

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET PRESENTATION MEETING  
HELD JANUARY 9, 2020 AT 7:30 P.M. AT TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

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Board Members Present: Anthony Perugini-Chair; Adam Grippo-Vice Chair; Kathryn Hallen-Secretary; Faith Ham, Anne Harrigan (arr. 7:40 p.m.), Andrew Martelli, Timothy White (arr. 7:35 p.m.)

Board Members Absent: None

Administrators Present: Jeffrey F. Solan, Superintendent of Schools, Marlene Silano Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Vincent Masciana, Chief Operating Officer; Tracy Hussey, Director, Pupil Personnel Services; Mary Joscelyn-Gadd, Principal-Cheshire High School; Maureen Reed, Assistant Principal-Cheshire High School; Kristin Pelz, Assistant Principal-Cheshire High School; Daniel Tartarelli, Assistant Principal-Cheshire High School; Steven Trifone, Athletic Director-Cheshire High School, Michael Woods, Principal-Dodd Middle School; John Perosino, Assistant Principal-Dodd Middle School; Diana Burns, Principal-Chapman Elementary School; Ann Donnery, Principal-Darcey School; Amy O'Brien, Principal-Doolittle Elementary School; Kristin Lopa, Assistant Principal-Doolittle and Norton Schools; Scott Jeffrey, Principal-Highland Elementary School; Erica Bordonaro, Assistant Principal-Highland Elementary School; Marlene Silano, Curriculum Coordinator K-8; Robin-Anne Carey, Supervisor of Elementary Special Education; Marie Broadway, Supervisor of Secondary Special Education; Kelly Lenz, Coordinator of 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. Perugini led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. He then turned the meeting over to Superintendent Solan.

**MOTION** by Mr. Grippo and seconded by Mr. Martelli to add “Public Comment” after Agenda Item #2, Presentation.

**VOTE:** The Motion passed unanimously, 5-0.

**2. PRESENTATIONS**

- A. 2020/21 Superintendent’s Proposed Budget.

Superintendent Solan thanked everyone for attending this evening. He explained this meeting is an overview of his budget proposal and there will be subsequent meetings to delve further into the budget recommendation. He thanked Mr. Masciana, Chief Operating Officer and his staff, along with central office staff and administrators who put a great deal of work into this budget. He reviewed the

Board's responsibility, as well as his own, in this budget process. He noted we have 4,285 students that are provided services every day.

Superintendent Solan explained that when developing the budget, two key paths are considered – social emotional learning and complex thinking. He reviewed where they have made advances in these two initiatives over the last few years. He said they added a school counselor and a social worker to support social emotional Learning as well as 3 school psychologists. Regarding complex thinking, they added an elementary math coach, a middle school math coach and extended elementary world language in grade 6. In addition last year they initiated learning walks which have been very beneficial.

Other items that influence the budget process are internal factors such as enrollment, contractual increases, special education, facilities and medical benefits. External factors include looking at the state of the State, state and federal education revenue and state and federal mandates.

The Superintendent said the initial internal budget request was \$78,930,202, a 7.6% increase over last year. As that amount was not fiscally reasonable, they pared the request down to include the most critical needs. This historical four-year average budget increase has been 1.47%.

Some of the management strategies they use are analyzing enrollment, keeping as many line item amounts the same or less than they were, sharing services with area districts, and efficiencies that are shared with Town services. He noted the cost of Special Education and outplacing students is very expensive. To be more efficient, we try to keep students in-district whenever possible. This year we had to add 6.7 Instructional Assistants to address the needs of students. That cost will need to be carried over to next year at a cost of approximately \$165,000.

The budget is designed this year with three elements: to *sustain*, such as contractual requirements, *restoration* of medical benefits and building maintenance, and lastly what do we have to *advance* the quality for our students

Superintendent Solan said after careful consideration, he is recommending to the Board of Education, a budget of \$76,330,052, which represents a 4.05% increase of \$2,973,541.

Of this amount, 62% is for contractual increases, 31% is for restoration and 7% is for improvements.

This budget request includes the addition of 2 building security monitors (2 elementary schools), .5 Board Certified Behavior Analyst, .8 Math Support at Dodd, 1 FTE Special Education Teacher (2 half-time positions) and funding for

strategic planning to set new strategic goals for our school system. For restoration, the goal is to increase medical benefits to match expected claims and also to increase the maintenance budget to address repair needs.

The Superintendent reviewed the large line item changes that represent more than 75% of the total budget increase:

Teacher Salaries - \$1,079,387  
Medical Benefits - \$689,100  
Building Maintenance/Repair - \$190,926  
Instructional Asst. Salaries - \$126,246  
Tuition Outplacements - \$100,350

The budget increase by category is as follows:

Salaries – 3.04%  
Maintenance – 8.13%  
Instructional Expense – 6.15%  
Support Services – 2.51%

Superintendent Solan reviewed the projected revenue which is projected to total \$10,351,823. He explained that this is money we project and it goes directly to the Town.

Mr. Solan next reviewed some “what ifs”, fee collections and fee expenditures. Fees are collected to offset the cost of running programs or providing services to those individuals who use them. In absences of these fees, our budget would increase by \$229,582.

The Superintendent reported the items that are important and were requested but are not part of this budget request due to fiscal restraints:

- High School Math Interventionist (\$40,000)
- Elementary Technology Coach (\$80,000)
- Districtwide Professional Development (\$20,000+)
- Districtwide Classroom Furniture (\$20,000+)
- Administrator Support (\$150,000)
- Reading and Math Specialist Highland/Chapman (\$80,000)
- Staff Chromebooks (\$150,000 or some portion thereof)
- Interactive Flat Panel Displays (\$1.5 Mil at \$500k/year)
- Secretarial Support (\$50,000)
- Additional Athletic Offerings (\$6,000 to \$40,000+)

The Superintendent reviewed enrollment. Projected enrollment, not including Open Choice students, is projected to be down 47 students. He said this is a great

opportunity to invite more students through the Open Choice program and he will review this with the Board at the January business meeting. According to NESDEC, next year's grade 1 is expected to be about 5.8% larger than the previous year's Kindergarten class. Over the next three years, K-5 enrollments are forecasted to increase by a total of +170 students; grades 6-8 to decrease by -45 pupils; and the high school level to decrease by about -189 pupils. After that point, these projections again show increasing enrollment in Grades K-5 of +141 students, combined with an increase in enrollment of +267 students at Grades 6-8; and a decline of -1 pupil in Grades 9-12 – as classes work their way up through the grades.

Superintendent Solan said that the recommended staffing changes slightly increases the overall elementary class size in the 2020/21 recommended budget from 17.9 to a projection of 18.1 students per class. These changes in class size averages at Dodd Middle School go from a current class size of 23.3 to a projection of 22.8. He noted they have decreased staff at a rate of 1 certified teacher per every 30.2 students declined in enrollment over the past 7 years in spite of adding special education programming.

Next, the Superintendent reported on per pupil expenditure. In 2018/19, the most current report available, the state average spent per student is \$17,439 and Cheshire spends \$16,514 per student. He said we are 122nd out of 166 school districts. The average DRG B school system spends \$17,948. Our budget would cost the town \$6,073,965 more per year if we spent the same as the average DRG B district. He said he is not recommending this, but it shows the incredible value provided. He noted the constant recognitions that our students and schools receive for this value. Our students rank very high compared to other school systems in Connecticut. Our overall state rank is 5<sup>th</sup> for all of our students, including our special education students.

The Superintendent highlighted that investing in our schools is investing in Cheshire. The Superintendent ended by reviewing some key takeaways:

- The initial budget request of over 7% has been aggressively reviewed to present a conscientious and prioritized 4.05% request.
- Cheshire Public Schools is an outstanding value for our community spending \$6 million less than the average DRG B district with exceptional results.
- The addition of 1 certified position in special education is necessary to address needs at the elementary and post-secondary levels.
- A total of 6.7 FTE Instructional Assistants hired during this year are included in the new budget. Almost all of the current proposed increase is dedicated to maintaining contractual and underfunded commitments. This substantially limits our ability to advance educational programs.

- A modest increase in building operations and maintenance funding was requested to address infrastructure needs.
- Almost all of the current proposed increase is dedicated to maintaining contractual and underfunded commitments including medical benefits to match the expected claim rate.
- Two Instructional Assistants were added to provide security support in elementary schools with entrances on separate floors.

Mr. Solan announced that the artwork that is on the cover of our budget book is by Aubrey Ignatowski, who is currently a grade 2 student at Highland School.

Mr. Perugini thanked everyone for their work in putting together this budget.

Mr. White asked Mr. Solan if the hall monitors were full time FTE's and the Superintendent answered, yes.

### 3. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Natale DiNatale, 10 Copper Beech Drive. Mr. DiNatale stated he is here this evening to ask the Board of Education to include funding for girls ice hockey in its budget. He said his daughter Nadia is a senior and has been part of this club for four years. He said that although his daughter will not benefit from it, he is there tonight because he feels funding girls hockey is the right thing for the Cheshire Community. He noted that Cheshire has always supported boys hockey. Girls ice hockey is being funded by surrounding communities, but not Cheshire. Mr. DiNatale said he is a lawyer and has examined the issue of Title IX compliance. He said on the surface, Cheshire appears to comply with 15 sports for boys and 15 for girls, but Cheshire is not in compliance because they count Cheerleading as a sport, but the law is clear that schools are not permitted to count cheerleading in Title IX compliance. Our community loves ice hockey but we continue with the false assumption that it is only a boy's sport. Cheshire wouldn't discontinue ice hockey for boys because it is expensive, but yet it is used as an excuse for why a girls team is not funded. He asked the Board to treat the girls equally.

Mr. Perugini thanked Mr. DiNatale. He noted the Board has not had a formal discussion regarding this subject, but now, during the budget process, will be a good time to review this request and those from other clubs. He asked Mr. DiNatale how many students are on the team. Mr. DiNatale said there were seven Cheshire girls on the team this year. He thinks they might have more if the cost was not so prohibitive. He would anticipate that Cheshire would continue to be part of the co-op which would keep the cost down.

Ms. Ham asked if there was a projected budget. Mr. DiNatale said they are charged \$1,800 but the actual cost was less than that and they are reimbursed the difference. He said he is thinking \$1,300 after the participation fee, times the 7 players.

Nadia DiNatale, 10 Copper Beech Drive. Nadia is a Grade 12 student at Cheshire High School. Nadia has been playing hockey since she was 7 years old and has been on the

Blades Hockey Team since her freshman year. Nadia spoke in support of funding the girls hockey. Nadia said it is the right and compelling thing to do. She said the cost of the program is prohibitive for many girls and it is not fair that it costs \$1,800 for girls to play and only \$225 for boys to play hockey. She noted the unfairness of what is paid for the boys team but not the girls. She said that although she is a senior she is speaking out today for her younger teammates who should not be treated differently because they are girls.

Meaghan Coyle, 225 Elmwood Circle. Meaghan, Grade 9 student at Cheshire High School presented the Board with a letter and spoke to the Board in support of funding for a girls hockey team. She spoke about the unfairness of how the girls are treated versus the boys hockey team, not only monetarily, but with resources as well.

Anna Lindner, 652 Ashley Court and Avery DePodesta, 22 Southpond Circle. Both Grade 10 students at Cheshire High School, also spoke in support of funding for a girls hockey team. There are students who would like to play but cannot afford the cost.

Mr. Grippo asked Mr. DiNatale if the seven players were to become a team, if they would leave the co-op? Mr. DiNatale said he did not envision leaving the co-op.

Ms. Hallen asked if the \$1,800 was a student activity fee for the club. Mr. DiNatale said that Amity calculates the cost per player and that is the charge. If expenses are lower, the players receive a reimbursement. Mr. DiNatale said his hope is that the girls would only be responsible for the same participation fee that the boys are paying and the Board would absorb the remainder of the costs.

Ms. Harrigan commended the bright young women who came out to speak tonight. She said they are exactly the type of students that they encourage. She encouraged the girls to keep their voices strong no matter the outcome.

Mr. Perugini echoed what Ms. Harrigan said. All of the students tonight did a very good job. The Board will certainly take this under consideration and it will be discussed during the budget process. He said he can't make any promises but will certainly keep them apprised of the conversations.

Martha Lindner, 652 Ashley Court. Ms. Lindner said she is a hockey mom with her son on the boys team and her daughter playing for the Blades. She expressed how important hockey is to her daughter. She said it upsets her that only families who have money can play. She said we fund the boys team and serious consideration should be given to supporting the girls team. She said she is amazed that in the year 2020 we are even having this conversation.

Mr. Solan said he is very proud of the students this evening. Hockey has been a big part of his life and he understands what it means to be part of a team. He told the students

they did a great job advocating for themselves and demonstrating what it means to be on the Blades team and a hockey player in our community.

Mr. Grippo asked Mr. Masciana to have information available at the budget meetings regarding how much it costs to institute a new team or how much the school system contributes to each team and what the obligations are to institute a team. He said he thinks this will probably lead to more requests so it would be helpful to have the information.

Mr. Perugini announced the upcoming meetings.

Mary Burnham, 45 Tress Road. Ms. Burnham thanked the Board for trying to involve the public. She also encouraged those Board members who were not members of her Cheshire Education Facebook group to join. She said the purpose it is to have education issues come forward and to have conversations. Mr. Perugini said regarding Board member activity on social media, that there are strict FOIA laws about a quorum being on a single post. It is not that folks don't want to engage; it is because they can't. He said they are paying attention even if they are not commenting. He said Board member business is conducted at meetings not on forums, but they do listen.

4. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mr. White and seconded by Ms. Ham, the meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Anthony Perugini, 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: 1/16/2020 .