

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL
BUSINESS MEETING HELD APRIL 6, 2020
Virtual Meeting 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

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.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

The Superintendent said he received one email from Jami Ferguson, who suggested students should be asked if they are feeling more rested on the next student survey, due to the later start time.

3. SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

A. Remote Learning Update

Superintendent Solan began by thanking parents, students and staff. Schools are closed until at least April 20th with the strong probability that the date will be extended. He thanked the principals for organizing “parades” where the teachers and school administrators are driving through students’ neighborhoods and waving to the children. He announced that the April break has been truncated. Schools will be closed on Friday, April 10th and remote learning will resume on Wednesday, April 15th. While students and staff will get a break from remote learning, they cut the break short because students and staff are in a routine.

Mr. Solan gave an update on staff employment. IA’s/Lunch Aids/Hall Monitors are helping with food distribution, supporting students and participating in professional development. Custodians/Maintenance staff are working in buildings. Administrators, teachers and secretaries are all working remotely. Technology staff, nurses and drivers are also still working.

Mr. Grippo inquired in regard to the IA’s Memorandum of Understanding, as we are self-insured for unemployment, if we were to entertain laying them off, is the cost to school system is a wash. Mr. Solan said it would cost at least 60% of their salary. In addition we have the need for the IA’s to support students. The other

consideration is that staff must be available for when the schools reopen. The Governor also indicated that districts should do everything in their power to retain yearly staff.

Mr. White and Ms. Ham inquired if any students have the virus. Mr. Solan responded that there are members of the community, students and their families but Chesprocott is confident that they were infected after we closed our schools.

Mr. Perugini asked if the Memorandum of Understanding with the unions is tied to the COVID shutdown only, to which the Superintendent replied yes

Assistant Superintendent's Update

Assistant Superintendent Silano thanked the Board, parents, and staff for their help during this emergency. She said they are working very hard to have some sort of normalcy for the students. She noted this is the 14th day of remote learning. They received over 1,600 responses from the parent survey and also administered a teacher survey. Based on those surveys, 3rd grade will be moving to the use of Google Classroom this week. K-2 is adding limited online components for reading and math, and learning toolkits (Goal) will be distributed next week.

Ms. Silano noted the continued use of existing tools: Google Classroom, Google Meet, School Messenger and Screencastify. She noted there have been questions regarding audio and video access for the students. She said it was a deliberate decision that was made a long time ago to only allow audio, but they may make changes to that in the future.

Another Technology Access Survey was sent out last week to determine the technology and internet access capability for Grade 3 students. They have distributed an additional 35+ Chromebooks and Wi-Fi Devices were deployed to families who do not have internet access. The two Technology Integration Specialists plus the technology department are supporting, 3,300 remote learners in grades 3-12 and approximately 600 staff members with software and device support. Our technology support staff is providing professional development daily in a segment called Lunch Bytes for staff.

Ms. Silano said for those students who require intervention services, SRBI or special education, when the students come back the staff will be there to support them and get them to where they need to be.

Ms. Silano provided an overview of the feedback of the teacher survey. Regarding state testing, she said they received word today, regarding at home AP testing, that all Connecticut public and private colleges and universities will be accepting AP credits for qualifying scores from the College Board's online AP exams. They will not be able to provide the PSAT for 8, 9 or 10th graders.

Discussion:

Mr. Grippo asked if the video restriction goes away if a student uses a MAC or device other than the Chromebook. Ms. Silano replied that as long as they are signed in with the Cheshire Public Schools account, the video is disabled.

Mr. Perugini asked if the Chromebook inventory is getting low. Ms. Silano answered that we are managing what we have deployed well. They are not running low on devices, but they will not be distributing devices to students in grades lower than 3rd grade.

Ms. Ham asked if they would receive a copy of the survey results. Ms. Silano said they will provide them with a summary. Regarding Special Education, Ms. Ham asked if we know what kind of demands will be on the system in the summer when the remote learning is over. Ms. Silano answered that there is no way to measure but they have had many discussions on how to address that when we come back. They will meet when we come back to see what type of services will be needed. They are hopeful some of this can be done over the summer but that will be determined by the Health Department.

Ms. Ham inquired if they are confident of the continuity of the students and teachers giving assignments and how they know if the assignments and instruction are being applied consistently throughout the week. Ms. Silano said continuity in such a large organization is always a struggle. She said with remote learning they are giving options and flexibility to students because home life right now is not the same for all students. Mr. Perugini said his daughter's teachers have been wonderful as far as communication. He thanked the teachers for communicating as best as they can.

Mr. Martelli asked about student testing at various grade levels. Ms. Silano replied that they are continuing assessments. It is a multi-pronged approach.

Ms. Hallen asked how they would assist a K-2 family who doesn't want their student online. Ms. Silano said that the parent should reach out to the teacher or principal. Based on the surveys, over 95% of parents wanted online work.

4. REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

A. CURRICULUM

I. Report on Meeting Held March 9, 2020.

The Committee discussed Nature's Classroom for Highland and Chapman students. They also discussed Out-of-Country Field Trips which have all been cancelled. Students have been issued vouchers or transferred credit to another student in the school.

Dr. Mary Gadd gave an update of the Curriculum and Activities Night created for next year's incoming freshman class which was held on January 30, 2020.

Kevin Hanlon provided a review of some of the professional development activities including math fluency, Dodd math and language arts teachers examining mid-year data to inform instructional practices, and Dodd science teachers working with the Connecticut Science Center to use Next Generation Science Standard assessments and instructional practices to support students.

The grade three students took the Otis Lennon School Ability test last week. The attached letter was sent to parents prior to the test administration, and results will be shared with families later in the school year.

Tracy Hussey and Cathy Sullivan shared a presentation on the Signs of Suicide Curriculum for secondary students.

Lastly, Faith Ham, Chair of the Board of Education Curriculum Committee, gave an update on Public Act No. 19-12 - An Act Concerning the Inclusion of African-American Studies in the Public School Curriculum. She said Special Education Research Center (SERC) focus group is soliciting feedback from the community on the development of a high school course to meet the requirements of Public Act No. 19-12.

B. FINANCE

I. Financial Report

Mr. Grippo read the Finance Report. We have completed nine months of the fiscal year and the projected expenditures shown above through March 31, 2020 reflect several relatively minor developing negative trends, as explained below.

Projections through March 31st exclude the impact to the district's expenditures that will begin to take effect in April as we are adjusting and adapting, as necessary, to enable our educators and staff to teach and work remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall impact on expenditures will depend on the duration of the remote learning period which is scheduled to continue through at least Monday, April 20, 2020 by order of Governor Lamont. While the short term impact of the remote learning/work period is expected to result in a favorable budget variance due to lower costs for substitutes, non-certified staff hours, maintenance and utility costs, we do expect that those savings will be offset by higher future costs for unemployment, medical benefits and special education services. We will obviously be analyzing the variances and project our

future costs as we continue through the remaining months of the 2019-20 fiscal year.

The timeline of key past and tentative future events related to the COVID-19 pandemic are as follows:

- Friday, March 13, 2020 - last day of classes with students in our school buildings.
- Wednesday, March 18, 2020 - remote teaching and learning begins for students.
- Wednesday, March 18, 2020 – Grab and Go Program for student meals begins.
- Tuesday, March 25, 2020 – Governor’s Stay Safe, Stay Home executive order takes effect and most district employees begin working from home. (Excluded from remote work are our Facilities management and staff, as well as the staff working in the Grab and Go Program which includes food service, nurses, instructional assistants, bus drivers and our building maintainers.
- Monday, April 20, 2020 – Current end date for school closure requirement
- Thursday, June 18, 2020 – Expected last day of school

Certified Salaries are projected to be below budget by a net of \$32,399, or .09%, with overages in substitute and homebound/tutoring costs offset by a positive variance in teacher salaries. Employee Benefits are projected to exceed budget by \$1,406, or .01%, due to a minor increase in our disability insurance costs. Instructional Programs are projected to exceed budget by a net total of \$86,212, or 1.9%, due primarily to Tuition Outplacement and Pupil Consulting costs for Special Education which are projected to exceed budget by \$176,212 for the year. The budget overage in Tuition Outplacement and Consulting is partially offset by reductions that will be made in our Instructional Supply, Textbook, Library and Curriculum accounts, in order to meet our overall budget. Support Services is projected to be below budget by \$45,219, or .68%, due primarily to lower than budgeted costs for copier rental/printing and communication services, student transportation and bus fuel. Operations and Maintenance costs are projected to be below budget by \$10,000, or .28%, with higher than budgeted costs for maintenance supplies being offset by lower than budgeted heating and snow removal costs. As of the writing of this report, we still have a district-wide expenditure limit of 70% of non-payroll accounts for our schools and departments which will be adjusted accordingly as we move through April and into May.

Mr. Grippo asked about outplacement costs. Mr. Masciana answered that there are a number of things taking place. They are expecting

outplacement providers will lower their costs because they are not providing full services. It is not known what services will need to be made up for students over the summer. He said his estimate of total savings, assuming they are doing remote learning until the month of April, will be about \$347,000. This all depends on bus contract costs and special education costs. He reviewed some of the requirements of the Governors Order 7R.

Mr. White asked, if an employee goes on unemployment, do they still receive medical benefits? Mr. Masciana answered, no; they can purchase COBRA. Mr. White said he wants to voice his support of continuing to pay our employees now.

II. Report on Meeting Held March 12, 2020

Mr. Grippo reported that the Finance Committee met to discuss two items: Pension Account Funding and Student Accounts.

Regarding Pension funding, Mr. Masciana reviewed some of the choices the school system may have to make for the pension recalculation, we will have to make additional contributions.

Also, the Committee spoke about the student activity accounts. He said the principals did an excellent job explaining how they administer those accounts. At the end of the meeting the Committee said AG would meet with Town officials and auditors to do a detailed audit of those accounts. He said he wasn't sure if parents knew that over \$1 million flows through those accounts each year. While it seems the controls are effective, we would like to confirm that.

III. Medical Benefits Report

Mr. Masciana reported that claims for February were extraordinarily high at \$921,369. This is because we have some very large claims coming through the school system. The trust fund balance as of February 29, 2020 is \$2,504,287 or 2.88 months in reserve. He said none of these claims have to do with COVID-19.

Mr. Grippo asked if any of our employees had to be treated in the ICU with COVID-19, do we know what the cost might be? Mr. Masciana responded that a 14-day hospital stay is a minimum of \$5,000 per day. The stop-loss coverage will cover any claim over \$175,000 per individual.

C. PERSONNEL

I. Report on Meetings Held March 5 and March 28, 2020.

Mr. White reported on the March 28th meeting which was called to review the contingency plan should something happen to the Superintendent or

any of his administrators. This meeting led to a Policy Committee meeting which Mr. Grippo will discuss as the next item.

D. POLICY

I. Report on Meeting Held March 31, 2020

In light of the current Coronavirus pandemic, this meeting was called in response to a request by member Mr. White to update the current policy to reflect the current chain of command should Mr. Solan become unable to make decisions for the district.

II. First Reading of Policies

The Committee reviewed Policy #2132 – Administration, which was last revised in 1996. The policy is being updated to include language stating that the Assistant Superintendent will assume responsibility for the school system in the absence of the Superintendent. It will also state that the Chief Operating Officer will assume responsibility for the school system in the absence of the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services. CABE has suggested that the Superintendent amend the regulation to reflect these changes to take effect immediately. The Superintendent agreed to update the Administrative Regulation with the same revision. The Committee will recommend waiving the second and third readings for this policy.

The Committee also reviewed Policy #3171.1 - Non-Lapsing Educational Fund. This new policy would allow the Board of Education to request Town Council approval of a Non-Lapsing Education Fund in accordance with C.G.S.10-248a. The policy states that *“the Cheshire Board of Education (Board) may request the Town Council deposit into a non-lapsing account any unexpended funds from the Board’s prior fiscal year general operating budget, provided such deposited amount does not exceed two percent (2%) of the total budgeted appropriation for education for such prior fiscal year. Any expenditure from the Non-Lapsing Education Fund shall be authorized solely by the Board of Education. Each expenditure from such account shall be made only for educational purposes.”*

Mr. Masciana explained that the reason to do this for the current year is that there may be a need to be expending funds over the summer as the district is currently closed and we do not know what our expenses may be.

MOTION by Mr. White and seconded by Ms. Hallen

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education waive the second and third readings for Policies #2132 Administration and #3173.1 Non-Lapsing Education Fund and direct the Superintendent to put said policies into immediate effect.

Discussion:

Mr. White noted that they are waiving the second and third readings for these policies in order to put them into immediate effect.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

Mr. Grippo reported that the Committee also discussed a policy that was recommended by CAFE, for possible adoption due to the current pandemic. The Board reviewed this policy and both the Board and Superintendent decided it was not necessary.

E. SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE

Mr. Martelli said they have not had any meetings although they did go out to bid for the Owner's Project Manager and received two bids – one from Colliers Associates and the other from Arcadis. There was to be a March 18th meeting for a presentation, but unfortunately that has been paused. Mr. Martelli said they received notification from Arnett Talbot, Assistant Town Manager that the committee is considered non-essential meaning meetings will not be held at this time. Mr. Perugini reported he received communication from the Chair of the Committee who stated she wanted to get the meetings started again as soon as possible, at least to review the bids, possibly using Zoom.

F. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES

None.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Approval of Minutes of the Board of Education Business Meeting Held February 20, 2020, Showcase Meeting Held March 5, 2020, Special Meeting Held March 16, 2020 and Special Meeting Held March 26, 2020

MOTION by Mr. Grippo; seconded by Ms. Hallen.

***MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education approve the minutes of the Board of Education Meetings held February 20, March 5, March 16 and March 26, 2020.*

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously 7-0.

6. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence.

7. OLD BUSINESS

None.

8. **AUDIENCE** (Public Q & A's via CPSCovid19@cheshire.k12.ct.us)

Mr. Solan said they have received some emails from parents appreciative of the remote learning.

Question: *Can Instructional Assistants will be available for one-to-one support.* Mr. Solan said he will talk to Tracy Hussey, Director of Pupil Personnel, to determine if this is possible.

Question *Will be pass/fail grading be used* – Mr. Solan said this has been a discussion at the State level. He said they are discussing it on a local level as well.

Question: *Can we share the Google Classroom with parents?* No, Google Classroom can only be accessed by people inside the Cheshire Public Schools organization.

Question: *Can the public get a copy of the bids for the School Modernization Project Manager?* Mr. Masciana responded that the bid results are posted on the Town's website.

Mr. Perugini said he received a message from a parent requesting that spring break is truly a break, with no assignments and no screen time.

Mr. Grippo asked if there is a way that parents can get access to Google Classroom and are there tutorials for third grade parents. Ms. Silano said they suggest that parents access Google Classroom alongside their students. We don't provide that Google Classroom access for parents. She said they will be sending home a link with tutorials for parents.

9. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **Chairperson's Update**

Mr. Perugini thanked everyone. He said he has been in communication with other districts and everyone is dealing with the same situations that we are.

10. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mr. White and seconded by Ms. Ham, the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anthony Perugini, Board of Education Chair

Attest:

Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

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