

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING
HELD MARCH 26, 2020 AT 7:30 P.M. – LIVESTREAMED VIA YOUTUBE**

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

1. CALL TO ORDER – 6:00 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 welcomed everyone to the first online Board of Education meeting. He explained that this meeting is being held to update everyone on the Coronavirus. He thanked all in Cheshire Public Schools and the town for the support they have shown over the last few weeks. He invited the public to email cpscovid19@cheshire.k12.ct.us during the meeting if they have any questions or comments.

2. Superintendent's Report

A. Covid-19 Update

The Superintendent thanked parents, students and staff. This has been a complete change in lifestyle for everyone involved and he is proud of the way everyone has handled themselves. He announced the Governor made the decision to close schools through April 20th and said, thankfully, our district is prepared for this. Right now, the plan is to retain the April break, but this will be reviewed in the future as they monitor the emotional and health status of our students and staff. He will make a definitive decision by April 3rd, so that families have time to plan. He announced that all field trips are canceled through April 20th and a decision will be made on the 8th grade Washington trip next week. The Superintendent also announced that the Town Manager just informed him that all school fields will be closed beginning tomorrow. He reminded the community about the district's remote learning website which includes all of his communications to parents, as well as information on technology and food services. The Superintendent said that remote learning has been their first and foremost priority with 4,200 students learning from home. This has been a great undertaking and unfortunately, other less urgent projects have had to be put on hold. He also thanked Town officials for their support and collaboration.

Mr. White said he is hoping to call a Personnel meeting this weekend with a general discussion on succession planning. Mr. White said that although the number one priority now is health, he asked if the Superintendent knew when he may be able to

concentrate on day-to-day items such as solar. He said he wants other things to continue. The Superintendent answered that right now, because it is such a dynamic situation, he does not see that happening immediately, but hopefully over the next couple of weeks, they will start to see some normalcy.

Ms. Ham asked Mr. Solan if he is aware of any residents who have tested positive for the virus. He answered that he is aware of four members in our community who have tested positive, but they would have been infected after the schools had been closed.

Regarding graduation and other the major student events, she asked to please involve the Board as she would like to see these students graduate and have their performances, even if it is over the summer months.

Mr. Perugini said he thinks it would be a good idea to have April break for the students who have been adjusting to remote learning.

Remote Learning Update

Ms. Silano first thanked the parents for partnering with the school district in this endeavor. She also thanked her team including Scott Conway, Tom Lewoc, Kevin Hanlon along with the RAMS and Michael Papa for everything that they have done. She explained the platform that teachers are using is Google Classroom. Teachers can also use Google Meet, Screencastify and School Messenger. Right now there are 2,400 students with one-to-one devices, Chromebooks, which our tech department is supporting. They are also supporting 600 staff members. She noted there is a tech support webpage for any parent or student who is having difficulty with a Chromebook.

Regarding interventions, they are working towards providing technology for all of the intervention staff as well. Support staff, including counselors, therapists, etc. will be reaching out to students and families. Those staff members are also in contact with classroom teachers to discuss which students may need additional help. Per state guidance, upon return to school, they will reconvene any team meetings. The state has asked districts to hold off on PPT's.

Ms. Silano said they have received 1,419 responses to their parent survey. The data is looking very positive. Parents indicated that they are happy with the amount of communication they are receiving. Responses showed that 89% of parents felt it was just the right amount of work with the balance of parents split between too much and too little. She said they will be looking to be sure the amount of time spent on the computer and the amount of work they are giving students is meeting their needs. Because they did not deploy Chromebooks to students in grades K-3, they surveyed those parents to ask if their family has the ability to have their children view some instructional material on a home device. The data shows that 94% said they did have that ability. She said they needed that information if they were going to be able to move forward with other forms of instruction. They will be aggregating the data

more so they can continue to improve on remote learning. They will continue to survey students, teachers and parents.

Regarding State testing, the Smarter Balance and Next Generation Science assessments will not be required. Regarding ACT, they will be looking at future dates for testing. Advanced Placement tests will be taken at home.

Remote Working Update

There are daily meetings with the technology staff, teachers, and reading and math specialists regarding curriculum. The administrative staff is meeting daily as well.

Mr. Grippo asked if there is support for single parents or working parents. Ms. Silano said if there is any parent in that situation, there is a great deal of flexibility. If the student needs to do the work at night or on weekends, they can do that. The students are given ample time to complete assignments as they want the pressure off of the students.

Mr. Grippo asked if all of the work counts. He said there are some states where they are just having children do work to stay educated but it doesn't mean anything. He said in Cheshire, it seems to actually count and teachers are keeping track. Ms. Silano said it all counts. Superintendents across the state are discussing grading. Some of the information in the K-3 packets was review material. When all of the students come back, they will be accessing them to monitor and adjust the instructional path to be sure the kids get to where they need to be, as this was a huge disruption.

Ms. Hallen noted when they were speaking about the partnership between the parents and children, the one silver lining is that this is a great opportunity for parents to actually see what their students are doing and what the curriculum is like.

Mr. Martelli said he was able to join in his daughter's conversation with friends and they are all enjoying it. The other thing that he was impressed with is at Dodd, the students are encouraged to get up, do a quick workout and then shower as if they were getting ready for school.

Ms. Harrigan said that college students are struggling with time management as well. She said it is remarkable what Cheshire Public Schools has been able to do.

Mr. Grippo inquired when additional materials will be distributed to students in K-3. Ms. Silano said the day the packet went out, they were already focusing on the next batch of materials that will need to go to students. She said they are not sure of the delivery method yet, but they will be in the hands of the students before they need them.

Mr. White said he was contacted by a parent who said one teacher was structured but at the same time, some other teachers may have home distractions and are doing the best that they can. He said everyone should be understanding of home situations.

Mr. Perugini agreed and said we thank the parents, but some of our teachers are parents too. He thanked Ms. Silano, and said he is not bragging, but it was a great feat to get this program up so quickly. He said teachers have reached out to his daughters and he appreciates that. He said a comment from one parent was that students could use more interactions with the students. He said he can see the challenges, but maybe one-one-one time with teachers would go a long way.

Ms. Silano thanked the Board for their support. She said this is not perfect, but having so many positive comments from the community and the Board's support is much appreciated.

Chief Operating Officer's Update

Mr. Masciana said that in their School Safety and Security Plan, there is a section on large scale outbreaks; however, this is not what they were expecting to see this year. He said the entire staff of Cheshire Public Schools has responded very well. The school district is not shut down at all; we only took what was being done inside the buildings and put it outside, doing everything remotely.

- School Breakfast and Lunch Grab-and-Go at Dodd Middle School. A waiver was obtained to offer this to the community. The district is supplying fully compliant, USDA reimbursable meals. They are distributing breakfast and lunch three days a week. On Mondays and Wednesdays they supply breakfast and lunch for two days, and on Fridays they supply breakfast and lunch for three days - Friday, Saturday and Sunday. By tomorrow, they will have served over 16,222 meals. It has been flawless and quite an accomplishment that they have been able to do this so quickly. Per the Waiver, they are reimbursed \$1.84 for breakfasts and \$3.41 for lunches. These funds do not come out of the operating budget. All students 18 and under, and their siblings, can receive the meals. Our Food Services Manager, Madeleine Diker, said the teamwork has been amazing. Not only the food service employees, but also custodians, IA's, nurses and even the School Resource Officers have been helping out. Our bus drivers are delivering food to medically fragile students.

Ms. Harrigan said she spoke with a parent or two about the food process. She asked how we cannot be taking a hit to our operating budget seeing as we are serving meals to all students and their siblings. Mr. Masciana said the reimbursement received applies to each meal that is distributed. He said they won't know until this is over, whether or not the reimbursement covers all of the costs.

Mr. Grippo asked if they track who is coming in for the meal and if so, can students use their school lunch accounts to pay. Mr. Masciana said, no they are not tracking and no, they are not using student's lunch accounts. He said the program is intended not to do that because the district is reimbursed through FDA.

Mr. Grippo asked about outplacement costs. Mr. Masciana said the outplacement centers are providing remote services. The question will be, if there be a discount because they are not providing the services at the center. He doesn't have all the details, but estimated costs may be reduced by 15%.

Ms. Ham asked how long they will have to wait for the waiver and if they will need to apply for an extension. Mr. Masciana answered; it is for this COVID period, so as long as they have to serve lunch the waiver applies.

Ms. Ham asked about the trend and what is done with leftover food. Mr. Masciana replied the number of meals served each day is increasing and the excess is refrigerated and used the next distribution day. She asked if we are reimbursing families for unused school lunch money, to which he replied it is carried over to the next year or if a student is graduating, they can be reimbursed or the student can donate it to the school.

- Human Resources, Staffing and Remote Work.

We have a few employees who cannot work because of child care. They are counseling them to use vacation time or get government assistance. He reported there are Memorandums of Understanding put in place for teachers and instructional assistants. There are no issues with any of the bargaining groups. He said with the exception of building maintainers, everyone else is working remotely. He noted in Central Office, they are practicing social distancing, washing hands, etc.

- Facilities and Maintenance.

Building maintainers are reporting daily and shifting some responsibilities, with three maintainers working at Dodd with the meal distribution. He said they are suspending daily cleaning as of tomorrow, but are working with the vendors who are available to do disinfecting as needed. He said they have placed "closed campus" signs at all of our sites. Tomorrow, all fields will be closed until further notice. In addition, they are reducing utilities with minimum lighting at night. He reported they do have summer work planned with some major projects. They have had bid walk-throughs with six prospective bidders for the Cheshire High School ADA Compliance project; seven 7 prospective bidders for the window replacement project, and five prospective bidders for the school security project. Also regarding solar consulting, Mr. Masciana said he should be able to meet with the representative from the consulting firm next week. If we end school earlier, we will try to start projects earlier.

Ms. Hallen asked if Mr. Masciana could explain the definition of a Memorandum of Understanding. Mr. Masciana explained that it takes a bargaining unit contract and outlines a temporary change to the contract.

- Technology Support.

The procedure for swapping out hardware has changed. They are no longer doing this at Central Office, but delivering replacement devices to students at home.

- Payroll and Accounting

He reported that payroll is complete for this pay period. The next one is April 10th and is based on scheduled hours. Two accounting clerks are also working remotely and are in the office on alternating days.

Mr. Grippo asked if because the Governor deemed construction as essential, if it safe to assume if we get good bids, those will go forward and be completed before the start of the next school year. Mr. Masciana answered yes. He hopes to get the projects started as soon as school is out.

Ms. Ham asked if we have had any layoffs and Mr. Masciana answered no. She asked if he will discuss medical benefits tonight. He said he does not have a report for tonight but doesn't expect to see related claims for a few months.

- 2019-20 Operating Budget

Mr. Masciana said he looked at what the impact would be if we remain shut down until the end of April. He is estimating a net cost reduction of about \$478,000, mostly because of substitute costs. However, if any employee collects unemployment, the district is self-insured, so we would have to increase our unemployment line in the budget by about 50%. He also estimated because we are not running busses we would have one month of contract savings, including no field trip runs, and save 50% of the cost or about \$172,000 for one month. He said he has spoken with DATTCO and they have agreed to keep in contact. He noted there is talk of legislation mandating bus contracts to be paid in full.

Mr. Masciana also mentioned the possibility of taking advantage of the 2% budget carryover of unexpended funds as he believes there will be related costs to pay compensatory special education costs.

Mr. Perugini said he recommends that the Finance or Policy Committee take this up and also to give the Town Council a head's up. Mr. Masciana suggested it be brought to the Policy Committee.

Mr. Perugini thanked Michael Solimine for live-streaming this virtual meeting.

Each of the Board members praised and thanked the administration and staff for all of their work during this process.

Public Questions and Answers.

Mr. Solan answered some of the public's questions received via email during the meeting.

Regarding special needs progress. He said one term they use at the end of a school year is regression-recoupment, meaning what have they lost and what services they will need

to recoup. Right now, they are in touch with their providers. Mrs. Hussey has sent out many letters to parents. They are trying to maintain close communication.

Why aren't high school teachers live-streaming videos in real time? He said there are many things going on for our staff during the day. There is a test process going on and they will adapt more to meet the needs of our students.

Will end of year assessments be modified? State testing has been waived. With end-of-course assessments, we will be flexible considering what the students have been through, and he is more inclined to think students will need more instruction than assessment.

Will remote learning satisfy CT State Department of Education requirements for grade promotion? Absolutely. Our remote work is very closely aligned with the curriculum.

The Superintendent thanked the union leadership for working alongside the administration, as they recognized the first priority is to educate our students. He also thanked Mike Solimine, who always makes himself available to support us. He spent a lot of time prepping for this meeting tonight.

Ms. Harrigan said she received a notification that says their teams are well rested, which brings up the topic of school start times. Mr. Perugini said they will keep that on the forefront.

2. **ADJOURNMENT**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Anthony Perugini, Board Chair

Attest:

Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

Filed electronically with the Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, Cheshire: April 22, 2020.