

**New Milford Board of Education
Special Meeting Minutes
March 20, 2014
John Pettibone Elementary School - Cafeteria**

Present:	Mrs. Daniele Shook, Chairperson Mrs. Angela C. Chastain Mr. Robert Coppola Mrs. Wendy Faulenbach Mr. David A. Lawson Mr. Dave Littlefield Mr. John W. Spatola Mrs. Theresa Volinski Mayor Patricia Murphy
Absent:	Mr. David R. Shaffer

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Also Present:	Dr. JeanAnn C. Paddyfote, Superintendent of Schools Mr. Joshua Smith, Assistant Superintendent of Schools Ms. Ellamae Baldelli, Director of Human Resources Mr. Gregg Miller, Director of Fiscal Services Mr. John Calhoun, Facilities Manager Mr. Joseph Olenik, Assistant Facilities Manager Ms. Roberta Pratt, Director of Technology Mrs. Laura Olson, Director of Pupil Personnel and Special Services Dr. Len Tomasello, Principal, Sarah Noble Intermediate School Mrs. Anne Bilko, Assistant Principal, Sarah Noble Intermediate School Mrs. Susan Murray, Principal, Northville Elementary School Mrs. Paula Kelleher, Principal, John Pettibone Elementary School
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1.	Call to Order A. Pledge of Allegiance The special meeting of the New Milford Board of Education was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Mrs. Shook. The Pledge of Allegiance immediately followed the call to order. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mrs. Shook said this was an opportunity for the Board to review data from the School Facility and Utilization Study Committee and from the two Public Hearings previously held and to receive additional information from administration. Discussion and response from Board members will follow and another meeting may be scheduled if necessary. 	Call to Order A. Pledge of Allegiance
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2.	Public Comment	Public Comment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adrienne Aurichio said there have been two public hearings so far and no one from the public has spoken in favor of closing yet. She would like to see actual figures regarding the cost of building a new school or reopening a closed one if ten years down the road it turns out it is needed.• Amy Davis asked if the Board is following the charter in its process to possibly close a school.• Heidi Fair, a JPS staff member, asked about the impact of the low income housing that is before Zoning now. She also said that HPS has the largest population of the elementary schools and suggested redistricting for more equality.• Roseann Petruso says she doesn't like the timing of the meeting so soon after the Town Council cut \$650,000 from the school budget. The issue of closing a school should be separate from the current budget not a response. She said the district hired two teachers this year to address large class sizes, so that is an example of projections not always being accurate. She requests that the Board truly evaluate the space to exhaust all options. Increasing class sizes and transportation lengths is not in the best interest of students.• Richard Close said he subs in the district's schools and increased class size will impact children. He also asked who will want the real estate if JPS is closed and wondered what the impact to taxpayers would be if it is used for another box store.• Allison Sidel said she had reports to share that report the negative impact on sixth graders if they are moved to the middle school. She asked that copies be given to the Board. She also said the decision should not be made on strict economics.• David Gronbach said he has three children at JPS. He loves New Milford and has faith in the town and its economic recovery. His gut tells him that population will increase. He suggested if it was a budgetary issue to move East Street	

	<p>offices into schools rather than close JPS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Michelle Liguori said the total savings is minimal, by her calculations only \$90 a year for a family of four. She said what happens when population increases and the town needs to build a new school. She said she does not want an empty building and increased class sizes and asked that creativity be used to find another answer.• Erika Carlson quoted the school mission statement and the town's website. She asked what the vision is for the town. She said better schools will bring more people to town and that will bring more revenue.• Rita Napoli said she is speaking from the heart and that a \$650,000 savings takes away from children's future. She said moving children to another school will hurt their self-esteem. She said an increase in taxes is okay to help the schools.• Paul Szymanski said he is a Town Council member and is wholeheartedly in favor of closing JPS. The process to make this decision started 501 days ago. He said he reviewed the last two public hearings and the people who spoke had two primary concerns: enrollment and the sixth grade transition. He said projections show no increase in enrollment. He said sixth grade is currently segregated and that would continue if they moved to the middle school. He said there is no reason to think enrollment will increase; even this year there are 37 less students than projected. Of the 24 people who were on the School Facility and Utilization Study Committee, none were opposed to closing. Even with closing JPS, there will still be vacant classrooms. Class sizes will average 19 or less at the elementary level. The proposed low income housing is only 12 units. The newest housing built of 36 units has few children. He requested that JPS be closed for the benefit of the entire town of New Milford.• Dayna Gartland said she has a fourth grader and by the time the student is in sixth grade SMS will be almost at capacity. She said the class has	
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a lot of special needs students and they will not be successful in that environment making costly out of district placements necessary. She also was concerned that sixth grade will not get recess at SMS. She asked what the cost is to close JPS.

- Beth Falder said she is on the Town Council, has three children who went through JPS and was on the School Facility and Utilization Study Committee. She said class sizes were not increased under the recommendation. She says right now with the empty rooms, money is being spent on a building, not what is going on inside the classroom. She read a letter from fellow Town Council member Katie Francis who said in the face of declining enrollment and escalating repairs it is best for the town to close JPS. She said she has faith that teachers will help acclimate students to a new school. It is a waste of resources not to use all schools to their full extent. She said the Committee's conclusion was clear and that we should move forward with closing.
- Amy Reagan said daycare and pre-K numbers were not included in the study. She asked if the study was truly an accurate reflection of enrollment.
- Lisa McAleer said she was previously a realtor in town and said enrollment is down because our schools are not an attractive package for middle and upper middle class families in comparison to surrounding towns. Closing a school will make it even less attractive. We should be looking at how to raise test scores and other ways to make the schools better.
- Lisa Terlizzi said she was here 20 years ago when the process to build a new high school started. She urged the Board not to be short sighted and do the easy fix but to think long term. She said the decision should go to referendum and let the whole town decide.
- Jennifer Peloso said the Town Council had suggested using reserves to pay for the budget cut and asked if that would be discussed tonight. Parliamentarian Wendy Faulenbach said no that

	<p>only items on the agenda could be discussed at a Special Meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steve MacKessy asked how common core will affect redistricting and future students. • Darcy Schriver asked how many empty rooms there would be, what class sizes would be, whether specials would go back to carts, if there was room for special ed teachers, and if the money saved would go back into the schools. What would it cost to move Central Office into the schools? Would teachers be compensated to pack? If the building is sold would that money go back into schools? • Jason Reynolds says he was drawn to New Milford and says the town is willing to invest in other things but not children. He said it is a time of recession that we will eventually come out of. • Karen Berisha is an educator and she said it is important to know the whole student and that will be impossible with increased class sizes especially with common core. • Bob Coppola, a current Board member, said he has previously served on the Town Council and Board of Education. He said his job as a Board member is to do what is best for the children of New Milford and decide how best to manage the money budgeted. He said he resents the fact that we are talking about what is best for the land and not looking at what is best for the children. He asked if it is wise to close any school. • Adrienne Aurichio said that the population in 2020 is supposed to level off then go up according to the State of Connecticut. That is only six years from now so she said to think carefully. • Jane Barillaro said her big concern is class size increases. 	
3.	Discussion and Possible Action	Discussion and Possible Action
A.	Discussion regarding the possible closing of a school due to declining enrollment. The purpose will be to provide an opportunity for Board members to discuss information already presented previously and to pose questions to the administration for	A. Discussion regarding the possible closing of a school due to declining enrollment. The purpose will be to provide an opportunity for Board members

	<p>further analysis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mrs. Shook asked Dr. Paddyfote to start the discussion by addressing Board questions previously asked.• Dr. Paddyfote distributed a handout which gave preliminary staff savings of closing an elementary school re: salaries and fringe benefits.• Mr. Coppola asked if he was interpreting it correctly that projected savings totaled \$821,958 and Mr. Miller said yes.• Mr. Lawson asked if this included unemployment compensation and Dr. Paddyfote said no, that it would be shown on another chart.• Dr. Paddyfote distributed a second handout that showed the annual operating costs for an elementary school using 2012-13 actuals.• Mr. Miller said this was a fair representation of actual costs blended for the three elementary schools for an average.• Mayor Murphy asked if this included trade expenses and Mr. Miller said it did not, just utilities.• Dr. Paddyfote distributed a third handout which showed one-time costs to close an elementary school.• Mrs. Chastain asked if the cost of any changes that needed to be made to the still open buildings were included and Dr. Paddyfote said no.• The fourth handout showed the operating cost reductions to close an elementary school. It included savings and increased costs.• Mr. Coppola asked if the four additional buses were for the life of the program. Mr. Miller said busing needs are re-evaluated annually.• Mr. Coppola asked if the express bus suggestion for students farthest from school would increase the cost and Mr. Miller said it had been figured in already to the cost.• Dr. Paddyfote said the whole intent of the four extra buses is to reduce ridership time to 50 minutes or less.	<p>to discuss information already presented previously and to pose questions to the administration for further analysis.</p>
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- Mr. Littlefield asked for an explanation of non-budgetary capital reserve and Dr. Paddyfote said that was a suggestion to take the expense from capital reserve for funding.
- Mr. Coppola asked if Town Council had to approve use of capital reserve and Mr. Miller said yes there was a process to follow if the Board wanted to pursue that option.
- Mayor Murphy asked if the \$679,497 savings was every year under this scenario and Mr. Miller said yes.
- The fifth handout was cost avoidance over 10 years forward if an elementary school is closed. Mr. Miller said these are on-going budgetary savings based on reasonable assumptions. It includes capital outlays not done and salary and fringe benefits saved. Mr. Miller said it assumes the staff cut are not added back in at all during that time. He had not included the increased transportation costs. If that was included the total savings would be estimated at approximately \$10,500,000.
- Mr. Lawson said the salary and fringe benefits are based on enrollment staying flat and no teachers being hired. Dr. Paddyfote said programs can also lead to teacher hiring but that this chart is based on enrollment projections.
- Mayor Murphy asked what asphalt project would be done for \$55,000 and Mr. Calhoun said patching and sealing not reconstruction.
- Mr. Spatola said he had seen a capital plan from 2007 that had suggested up to \$15.3 million dollars and this was much lower. Mr. Calhoun said that plan was advisory and included many wish list items and some items that have already been completed. The capital items here are on the current Facilities Five Year Capital Plan that the town has.
- Mr. Spatola asked what the life expectancy is for the JPS roof and Mr. Calhoun said 2020 is expected as the end of its useful life.
- Mr. Lawson said he agreed with Mr. Coppola that it is the Board's responsibility to do what is right educationally and we have yet to speak

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to the educational soundness of these issues tonight. Common core is coming, there are a magnitude of unfunded mandates, and special needs. Do we want smaller, more manageable neighborhood schools?

- Dr. Paddyfote distributed one more handout which showed current utilization of schools.

The meeting recessed at 8:04 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 8:24 p.m.

- Mr. Lawson reiterated that we have room; the question is what to do with the room while satisfying the educational needs of students. He has yet to hear the educational soundness for moving sixth grade but has heard plenty of reasons why not to. He said the Lillis building is costing \$150,000 in repairs and district offices should be moved into unutilized space in the schools. This would not impact transportation or redistricting. Then it would be prudent to revisit this issue in the future and re-evaluate in ten years. Dr. Paddyfote asked if Mr. Lawson was requesting a cost analysis to move the district offices to JPS and he said yes and also what the cost avoidance of the move would be.
- Mr. Coppola said he wanted this as well. District offices are in schools in other towns and it works well. He also wants to see the educational value of the realignment of sixth grade and third grade explained. He thinks smaller units are best and that we are talking about saving the town money not what is best for students.
- Mr. Littlefield asked what would happen to the Headstart and EXCEL programs currently at JPS. Dr. Paddyfote said the EXCEL program was figured in the plan already and Headstart is a rental program through Education Connection. She did not know if it would continue.
- Mayor Murphy asked if public comment questions could be addressed such as increased class sizes. Dr. Paddyfote said the K-2 average

would be 19 and under.

- Mayor Murphy asked if other districts use the alignment suggested by Milone and MacBroom. Dr. Paddyfote said there are all sorts of grade configurations depending on the community and whatever works best for the individual town. Typically, educators make things work. New Milford itself has had many different configurations through the years. We would plan for any transitions to do what is in the best interest of the children regardless of grade configuration.
- Mr. Lawson said K-3 is crucial to cognitive and physical development, why risk changing that configuration?
- Mrs. Faulenbach said she served on the School Facility and Utilization Study Committee and they had many, many serious discussions about the issues raised this evening. The Committee's charge was to determine the most efficient use and allocation of resources based on declining enrollment. There were many breakout sessions on educational and other issues including how to best utilize our buildings, how to be cost effective, keep sizes small and take care of students. In the end the question was how can we justify multiple schools with empty classrooms?
- Mr. Coppola said many Board members are new and did not hear original presentations. Now they want to hear from administration how they will make changes work.
- Mr. Spatola said he is usually a numbers person but there is a human side to this discussion. Schools act as home and family for many students and he likes the idea of smaller schools where staff know all the students by name. He is not sure which way to go right now.
- Mrs. Shook asked if there was a way to get a mapping of the number of classrooms open at each school if Scenario B is used. Dr. Paddyfote said it would take some time but could be provided. She said the first year at SMS will be tight and people have branched

out into extra space so it will take a mind shift in some cases to move back into the smaller space they originally had.

- Mrs. Volinski said she was a newly elected member of the Board and she would like to see the financial costs beyond 2016 for keeping JPS open.
- Mr. Littlefield said he thought the sixth grade could be effectively segregated at SMS as they are now at SNIS.
- Mr. Lawson said he disagreed; they will ride the same bus, wait outside together.
- Mrs. Chastain asked about just redistributing amongst the three elementary schools. Could an exercise be done to show redistricting if we just shifted some students from school to school? Dr. Paddyfote said this was difficult as it changes every year and the demographers actually had a software program they used to do the shift. She said the empty classrooms would still be there.
- Mr. Lawson asked for clarification as to what a closed school could be used for to make it eligible to reopen. Did this include educational and municipal use? Dr. Paddyfote said counsel had previously indicated that it needed to be used for educational purposes, at least in part, in order to remain under the control of the Board of Education.
- Mayor Murphy said municipal use was not allowed. She said the Board was following the charter correctly in this process. She also said she was a realtor in a previous life and one concern people had was affordability. They wanted to know if the tax rate made it affordable to live here. A child's happiness is dependent not just on school but on how well the family is doing in general.
- Mr. Coppola said he disagreed. He said when he campaigned it was the quality of the educational system and family activities of the town that were most important.
- Mayor Murphy said the district's teachers are swell and will move with the students to other schools and be successful there as well.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mrs. Volinski said she had concerns about redistricting and moving grades to other schools.• Mr. Coppola thanked the Mayor for her participation.	
4.	Adjourn The meeting was recessed at 9:05 p.m. to a later date to be announced and advertised.	Adjourn The meeting was recessed at 9:05 p.m. to a later date to be announced and advertised.

Respectfully submitted:



Angela C. Chastain

Secretary

New Milford Board of Education