MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION FINANCE/COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
MEETING HELD JANUARY 12, 2012 AT 7:30 P.M. AT DODD MIDDLE SCHOOL

Board Members Present: Gerry Brittingham-Chair; Tod Dixon-Vice Chair; Sandra Pavana-Secretary; Cathy Hellreich; Anthony Perugini; Marléna Soble

Board Members Absent: Stephen Mrowka

Administrators Present: Greg J. Florio, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools; Vincent Masciana, Director of Management Services; Shaye Sheehan, Director, Pupil Personnel Services; Jeffrey Solan, Principal-Dodd Middle School; Russell Hinckley, Principal-Chapman Elementary School; Barbara Stern, Principal-Darcey School; Sharon Weirsman, Principal-Doolittle Elementary School; Mary Karas, Principal-Norton Elementary School; Beverly Scully, Principal-Highland Elementary School; Dr. Deborah Burns, Curriculum Coordinator K-8; Robin-Anne Carey, Supervisor of Elementary Special Education; Kelly Lenz, Coordinator-School/Community Relations

1. CALL TO ORDER – 7:30 P.M.
   A. Roll for Quorum. The roll was called and a quorum determined.
   B. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.
   Mr. Brittingham led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
   The Chairman reviewed the upcoming meetings, noting that the Curriculum Committee meeting is being moved to Dodd Middle School on February 6th at 7 p.m. to discuss how Veteran’s Day will be observed in Cheshire Public Schools in the future. The Chairman turned the meeting over to Mr. Perugini.

   Mr. Perugini stated the purpose of this meeting is to review the Superintendent’s Budget Proposal. This evening they will be reviewing the Administrative Accounts. He explained that the meeting’s format will differ slightly from prior years in that they will look at the larger items and “drill-down” as necessary. At the end of each section, they will break for questions. He noted that index cards are available for anyone who does not wish to speak publically.

2. REVIEW AND DISCUSSION REGARDING THE SUPERINTENDENT’S RECOMMENDED BUDGET
   Dr. Florio stated they will be looking at issues at a macro level instead of reviewing line by line because most of the accounts are not changing. They will be looking at some of the larger items first. The first item to be reviewed is mandates. The Superintendent presented an abbreviated list of mandates required by state and federal law. He explained that even in extremely difficult economic times, the state and federal governments do not reduce mandates placed on public school systems. The schools are required to comply with the mandates “within their existing appropriation” which means, no financial reimbursement. Dr. Florio began by reviewing some of the largest mandates including PA 111 Connecticut School Reform, No Child Left Behind and School Climate Plans.
The Board discussed adequate yearly progress and possible penalties for non-compliance. Dr. Florio said we have never had a financial penalty. Mr. Perugini asked if the State of Connecticut is going to be getting a waiver to reduce the burden of NCLB. Dr. Florio said the new Commissioner has discussed the waiver but does not know of any action that has been taken. Ms. Hellreich asked what we are providing and how many staff we have for the mandated services for English language learners. Dr. Deborah Burns answered 40 students are serviced with two 20-hour tutors to work with students in K-12.

Next, the Superintendent reviewed mandates with dealing with school construction and facilities. Some of these include code compliance for the Americans with Disabilities Act, Indoor Air Quality, Integrated Pest Management, Asbestos Management, and Hazmat.

Dr. Florio explained that one of the largest mandated issues is Special Education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that we provide free and appropriate education for children with disabilities up to the age of 21 or graduation in the least restricted environment. We must provide related services, such as physical and speech therapy, health and transportation. We do get a reimbursement for those students whose costs exceed a certain limit. For example, if we have $100,000 of expenses, we would be reimbursed for about $60,000 of those expenses from the State of Connecticut. Other expenses include special education hearings, staffing and transportation costs.

Mr. Dixon noted that the administration has made a concerted effort to keep these students in district, reducing costs dramatically and they should be recognized for that. Shaye Sheehan, Director of Pupil Personnel confirmed the savings. Mr. Perugini asked how much we have saved by providing services in district versus sending the students out of district. Mrs. Sheehan said she did not have that information with her but will provide that information for the Board at the next meeting. Ms. Hellreich asked how many students are outplaced. Mrs. Sheehan answered 30 students now, projections for next year are less, but that number is variable because we could have state placements or hospitalizations. Ms. Pavano asked how many Cheshire students receive special education services. Ms. Sheehan responded approximately 500 students. Dr. Florio said roughly 20% of the budget is used to service these students. Dr. Florio and the Board discussed our Birth to Three program that is fully funded by the State. Mr. Brittingham emphasized the fact that we are required to educate all students in Cheshire until the age of 21 which includes homebound students.

The Superintendent talked about transportation mandates. We are mandated to provide transportation to each of our students and also to students in private schools in Cheshire. A seat must be provided for each student, whether or not they choose to take the bus. Mr. Brittingham asked the Superintendent to discuss the cost of transportation for extracurricular activities. Dr. Florio responded that we spend approximately $180,000, for which the majority is athletics and music. Mr. Brittingham asked if any of the gate receipts are used for transportation. Dr. Florio said most of the game receipts are used for game expenses such as officials. Mr. Brittingham asked if we get any service in kind.
from St. Bridget for transportation. Dr. Florio noted that if St. Bridget School was not successful, most of those students would be back in our schools where we would have to provide services. We do also provide a nurse and special education services to St. Bridget. Cheshire residents who attend Cheshire Academy are also reimbursed for transportation costs.

The next set of mandates discussed was student reporting. Dr. Florio said it is very onerous. For example, the ED001 was just reviewed and submitted to the state at a cost of about $5,000. That report used to drive significant grants but does not any more. It still has to be completed so we are expended the same amount of staff hours without the financial return. There are approximately 24 reports that have to be completed monthly or annually which is quite time-consuming for staff. Lastly, Dr. Florio reviewed the mandates related to personnel such as Continuing Education, fingerprinting of new hires, Teacher Negotiations Act, BEST/TEAM training and Blood Borne Pathogens Training. Mr. Perugini said he would like to somehow track the time spent on complying with these mandates. Mr. Brittingham discussed the Capstone project and stated they will be tracking the amount of additional time this mandate will require from teachers, administrators and students without additional appropriations.

Dr. Florio discussed enrollment and his request for 3.0 elementary teachers. He explained the reason for the request is that Doolittle class sizes are very high due to a very large number of enrollments in Grades 1 and 3 over last summer that were not in the projections. This year, they have supplied support to these classes so the students will be successful, but he feels 23-25 students per class is not acceptable. He explained that there were 93 more elementary students than projected. The 3.0 additional teachers will bring class sizes back to about 19 students per class.

Mr. Perugini asked what numbers he is using for the enrollment for next year. Dr. Florio said he is using the NESQEQ projections, as he always does. He said he is hoping last year’s situation was an anomaly and the projections will not be that far off, but he will continue to monitor enrollments. The Board discussed hiring Instructional Assistants versus certified staff. Principal Weirsman said that an aide can be of help in the classroom, but you really need a certified teacher to provide the level of instruction that is required. Principal Scully also noted that the teacher would needs to take the time to teach the Instructional Assistant what and how to teach the students. Mr. Perugini asked about parent volunteers. Mrs. Scully said they love their parent volunteers and depend on them a great deal but, they are just that, volunteers. Ms. Soble noted that she has been a parent volunteer in her child’s class and no matter how great that parent volunteer is, they cannot replace the teacher. Ms. Pavano asked what the cost is for the additional three teachers. Dr. Florio answered that he budgeted about $55,000 per teacher for salary and benefits. Mr. Brittingham said that although there is no Board policy regarding the number of students in a classroom, it has always been the feeling of the Board that in grades 1-3, the lower the number the better such as 18-20. He said he thinks 23-24 students in a classroom is too high.
AUDIENCE:
Andy Falvey, 379 Peck Lane.  Mr. Falvey, Town Council Liaison to the Board of Education, said he had a few questions from the Town Council. He asked if there are currently four classrooms available to absorb the additional four teachers at Doolittle (three new FTE’s and 1 transfer) without using temporary classrooms. Dr. Florio answered yes. Regarding the enrollment projections, have the additional students that moved in this year been put into the new projections. Dr. Florio answered yes. Lastly, Mr. Falvey said he agrees with Mr. Brittingham that a lower student/teacher ratio is better than a higher ratio.

Mr. Perugini announced the next meeting to discuss the Superintendent’s Budget request will be on January 17, 2012, 7:30 p.m. at Dodd Middle School.

Mr. Perugini turned the meeting back over to Chairman Brittingham who reviewed the upcoming Board of Education meetings.

3. **ADJOURNMENT**
On a motion by Mr. Dixon, and seconded by Ms. Pavano, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Gerald Brittingham, Chairman of the Board

Attest:

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Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

Filed at the Town Clerk’s Office, Town Hall, Cheshire: _____________.