted Services - \$28.3K to \$69.5K (+146%, \$41.2K)... Huge jump -- why? What is new/different from previous years?

- Is Rubicon Curriculum mapping a totally new system, or is it already in place? Replacing something else currently in use?
- Same questions for NWEA student performance monitoring.

p221 - Textbooks - \$98.7K to \$125.6K (+27%, \$26.9K)... does this represent doubling-up/catchup on purchases since the line item was held flat the previous year?

#### **Technology:**

p228 - Technology -- Of the 91 iPads requested for 14/15 budget, how will they be used? What is the number that will be used by students vs. staff? What is the total number of iPads we have in use in the district today, and how many of those are used by students versus in the hands of staff?

*Reason I ask is that there are over 1,000 iPads proposed for purchase over the next 3 years, so curious as to how they would be used (some may be replacing existing).*

What is the district's policy regarding BYOT as it applies to teachers/staff/admin? Are teachers bringing their own technology devices (iPad/Droid) or are they relying on district to provide?

NOT DIRECTLY RELATED TO BUDGET: Do you have an estimate of the % of Newtown students who have use of a PC/laptop at home? For those who do not, I've heard of school-sponsored (not funded) purchasing programs at decent discounts, partnering with well-known manufacturers. Has Newtown considered this? (similar program exists at St. Rose for iPad purchasing)

#### **Mandates/CCSS:**

Over the past 1-2 years, has the district been tracking cost increases that are due to new (or existing) state mandates? Specifically, what has been the cost to date for implementation of CCSS, and is there a total projected cost estimate?

**Staff Reduction**

Can you explain how decisions were made regarding staff reductions? In particular we have received emails regarding 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at HOM—it seems that the other third grade classes had similar teacher to student ratios but HOM is slated for a teacher reduction to bring them to a higher (albeit within BOE recommendations) average class size.

**High School Staffing**

Can someone elaborate on perceived overstaffing at the High School?

Can someone address/discuss the idea of an annual sunset plan; that is, each year prioritize offerings to decide if they are effective and consider whether or not an offering should be eliminated?