

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING
HELD JANUARY 28, 2020 AT 7:30 P.M. AT DODD MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Board Members Present: Anthony Perugini-Chair; Adam Grippo-Vice Chair; Kathryn Hallen-Secretary; Faith Ham, Anne Harrigan, Andrew Martelli, Timothy White

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; Michael Woods, Principal-Dodd Middle School; Ann Donnery, Principal-Darcey School; Kevin Hanlon, Curriculum Coordinator K-8; 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. Mr. Perugini announced that this meeting is the culmination of a long process.

2. AUDIENCE:

Jack Bestor, 45 Tress Road. (A copy of Mr. Bestor’s statement is on file). Mr. Bestor is requesting that the Board withhold funding for the purchase of new Chromebooks and improved Smartboards as there is a Cheshire Strategic Planning Initiative group studying what came out of the Personalized Learning Task Force. He said before we put more technology in the classroom we must make sure it is beneficial and appropriate. He is hoping this Board of Education will take an active role and that these points of view are considered and reviewed. He said this includes, Chromebooks, e-textbooks and Smartboards. Although it will be hard to push back against this, the reality is it hasn't been proven to be effective. He explained that he asked his family what they prefer to read, and they choose paper to read, even though they use technology for other information. He asked the Board not to put 100’s of 1,000’s of taxpayer dollars into new technology that is not proven and might be frivolous. He emphasized that this is for regular education children not children with IEP’s where it is determined that they need technology to advance.

Members of the Girls Hockey Team. The members read a letter (on file) into record as a follow up to their attendance at the January 9th budget meeting where they spoke of the inequity between the boys and girls hockey teams. They thanked the administrators for looking into the Title IX concern and for agreeing to fund girls ice hockey. They asked the Board of Education to correct an inequity and fund girls ice hockey, but to also add girls ice hockey as an “official sport” today and not at some later date.

Mr. Perugini said this group has been very professional, well-articulated and cordial. The team raises the bar. He thanked them for their passion.

Kari Button-Coyle, 225 Elmwood Circle. Ms. Button-Coyle read a letter (on file) into the record. She is the mother of Meaghan, a member of the Blades Ice Hockey Team who spoke to the Board at the January 14th meeting pledging to continue to stand up for women's athletic equality until justice prevails. She said the team has been in existence for 10 years, and that is 10 years this issue has gone unnoticed, and the girls have received no recognition. She asked the Board to consider funding transportation for the team as they have already fully supported the boys hockey team for over 10 years. She asked for full support for the team.

3. **FINANCE**

Mr. Grippo reported that the Finance Committee of the Whole, at a meeting on January 23rd, passed a motion to recommend and forwards to the full Board of Education a Budget of \$75,302,143, an increase of 2.65% or \$1,945,632 over the 2019/2020 budget.

MOTION by Mr. Grippo and seconded by Ms. Ham

***MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education submit to the Town Manager, a budget for the fiscal year 2020/2021, totaling \$75,302,143, a reduction of \$1,027,909 from the Superintendent's proposed budget.*

MOTION TO AMEND by Ms. Harrigan, seconded by Ms. Hallen

***MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education submit to the Town Manager, a budget for the fiscal year 2020/2021, totaling \$76,342,452, an increase of \$12,400 from the Superintendent's proposed budget to cover girls ice hockey.*

Discussion:

Mr. Grippo said that although he supports additional money to support the girls hockey team, he does not support the Motion in support the Superintendent's Recommended Budget.

Ms. Harrigan said she supports funding the girls hockey team, but does not understand how they can talk about this while decreasing the Superintendent's Recommended Budget by over \$1 million. She believes the proposed budget cuts would keep the Board from fulfilling their obligation. Ms. Harrigan read CGS 10-220 Duties of Boards of Education - shall provide an appropriate learning environment for all its students which includes (1) adequate instructional books, supplies, materials, equipment, staffing, facilities and technology, (2) equitable allocation of resources among its schools, (3) proper maintenance of facilities, and (4) a safe school setting.

Mr. Perugini said the \$12,400 to fund girls ice hockey does not cover the transportation. The group does not feel this funding corrects the inequity. But he thinks covering 8 players is a good start and if more than 8 join, the Board's operating budget will absorb

the additional players. Ms. Harrigan said the girls feel it is not only inequity, but it is a matter of fairness.

Mr. White said he would like to be supportive, but they also face budgetary concerns. With regard to funding the \$12,400 he is in support, but as far as transportation is concerned he would like to take a measured approach. He would be happy if this group and others came forward next year during the budget process. He said he does not support Ms. Harrigan's amendment as he is in support of the Finance Committee's reduction of \$1 million.

Public Comment:

Mary Burnham, 45 Tress Road. Ms. Burnham asked, as they get to the Finance Committee's motion, if they would break down where the cuts would be.

Natale DiNatale, 10 Copper Beech Drive. Mr. DiNatale asked for clarification on the Motions and whether they are considering funding for girls ice hockey and transportation. Mr. DiNatale urged the Board to support whatever Motion helps girls hockey become an official sport.

Mr. Perugini said that Mr. Trifone had originally requested funding for the team but it did not make it into the Superintendent's Recommended Budget. After listening to the players, Mr. Trifone asked for the funding for four girls be put back into the budget and Superintendent Solan recommended that the Board provide funding for eight players. He explained that none of the motions include transportation for the team.

Ms. Harrigan said our Finance Committee is proposing a drastic reduction to our budget while they support funding girls hockey. That money has to come from somewhere. If you want to support \$12,400, we have to increase the Superintendent's budget, not decrease it. Mr. Grippo said the motion out of the Finance Committee did support girls ice hockey for \$12,600 (the correct amount of \$1,800 - \$225 participation fee times 8 players). He said everything that is being cut from the budget is an increase over the current budget.

Mr. Solan said supporting the \$12,600 does not make it an official sport, it would still be a club sport, but the cost of participation is funded. Unfortunately transportation would cost anywhere from \$8,000 to \$20,000 depending on the number of participants and is not included.

Mike Crowley, 22 Trout Brook Court. Mr. Crowley said this is even close to being equitable, only a step towards it. He said he thinks the transportation amount is overstated because they share transportation costs with two other schools. The amount they are requesting is miniscule compared to the budget.

Jessica Weske, 25 Strollo Court. Ms. Weske has twin 7th graders who play girls ice hockey. She said there is a contingency of parents and children who are coming up through the ranks. She asked if we are not distributing funds equitably, aren't we tacitly

distributing those things based on gender. She said equitable distribution of funds goes beyond requesting more money regardless of cuts or proposals.

Bruce Linder, 652 Ashley Court. Mr. Lindner said there is a wave of girls coming up who play not only ice hockey, but field hockey and lacrosse. They are looking at private schools who support ice hockey like other premium top tier schools in Connecticut.

Jami Ferguson, 105 Copper Beach Drive. Ms. Ferguson asked if the line items that are being discussed tonight are set in stone, or could they change after possible cuts by the Town Council.

Mr. Perugini said the final number comes out of the budget tonight and then goes to the Superintendent and he can find other ways to meet it or exceed it. They have until February 15th to get the budget to the Town Manager, then it goes to Town Council and then by late April or May, they get a budget back from the Town Council. The Council cannot tell us where to make cuts. At that point, the Board and the Superintendent have to find a way to meet the number.

Ms. Ferguson said that if the Board and Town Council come back with more of a cut, we cannot guarantee that girls hockey funding will remain in the budget. She said everyone wants to fund it, but she finds it odd to say we would fund ice hockey if we cannot afford some of those other things the Superintendent has told you he needs, such as the new positions.

Mr. Solan explained that this evening, the Board makes the decision on the line item adjustments. Those line item adjustments are sent to the Town Manager who may, but rarely does, make a reduction and then the Town Manager forwards the number to the Town Council, which normally does make a cut. The Council's budget for education comes back to us as a number and the Board and Superintendent make a decision on line items at that time.

Mr. Perugini said the amount that came out of Finance could absorb the \$12,600 for girls hockey.

Bill Guilotte, 83 Eastgate Drive. His daughter is a freshman at Cheshire High School who plays ice hockey. He feels it is such a small amount of money, it should be done to improve school satisfaction and school awareness. The girls passion and spirit is something that should be recognized.

VOTE: The Motion Failed 2-5 (Ham, Martelli, Perugini, Grippo and White opposed).

AMENDED MOTION by Ms. Hallen, seconded by Ms. Harrigan

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education submit to the Town Manager, a budget for the fiscal year 2020/2021, totaling \$75,923,998, a reduction of \$406,063 from the Superintendent's proposed budget.

Discussion:

Ms. Hallen said she fully supports the Superintendent's Recommended Budget and understands that may be unrealistic, but our obligation is to provide funding for an excellent school system. The Superintendent and administrators come up with a budget of items needed. She said we have been operating on a lean budget for the last few years and the Superintendent was trying to get the district back to a spending level that supports the needs of the district. She is recommending cuts where they can be absorbed and girls hockey would be funded as part of it. She doesn't think it is fiscally responsible to take money off the bottom line. The board must be careful because we know the council will reduce it further. In the spirit of compromise, she is presenting this amendment as another option.

Mr. Perugini asked which accounts the reductions would come from. Ms. Hallen said possibly medical benefits, maintenance and repair, capital equipment, maintenance supplies, library supplies and dues and fees.

Mr. White said generally he agrees with the amendment, but he will support the motion that will be coming out of the Finance Committee.

VOTE: The Motion Failed 2-5 (Ham, Martelli, Perugini, Grippo and White opposed).

AMENDED MOTION by Ms. Ham, seconded by Mr. White.

MOVED that the Board of Education amend the proposed 2020-21 budget as proposed by the Finance Committee to reflect an increase of \$1,846,043 over the 2019-2020 Board of Education Budget this reflects a reduction of \$1,127,498 from the proposed Superintendent's Budget of \$76,330,052 for a total 202-2021 Board of Education Budget of \$75,202,554 or a 2.5% total increase over the 2019-2020 budget.

Discussion:

Ms. Ham said she understands the responsibilities of the Board but she is also keenly aware of how these budgets affect Cheshire residents. She said we are in a languid economy and year after year our taxpayers are seeing mill rate increases. She shared a document outlining where she would make the cuts (on file and listed below). She stated her suggested cuts are either increases to the budget or holding accounts, with just a small increase. She said when you are looking at 9-10% increases in some of the accounts there is room to reduce.

Mr. Grippo noted this decreases the Superintendent's budget even further than the Finance Committee's recommendation. He said he noticed that she did add the girls ice hockey funding to her recommendation.

Mr. Perugini said the Superintendent's budget asked for level-funding for the trust fund. The Board tries to budget at least two months of claims reserve. He said underfunding the level-funding may put the Board at risk of dropping down below the two months of reserves or it could put the Town Council in a position where they have a situation where they have to emergency fund the trust fund or plan for a big increase two years out. He said for that reason, he cannot support this reduction.

Mr. White said as he said before, his is comfortable with the Motion that came out of Finance.

Ms. Harrigan said she cannot support this recommendation which is a \$1,127,498 reduction to the Superintendent's Recommended Budget. She asked Mr. Masciana where we think our medical benefits reserve fund will be at the end of this fiscal year. Mr. Masciana said his estimate at the end of this fiscal year to be 2.7 months of claims reserve. He said if there is no increase to the reserve for the 2020-2021 budget, the fund will be at \$1.8 million. In addition, we would have to request an increase to our 2021-2022 of 1.64% just to make sure we do not deplete the fund.

Mr. Perugini noted that about 7 years ago, the Board did decide to under-fund the reserve to support the operating budget. The fund got as low as \$628,308 at the end of the 2013/14 fiscal year. Mr. Masciana said they had to increase the trust fund 3.61% in the 2014/15 budget and 3.5% in 2015/16 budget to replenish the fund to be able to meet the claims.

Ms. Harrigan asked if the increase to the reserve fund in the Superintendent's proposed budget will keep the fund at current levels or increase it. Mr. Masciana answered that it is budgeted so claims and increases would be equal to keep the reserve the same as it is this year. Ms. Harrigan said regarding other reductions in this amendment, that she cannot support the reduction of staff recommended by Ms. Hussey. She questioned the reduction to heat and utilities, stipends and capital equipment which contain contractual items. Ms. Ham said she is not taking away from the stipends that are currently being paid, just keeping them at the same level. She reviewed her reductions:

Mr. Perugini confirmed with Ms. Ham that many of these reductions are holding the accounts flat for the current budget. He asked if the reduction to Capital Equipment is because of Mr. Bestor's comments regarding technology purchases. Ms. Ham responded that she understands the Energy Performance Contract is in that account and is contractual, she is still leaving an increase of \$19,000, but she is not suggesting how that money is spent.

Line Item	Reduction \$\$
Medical Trust Reserve Contribution	(689,000.00)
Pupil Services	(27,744.00)
Maintenance and Repair	(190,000.00)
.5 BCBA or Special Ed	(40,000.00)
Library Supply	(20,000.00)
Maintenance Supply	(50,000.00)
Heat/Energy	(23,565.00)
Other Purchased Services	(2,326.00)
Instruction/Equipment	(27,500.00)
Instruction/Supplies	(18,031.00)
Student Activities	(11,347.00)
Substitutes	(5,000.00)
Travel and Conferences	(871.00)
Capital Equipment	(19,309.00)
Dues and Fees	(3,550.00)
Textbooks	(10,855.00)
Testing and Evaluation	(1,000.00)
Girls Hockey	12,600.00
Total Reductions	\$ (1,127,498.00)

Mr. Grippo asked, if we were to change the medical trust reserve contributions to the level that Ms. Hallen had recommended, would our months of claim reserve at the end of 2020-21 remain at 3.1 months? Mr. Masciana answered that it should be about 3 months.

Ms. Ham said the Board has been working on lean budgets dictated by the Town Council and she thinks it is appropriate for the Board to be proactive and chart its own destiny and identify where reductions could be made.

Public Comment:

Ms. Burnham said she is concerned because the Town Council always cuts the budget. She asked the Board to take a breath and think about it in case they cut in spite of the Board's good faith.

Mr. DiNatale asked if any additional amendments include the base funding of \$12,600 or if it includes both the base funding and transportation. Mr. Perugini responded that none of the proposals includes anything other than the \$12,600 for the base funding.

VOTE: The Motion failed 1-6 (Martelli, Perugini, Grippo, Harrigan, White and Hallen opposed)

AMENDED MOTION by Mr. Martelli, seconded by Mr. White.

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education amend the proposed 2020-21 budget as proposed by the Finance Committee to reflect an increase of \$2,146,043 over the 2019-2020 Board of Education Budget. This reflects a reduction of \$827,498 from the proposed Superintendent's Budget for a total 2020-2021 Board of Education Budget of \$75,502,554 or a 2.93% total increase.

Discussion:

Mr. Martelli distributed and explained his recommended reductions as listed below.

Line Item		Reduction \$\$
Medical trust reserve contribution	201	(\$339,000.00)
Pupil Services	323	(\$27,744.00)
Maintenance and Repairs	430	(\$190,000.00)
.5 BCBA or Special Ed		
Library Supply	642	(\$20,000.00)
Maintenance Supply	613	(\$50,000.00)
Heat/Energy	620	(\$23,565.00)
Other purchased services	590	(\$2,326.00)
Instruction/Equipment	730/731	(\$27,500.00)
Instruction/Supplies	611	(\$18,031.00)
Student activities	117	(\$11,347.00)
Substitutes	114	(\$5,000.00)
Travel and Conferences	580	(\$871.00)
Capital equipment	732	(\$19,309.00)
Dues and Fees	810	(\$3,550.00)
Textbooks	641	(\$10,855.00)
Testing and evaluation	645	(\$1,000.00)
retirements	620	(90,000.00)
Girls Hockey – add in		\$12,600.00
	reduction	(\$827,498.00)

He said his proposal includes the base funding for the girls hockey team. The funding includes funding for all of the requested positions and includes a projection of 3 retirements. Mr. Martelli said they are not reducing any of the funding that is in the current budget. It is only a reduction of the Superintendent's recommended budget moving forward. When he ran for the Board they spoke about keeping spending under control. When he graduated in 2000 there were a total of 4,934 students, this year there are 4,105 students, a reduction of 829 students. At the time of the 2000 budget the total budget was \$41,029,761 and this year the current budget is \$73,356,511; a 32,326,000

increase over the past 20 years. He said we are outpacing spending that we can afford as taxpayers in Cheshire.

Mr. Grippo complimented Mr. Martelli on his amendment. He said with his cut to medical benefits it is still an increase of \$350,000 and he finds this reasonable.

Mr. White said he supports this motion.

Ms. Harrigan said this amendment is a good compromise. She said we may have had a reduction of students, but they have had a huge increase in Special Education and that has constrained our budget. She asked the Superintendent if three is a reasonable number of retirements to figure, or are we taking a risk? Mr. Solan said as of right now, he only knows of one retirement. Historically there is an average of 5 retirements. She said the Town Council still has to review and come back with a number for the Board, so she told the girls ice hockey team they may have to bring their presentation to the Town Council.

Ms. Ham said she is comfortable with the \$350,000 addition to the trust and happy to see the Special Education numbers restored as well.

Mr. Perugini said he finds his proposal much more palpable, he said he will support this amendment. He said during his 11 years on the Board he has voted to increase this budget by \$16 million. He said he does not think this budget will affect the quality of education or be a detriment to the curriculum for our students. He is happy that the BCBA special education position has been restored. He complimented Mrs. Hussey and her staff for their work in the district and for saving money for the district. He said in regard to girls ice hockey, he absolutely supports the \$12,600 base funding but cannot recommend transportation at this time with no numbers from staff. But said he is optimistic that by lowering fees it should attract other participants and the team will exceed the eight members next year. At that time, the staff can look into the true cost of transportation. He supports this amendment and thanks the Board members, staff and administration. He doesn't think the Town Council will cut just for the sake of cutting and has to believe that after all the work the Board put into this budget and the line items and detail behind this, they would be hard pressed to reduce it any further. He said Chairman Oris has promised a fair review.

Ms. Harrigan asked if they have to wait until next year for transportation. Mr. Perugini said they will have a little better idea after the budget comes back from the Town Council. Superintendent Solan explained that he already gave an estimate of \$8,000-\$20,000 but CIAC prohibits soliciting middle school students about their participation until April, so they will have a better sense of the numbers at that time which would codify our transportation numbers, and the Board will also have a better sense of the final budget once it is returned by the Town Council.

Audience:

Blades team members distributed handouts to the Board (on file)

Martha Lindner, 652 Ashley Court noted that some the parents that were present this evening were from Amity and they came to support the Cheshire students.

Jack Bestor said he is disappointed that the new Chromebooks are still in the proposed budget. He said he would be happy to trade the Chromebooks or Smartboards for transportation costs for the Blades team.

Mr. Lindner said supporting transportation is a critical piece because then it can become an official sport. If the blocker is not knowing how many students will be coming up from the middle school, he asked if it would it be helpful for him to solicit the students. Mr. Solan repeated that they cannot solicit students, to which Mr. Lindner responded the district can't but he can. Mr. Solan said the cost could run from \$8,000 to \$20,000 and he still does not know what the final budget will look like. It is more prudent to review it in May.

The Board discussed what makes a team an official sport or team. Mr. Perugini asked how many girls would be needed to be a full team. Superintendent Solan said that he has not heard the girls say that they want to leave the co-op. CIAC sets the number of students at a school that have to be participating before they must opt out of a co-op. He said Amity funds their girls team but North Haven does not. He said he, and everyone on the Board, would like to fund transportation and the myriad of other items in front of them. He said they will continue to look at this in the spring.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

4. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mr. Grippo, and seconded by Mr. White, the meeting was adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anthony Perugini, Board Chair

Attest:

Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

Filed at the Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, Cheshire: 2/3/2020.