

**New Milford Board of Education
 Special Meeting Minutes
 May 27, 2014
 Sarah Noble Intermediate School Library Media Center**

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NEW MILFORD, CT

Present:	Mrs. Daniele Shook, Chairperson Mrs. Wendy Faulenbach Mr. David A. Lawson Mrs. Theresa Volinski Mr. Dave Littlefield Mrs. Angela C. Chastain Mr. Robert Coppola Mr. John W. Spatola Mr. David R. Shaffer
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Also Present:	Dr. JeanAnn Paddyfote, Superintendent of Schools Mr. Joshua Smith, Assistant Superintendent of Schools Ms. Ellamae Baldelli, Director of Human Resources Mrs. Roberta Pratt, Director of Technology Mrs. Laura Olson, Director of Pupil Personnel Services Mr. John Calhoun, Facilities Manager Mrs. Dana Ford, Principal, Schaghticoke Middle School Dr. Len Tomasello, Principal, Sarah Noble Intermediate School Mrs. Paula Kelleher, Principal, John Pettibone School
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1.	Call to Order A. Pledge of Allegiance The annual meeting of the New Milford Board of Education was called to order at 7:00 pm. The Pledge of Allegiance immediately followed the call to order.	Call to Order Pledge of Allegiance
2.	Public Comment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robert Winkelstern, a New Milford resident, said it was unfortunate that the decision might be to close John Pettibone. He was a facilities man for Danbury and Ridgefield for eight and eighteen years respectively and said the decision to mothball JPS would still have costs associated. The costs would include heating ventilating, plowing, mowing, inspections, checking the roof, etc. He suggested the Board go to the State and ask for an updated code inspection and determine what it would cost to get the building up to code. • Joe Failla, a New Milford resident, prior Board 	Public Comment

	<p>of Education member and current Town Council member, said he supports the closing of the school since the student population has declined significantly by over 500 students. He said even if 100 families with an average size of 2.5 people moved into town that would only add 250 children and would not make up for the total loss. He suggested that with the cost to renovate the building that it just needs to be taken down, the property should be sold, and the money should go back into the Board of Education in a fund that would be allowed to grow to potentially build another school if needed in the future. He said he would support that as a member of the Town Council. He also said he looked at a study handed out prior called the Duke Study and felt that it only suggested that sixth graders remaining in an elementary school setting got one more year of a child culture but noted that in this country we start our kids in school at a later age. He said it was time to close JPS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Katy Francis, a New Milford resident and a product of New Milford schools said she went to JPS half way through second grade through eighth grade. She said if there are issues at Schaghticoke that parents are afraid to send their sixth grader there then that needs to be looked at. She said she understands this is an emotional issue but noted that the teachers and administrators would be going to the same building with the children. She noted that as a Town Council member she would also support selling the property and giving the money to the Board of Education.• Gale Alexander, a New Milford resident, Board of Finance member and a teacher said he has reservations about a sixth, seventh and eighth grade configuration. He suggested instead of closing a school that the town furlough one, update and upgrade it, move students in and do the same with the other schools. He noted that Sarah Noble became Sarah Noble because it	
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was not maintained as the high school.

- Walter Bayer, a New Milford resident, and member of the Town Council, said he sat on the facilities committee that was asked to make this recommendation. He said that committee quickly focused on numbers and not on the effect of the students. He said sixth graders are elementary grade students. He is a retired teacher. He said sixth graders need recess. He also said a wave of new residents is going to come and they are going to come north because it is affordable here. He suggested this decision go to referendum versus just this Board making the decision.
- Carol Allison, a New Milford resident and sixth grade teacher, said sixth graders are an impressionable age group. She said according to studies, sixth graders do suffer academically when placed with seventh and eighth grade classrooms. She said for her daughter, sixth grade was the hardest in her K-12 education. She also noted that the paper recently announced that Danbury is in the position of adding classrooms because of enrollment.
- Jenna Peloso, a New Milford resident, said all towns have had a decrease in births probably due to the recession but the article in the paper said Danbury was running out of space and has a new middle school opening up. She asked why New Milford was not looking out for the best interests of its students.
- Steve MacKessy, a New Milford resident, said there is a lot of talk about money but little said about the impact on students educationally. He said the proposed average class size is supposed to be 18 but this move will result in 19 or 20 students. He felt lower class sizes will make students succeed. He also felt enrollment will go up in 10 years.
- Walter Rogg, a New Milford resident, former Mayor, and former Board of Finance member, said closing the school not affect the educational process in a negative fashion. He

said the Board is obligated to the taxpayers to give the best return for their investment. He felt there would be no problem with sixth graders going to the middle school. He felt parents now have a tendency to baby their children. He said there is no economic justification to keep the school open.

- Adrienne Aurichio, a New Milford resident, said she has asked the same question at every meeting which is how much would it cost to build a new school in 10 years. She said Brookfield and Ridgefield have opted not to close schools. She also noted the birth rate is expected to uptick for the first time in 2014 since the recession. She asked what the hurry is to make this decision.
- Lisa Terlizzi, a New Milford resident, said 18 years ago the town bought land for the new high school because of overcrowding at the then high school. She said she was involved in the PTO and saw the benefits of that project at that time. She said back at that time they were told that the alignment of K-3, 4 – 6, 7 & 8, and 9 – 12 was best for kids. She suggested the administration close East Street and move to JPS.
- Amy Davis, a New Milford resident, read a letter from Alison Buckley who could not be present, she said that everyone is feeling the squeeze. Last year she looked at the rankings of New Milford's schools and saw they were in the 70s, while nearby towns was higher. She said most of the people don't want the school closed and the Board should bring this to a referendum.
- Michelle Liguori, a New Milford resident, said as a resident, small business owner, and parent she feels that the Town Council is pushing this decision. She felt this should be put to a referendum.
- Beth Falder served on the facilities committee and noted there were only four town council members on the committee of 40 members. She

said she has skin in the game as her children go to JPS. She said the studies have been consistent with an aging population and decreasing population in Connecticut. She said the committee was very clear in its criteria that class size would be 18 or less and that is not an average. She said the committee has full confidence in the administration that they are aware of the challenges posed by this potential school closing. She said the special classrooms were never factored into the equation about the reconfiguration. She also noted the cost to move the administration would be at least \$1.9 million not including technology. She noted that a 2007 study of JPS said it would cost \$15 million to upgrade prior to Sandy Hook.

- Cheryl Hill, a New Milford resident, said she was born and raised in New Milford and went through all the schools. She is married to an active duty officer and they have moved around but came back to family in New Milford for the schools. She said this conversation should be about making decisions about what is best for the children. She also said the common core discussion is lacking from this conversation. Mrs. Shook interrupted Ms. Hill to say the conversation tonight was about the low student enrollment and the closing of a school and not common core. Ms. Hill said she was asking everyone to stay informed about JPS, standards and budgets.
- David Gronbach, a New Milford resident, said a town doesn't build a school unless they believe the population is vibrant and sustainable. That is what drove the decision to build the high school 10 years ago. He noted a lot of time was put into that discussion including building permits, etc. He said no one can look into the future to see what drives a population increase. He said the school enrollment is the least of this town's issues. New Milford is a town that is going to grow and prosper. He said he was impressed with the

research done on the grade configuration prior to this decision. He said this is an emotional reaction as this town is not dying.

The meeting recessed at 8:10 p.m. as there were multiple weather related concerns for Board members and the Mayor. The meeting reconvened at 8:28 p.m. Mr. Spatola rejoined the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

Mayor Murphy announced that 44% of the town was without power and wires and trees were down in many locations. She urged all to stay put as they were safest here.

- Vanessa Gronbach, a New Milford resident, said the decreased enrollment numbers, if they are accurate, are a bigger issue than the closing of a school. She noted she just bought a business in town and was wondering if this was the kind of town she wanted to stay in. She said closing an elementary school would not attract people to this town. She was glad there were private schools that are an option. She noted the savings from closing the school were not that much. She noted she has never voted no against a school budget but if in five to ten years the town came back to ask for money to build a new school she was not sure she could do it. She also noted there was significant disparity in the school enrollment and asked why. Finally, she asked the secretary to accept a petition from change.org with over 300 names.
- Pete Bass, a New Milford resident and town council member, said he is talking, however, as a dad. He said he has daughters in the school including one who has already graduated. He noted there will be a savings of \$13 million but also there was a study done prior to this board that said it would cost \$10 million to bring JPS up to code. He said he would rather see dollars go to the children and not buildings.
- Frank Short, a New Milford resident, said he

taught in Brookfield for 22 years and then went to Ossining, New York. He taught grade six math and then grade eight math in the same building. He said there were not problems between kids in different grades. He noted that he went to a conference back in the 1980's when computers were coming into being, at that time the demographics were part of the demonstration. He noted that the presenter talked about the baby boomers and the baby boom let, which is happening now with the demographics. The numbers are coming true now as suggested by the consultants. He said it is time to close a school.

- Gina Bubbico, a New Milford resident, said she is a resident of three years but noted that she was attracted by the school system. She said she came from New York and loved the structure of the school system. She said there is nothing wrong with small class sizes and asked that the Board find dollar savings someplace else.
- Adrianna Williams, a New Milford resident, and parent, said the decreased population is a bleak forecast and New Milford should want to draw people to town. She said schools draw people to town. She noted her children go to Hill and Plain but the nurse this year was placed in a closet due to space limitations. She said the class sizes at Hill and Plain are 19 to 22 students. She said there are para-educators in classrooms because teachers are not able to keep up with students. She suggested this vote go to a referendum and that the Board not look at the population projections as they could prove wrong.
- Claire Thingvold, a New Milford resident, mother, teacher and taxpayer, said she can't trust that class sizes will be kept low and yet differentiated education is handled by class size.
- Tom Pilla, a New Milford resident and member of the facility committee said at first he was not

in favor of closing the school. Then he started looking at the reality of affordability of New Milford for young people and determined it is not. He said 2008 drastically changed the economy here and he has seen that in the number of houses he is building now which is way down. He said the land use policies in place have and will inhibit growth in New Milford. He noted the Town of New Milford is the largest employer in town. He also said he was on the hospital board when the birthing center had to close.

- Amy Reguin, a New Milford resident, has a son in JPS and a daughter that is about to attend. She noted that the speaker who suggested there was a \$23 million savings that that was over 10 years and not every year. She said the numbers for natural gas and electric have been overinflated by 25%. She also said the consulting firm that was doing the demographic work did not talk to any of the day cares. She said under the new configuration there is no place for the Head Start program to go and the class size is not 18 now. She said she does not feel she has enough information to support this at this time.
- Tom Esposito, a New Milford resident, parent of two children, Town Council member, Economic Development Committee member, Economic Development Corporation member, and a member of this facilities committee noted there eight teachers, administrators, PTO members, EDC members, real estate developers, etc on the committee and they spent eight months meeting on this recommendation. They did not rush this job. He said the data used was from 2008 which showed an exodus of young people from Connecticut and the Northeast. He said committee members asked every question that has been asked already and more. He said he is concerned with the children, the property values and the growth of this town. He said the

	<p>committee members were all parents and grandparents and they carefully went through every number. He noted the vote was unanimous except for two abstentions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Denise Reiss, a New Milford resident and JPS PTO President, said she has a new born and two children in the schools. She said she was concerned with the redistricting because she is actually closer to Northville but her kids go to JPS and she is happy they do because of the Excel program. She said if Excel gets cut, then the children would be losing out on educational opportunities. She does not want to see JPS close.• Lynette Rigdon, a New Milford resident and prior member of the Board of Education, said this decision is political. She said the Board and Town just kick the can down the road year after year. She does not want JPS to close.• Michael Barnes, a New Milford resident, has a granddaughter in the schools and he said the teachers and children would move together to another facility. He said nobody wants to come into town and have their child go to a 60 year old school. He said there are serious safety concerns at JPS. He said the dollars saved from this move should go directly into the classroom.• Roseann Petruso, a New Milford resident, said she is considering sending her son to another school in another town. She said having 15 teachers in one school for third grade should already be done. She suggested the town fix what we have and make it work.• Alison Sidel, a New Milford resident, and a psychologist, said the Duke study spoke of the emotional impact on students. She suggested that the Board look at the risks to the students. She said sixth graders and middle schools had lower academic progress and more behavioral issues.• JT Schemm, a New Milford resident, and a parent said he was eager to send his child to a	
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	<p>60 year old school because of what happens inside the school. He said the Route 7 corridor can change this community. He also felt that a board of nine people had a lot of responsibility to make this decision.</p> <p>The meeting recessed at 9:41 and reconvened at 9:50 p.m.</p>	
<p>4. A.</p>	<p>DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION Discussion regarding the possible closing of a school due to declining enrollment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Paddyfote said the information presented at this meeting is up on the display and copies of the answers to Board members' questions are on the counter. • Mr. Coppola asked if there was consideration given in the redistricting to where kids would go to school and Dr. Paddyfote said there was a line that would be more formally drawn if this decision is made. She said under this configuration Northville would have 449 students, Hill and Plain would have 472, Sarah Noble would have 981, and Schaghticoke would have 1,036. • Mr. Lawson thanked the members of the public for coming out to speak and said the one fact the Board knows for sure is that there is room. What the Board does with that room that is best educationally is the question. He said Ridgefield closed a school and then reopened a school. He said he heard the question how much would it cost to rebuild and also wondered where it would be rebuilt. He felt a 55 minute bus ride for elementary students was too long. • Mr. Coppola said a referendum would only be advisory and would cost about \$10,000 to conduct. He said he would love to go out to the public because he has mixed feelings. He noted on the paperwork handed out tonight that Sarah 	<p>DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION Discussion regarding the possible closing of a school due to declining enrollment</p>

	<p>Noble has a full time social worker and two guidance counselors. He wondered why third grade did not also have that. He said Dr. Cooper does a lot in the schools and could be more efficient in one school however he liked the smaller units. He asked if band was in third grade or just chorus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Paddyfote said instrumental is grades four through twelve. She said chorus is taught voluntarily as the stipend was cut several years ago.• Mr. Coppola said he thought there were instrumental lessons in third grade and Dr. Paddyfote said only recorders.• Mayor Murphy asked if the Board had considered why people were so nervous about sending their children to Schaghticoke. Why does that school live under that shadow.• Dr. Paddyfote noted when Schaghticoke was sixth, seventh and eighth grade they heard these same things. She said many of the issues are within the grades and not grade to grade.• Mrs. Ford said in the middle school children start to experiment behaviorally. She also said the rigor of academics is of concern to people. She said often what is missing at Schaghticoke is parental involvement though they might be needed even more at this level. She said the children love Schaghticoke and the gossip and innuendo comes from disgruntled parents.• Mr. Coppola asked how sixth grade at Schaghticoke would be different than Sarah Noble. Mrs. Ford said currently the sixth grade is not a true elementary school level because they start to change teachers and they get more freedoms. She said there are pros and cons, but she also said there are some students who are not ready to leave at eighth grade.• Mr. Coppola asked if anything special would be done for sixth graders and Mrs. Ford said they would be contained in their own area and there would be different ways to correct behavioral issues. She said the Scientific	
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	<p>Research Based Interventions (SRBI) would allow them extra tutors and Academic Fitness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Coppola asked if Mrs. Ford had met with the principal and staff in present sixth grade and Mrs. Ford said she did not think that was her place. She felt central office would have to invite her to do so.• Mrs. Ford said she interviewed her two grandsons about middle school and they said the freedom is fabulous. They liked changing classrooms and liked the sports and clubs. She noted the only issue the kids had at sixth grade was bookslapping when an older student knocked the books out of someone's hands. She said under this reconfiguration the sixth grade would have their own lunch room and would be isolated.• Mr. Lawson said there would be nothing unique at Schaghticoke. He noted bookslapping was a form of bullying. Also, he said the bus ride would still be long.• Mr. Shaffer noted in the reconfiguration numbers that in the 2015-16 school years, Schaghticoke would only have one extra room. He said he sent e-mails to former students to share their opinions of Schaghticoke and they said the athletics were good; one student spoke about the social situation, another said he was bullied as a sixth grader because of his size. He asked about the Wellness Committee being upset about the amount of PE and asked if Schaghticoke would still have two PE classes a week. Mrs. Ford said that was more the result of adding courses to their schedules including literacy and technology.• Dr. Paddyfote noted that Schaghticoke has twenty classrooms open right now, some are used by special education but they do not need all the space. She also said the lunch lines will be duplicated regardless of this proposal because the money is available in the budget.• Mr. Littlefield said he has a daughter in eighth grade and some parents are making it sound	
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like they are sending kids to juvi when they go to Schaghticoke. He said the idea is to get kids ready to go out in the real world and in the real world they are not separated by age group in an office. He said maybe we are trying to wrap our kids in bubble wrap.

- Mrs. Chastain said she agreed with Mr. Littlefield in that she has had kids in Schaghticoke since 2006 and she sees nothing detrimental with having sixth, seventh and eighth grade together.
- Mr. Lawson said his kids did very well here but he is not concerned with his kids. He said there is a distinct difference in social learning of ages.
- Mr. Coppola mentioned the headline in the News Times about the population south of New Milford growing. He said it would eventually move here especially if the affordable units come through as proposed.
- Mr. Spatola said the 2007 population study said by 2017 the three elementary schools would be at 74% capacity but instead they are at 55%. He said Schaghticoke is at 65% capacity and was designed for 1200 students. He said the studies have come true. He also said there is room at Hill and Plain and Northville properties to add on or build new.
- When asked, Dr. Paddyfote confirmed there is enough room at those schools to expand.

Mrs. Chastain moved to recess the meeting at 10:38 p.m., seconded by Mr. Lawson.

- Mr. Coppola asked if the Board recessed would they have to listen to public participation again and Mrs. Faulenbach said the Board could just start where it left off.
- Mr. Spatola asked, since he was the last to speak, that he be allowed to be the first to speak at the reconvened meeting.

The motion passed unanimously.

Motion made to recess the meeting at 10:38 p.m.

The motion passed unanimously.

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Respectfully submitted:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Angela C Chastain". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Angela Chastain
Secretary
New Milford Board of Education