

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING  
HELD VIRTUALLY AUGUST 20, 2020 AT 7:30 PM**

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, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools; Marlene Silano, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Vincent Masciana, Chief Operating Officer

Public access made available through live streaming of the Cheshire Public School's YouTube Channel at [www.youtube.com/channel/UCULDbVCqppiY\\_3egBVDA-mw](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCULDbVCqppiY_3egBVDA-mw). Public comments were accepted at [CPSCovid19@chshire.k12.ct.us](mailto:CPSCovid19@chshire.k12.ct.us).

**1. CALL TO ORDER – 7:00 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.

**2. PRESENTATIONS**

**A. Opening of Schools Update**

Mr. Perugini explained that tonight we will hear presentations from Steve Trifone, CPS Athletic Director, and Mauro Esposito, Director of Health, Chesprocott.

Dr. Solan introduced Mr. Trifone to present on reopening and athletics (presentation on file). Mr. Trifone said that right at this moment, CIAC is meeting with the Department of Public Health (DPH) to determine if there will be fall sports. He said he will let them know if a decision is made during this meeting.

Mr. Trifone began by noting how important sports activities are for students, not only physically, but also social-emotionally. Fall sport teams were able to assemble cohorts beginning in early July. This was optional, not part of a team tryout and fortunately, no cases of COVID-19 were reported. He reviewed the organization and safety measures taken for these cohorts. He next reviewed the athlete and coach responsibilities.

Mr. Trifone reported there is a COVID-19 Sports Advisory Committee consisting of district administrators, the school nurse, athletic trainer, school physician, athletic director and coaching representatives. They will meet regularly before and during each athletic season. The purpose of the committee is to maintain constant communication among leadership, address concerns as they arise, and stay informed on COVID-19 best practices around athletics.

Regarding contests and transportation, there is a league regionalization of schedules. Schedules have been reduced with a shortened season. The transporting of athletes is per District busing guidelines (seating, masks). Parents may opt to drive athletes to and from contests, but athletes cannot drive themselves to or from contests. Spectators will not be allowed in any indoor event and the CIAC recommends no spectators at outdoor contests, although districts can develop their own plans. Cameras have been installed on the fields, so parents can sign up to view the contests through NFHS Pixxelot.

Mr. White asked how parents can be sure that all of our high school coaches are permitted. He said he heard from parents who checked the state site that not all coaches are listed. Mr. Trifone answered that right now, all fall coaches are properly permitted. Some of the winter and spring coaches will have to update their first aid and CPR training, which Mr. Trifone does, so he will be sure they are up to date before the seasons begin. He said guidelines have been developed and put into place, so they are in good shape.

Board members voiced their concerns regarding beginning contact sports.

Maura Esposito, Health Director for Chesprocott, spoke to the Board about the Coronavirus and reopening the schools. She said that following mitigation practices will allow the district to have a good start. She reported camps have opened successfully this summer. She has read the Cheshire Public Schools Plan and is satisfied that the public health mitigation is there because they know we will be more successful if the mitigation is followed. There has been an uptick in cases in college-age students. She explained that cohorts are important if there is a positive case and allows contact tracing. She said their goal is to get the children back into school and keep them healthy until there is a vaccine.

Mr. Perugini thanked Ms. Esposito and Mr. Trifone for all of their hard work and for joining them this evening. He asked Mr. Solan if the CIAC and DPH support sports opening. Dr. Solan said he would consult with Ms. Esposito and other professionals to be sure it is the right decision for Cheshire. Ms. Esposito said they all know a vaccine is coming. When it is available, they have to vaccinate 11,000 critical health forces first and the general public in phase 2.

The Board discussed the information Mr. Trifone and Ms. Esposito presented. Regarding testing, there is not enough testing agents to test all students before schools starts. Ms. Esposito reminded the Board that this is a new virus and there are a lot of unknowns. Regarding taking student's temperatures, high temperatures are not the main symptom; children's symptoms are mostly different. If you child is not feeling well, your child should not be going to school. Ms. Esposito said we have had over 90 cases over the last few months. It

is a steady 5-10 new cases per week. She said that 90% of the cases in Cheshire, Wolcott and Prospect can be traced to health workers. She explained that there are no guidelines yet on what will determine if a school must close again.

Mr. Solan explained that right now there will be no sports at the middle school. Depending on what the CIAC decides tonight, they will reevaluate at the end of September and make a decision in early October whether that will change.

Mr. White noted he has to leave for a work meeting, but asked the Health Director if she was comfortable with the reopening of our schools. Ms. Esposito answered that in the past, studies regarding H1N1, showed that as long as mitigation health strategies are followed, we can keep incidences down. She said as long as we follow CDC guidelines, which we are, she feels comfortable going forward with our model. She said we need to emphasize to parents and students that they must follow the guidelines. She said the opening of salons and camps has been successful with no incidences because everyone is following the guidelines.

Ms. Esposito said that when she looks at the Plan, she looks at it not only for the students, but for all staff. She said she understands why people are nervous, but they will be more comfortable when they get back to school and see the mitigation strategies that are in place they.

Ms. Hallen asked if the Health Director thought it would be okay to have all high schools students going back instead of the hybrid plan they have chosen. Ms. Esposito said the hybrid model at the high school level, is the best option because it is almost impossible to do cohorting at that level and keeping the students in small groups is very important.

Ms. Esposito explained the process that has been set up with the school nurses for easy reporting. Nurses have also been supplied with contact tracing questions. Chesprocott will be working very closely with all of our nurses.

Dr. Solan and Mr. Perugini thanked Ms. Esposito for attending tonight's meeting and for her guidance and collaboration with Cheshire Public Schools.

3. **AUDIENCE**

Dr. Solan answered a few questions received from the CPSCovid19@cheshire.k12.ct.us email address.

4. **CONSENT CALENDAR**

Dr. Solan explained the items in the Consent Calendar.

**MOTION** by Mr. Perugini, seconded by Mr. Grippo.

**MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education approve the Consent Calendar as presented.

**VOTE:** The Motion passed unanimously by those present 6-0.

**A. Approval of Statement on Class Size Policy**

In accordance with the *Agreement between the Cheshire Board of Education and the Education Association of Cheshire*, Article XXIII, the Board of Education hereby publishes and provides to the Association its policy relating to class size:

*"That the Board shall endeavor to maintain class sizes consistent with proven educational practices which require that various learning situations may alter the number of students per class. The Board, through its committees, shall study and make recommendations concerning personnel and space requirements based on all factors affecting class size."*

**B. Approval of ACES Annual Membership Agreement**

Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) is a Regional Educational Service Center, pursuant to Section 10-66a of the Connecticut General Statutes, which acts as a voluntary association of member Boards of Education establishing a cooperative arrangement to provide services, programs and activities for the education of children. Each year, participating Boards of Education must renew their participation in ACES by (a) carrying out its responsibilities as described in the Membership Agreement, (b) paying an assessment fee of \$250, and (c) appointing Board of Education Members to serve as Representative and Alternate to the ACES Governing Board.

*"That the Cheshire Board of Education agrees to participate for the 2020-21 school year in Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) as set forth in the ACES Annual Membership Agreement and appoints a Representative and Alternate to the ACES Governing Board."*

**C. Appointment of Hearing Officer**

Cheshire Board of Education Policy #5114 permits the Board of Education to appoint a hearing officer to preside over matters pertaining to student discipline and school accommodations. This individual does not preside over a matter unless the Board of Education opts to permit such a hearing to take place.

For example, should a student discipline matter require an expulsion hearing, the Board would be notified and given the option to hold the hearing as provided in Connecticut statutes or it could allow the matter to be heard by the appointed

hearing officer. The hearing officer is used more often than not because in most student discipline cases that rise to the level of expulsion the matters are spelled out in state law and the action required is not discretionary, but rather mandated. Further, in many cases involving expulsion, a stipulated agreement is developed prior to the hearing which renders any need for an evidentiary hearing unnecessary.

For the past sixteen years, Attorney Athan Mihalakos has served as the hearing officer for the Cheshire Board of Education. I recommend that the Board reappoint Attorney Mihalakos. Athan served for many years as a Corporation Counsel for the City of Waterbury prior to entering private practice with Willinger, Willinger & Bucci, PC in Bridgeport. In his role in Waterbury he represented the Board of Education and Administration in student discipline matters. He has a wealth of experience in this area and has served the Board very well when needed. The number of hearings that have been held over the past few years is very limited.

*“Move that the Cheshire Board of Education reappoint Attorney Athan Mihalakos of Willinger, Willinger & Bucci, PC as hearing officer for the 2020-2021 school year.”*

## **5. REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES**

### **A. FINANCE**

#### **I. Financial Update**

Mr. Masciana reported that the budget for the 2020-21 fiscal year is \$74,593,926. He said that while we have expended and encumbered \$12,641,910 through the first month of the year, we have not yet entered the full value of our encumbrances for our largest account categories, namely payroll and transportation. They expect the future monthly reports, and particularly, the September 30, 2020 report, will be more reflective of the full-year financial picture for 2020-21, as it will include the encumbrances for the largest accounts, as well as three months of actual expenditures. While it is too early to identify any singular major variance concern, they obviously expect that the 2020-21 fiscal year will present a variety of financial pressures and challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are many future unknowns as we prepare for the reopening of our schools for students on September 8, 2020, making it impossible to accurately forecast our expenditures at this point in time. With that said, however, we have identified below an initial estimate of the major costs that could potentially be incurred assuming that we were able to keep our school buildings open for students through June 2021. Mr. Masciana reviewed potential costs related to COVID-19.

|   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| Estimated cost for full-year contracted intra-day cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting for 10 months | \$325,000        |
| Tent and Table rentals for Sept. 8th through Nov. 2nd   | \$136,958        |
| Removal, 10 months of storage, and the return of classroom furniture and equipment                    | \$120,000        |
| Personal Protective Equipment for 8 additional months @ \$15k/month                                   | \$120,000        |
| Substitute costs to cover staff on leave  | \$100,000        |
| Potential Cost Total  | <b>\$801,958</b> |

If we were required to enter a remote learning method and were to proceed with a strategy to equip an additional 240 classrooms/learning spaces with the necessary audio/video equipment needed to enable our teachers to broadcast from their classrooms to our students at home, that cost is estimated to total \$768,000. This strategy would require sufficient lead time and funding to complete.

Ms. Hallen asked when we should begin talks with the Town Council regarding substantial costs. Dr. Solan answered that he has already had talks with the Town Manager, but it is premature to state a number. There are just too many unknowns at this point.

Mr. Grippo asked, if we had to go to full remote learning, if we are better prepared than last spring. Ms. Silano responded that we have had a lot more time to get prepared, have professional development and order devices. She said they are much better prepared than last spring. The fact that everyone has devices now means that we can do more synchronous work. There would continue to be an asynchronous piece, but a good blend of both.

**B. SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE**

Mr. Perugini said as many people are aware, there has been controversy on that Committee which they will discuss after the report.

Mr. Martelli reported the Committee met on August 3<sup>rd</sup> and August 19<sup>th</sup>. He reported on the August 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting which culminated about nine months of work. Colliers has been reviewing all of the information that already exists on the schools. Milone and McBroom, the demographer, has been hired to look at population trends. In October the Committee will be walking through all of the best case scenarios from the planners. They hope to have a plan by December with an application to be submitted by June 2021. He said there is a great deal of work to be done. Mr. Martelli said the Committee is working very hard and there are a lot of dedicated people. He said he hopes the people in positions of power make the right decisions so that they can move forward with the projects.

Ms. Harrigan added that at the previous evening's meeting, Colliers gave an update as Mr. Martelli reported. There is a new member, Kate O'Donnell, who will be replacing Anne Marie Kemp who resigned. She said the Committee has some mending to do and she hopes that begins. She said there are many hard working volunteers from our community and she is in awe and thanks them for their work.

Mr. Perugini noted that Peter Talbot also resigned. He said he welcomes Ms. O'Donnell. Regarding the controversy, there are great people on the Committee, not only elected people, but half of the committee consists of community volunteers who are not politicians. They are good people who want only to help the community. He said he supports his female colleagues on the committee and wishes there had been a different outcome. He explained that this is a Town Council Committee, not a Board of Education Committee. When it comes to action, the Board has no legal position. He said he is not going to interpret the Council's action, only they can explain it. He said he is not condoning what happened and no one is telling the females to move on.

Ms. Hallen said, as someone who has been on the Board for seven years and has worked on the Facility Master Plan, she is not confident the committee can move forward after watching the video of transpired at that meeting. Months have passed when the issue should have been dealt with when it first occurred. She said members of the committee who are not elected officials deserve to be treated better. This should be a well-functioning group who can work well together.

Ms. Harrigan added that the committee deserves more than just functioning, it has lost the collegiality over this incident. She feels it can be repaired. She has spoken with Mr. Perugini who she thinks has come up with a very good idea. Mr. Perugini said that they will discuss his idea at a future meeting.

C. **OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES**

None.

6. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**MOTION** by Mr. Martelli and seconded by Ms. Hallen.

**MOVED** that the Board of Education approve the Minutes from meetings held on June 4, June 29, June 30, July 14 and July 29, 2020.

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously 6-0 by those present.

7. **CORRESPONDENCE**

There was no correspondence.

**8. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

**A. Audience via [CPSCOV19@cheshire.k12.ct.us](mailto:CPSCOV19@cheshire.k12.ct.us)**

Mr. Solan answered additional questions that were sent in by parents regarding the opening of school.

Dr. Solan introduced Dr. Gadd, Principal at Cheshire High School to present on Cheshire High School reopening with a collegiate hybrid model (copy of presentation on file). Dr. Gadd explained the rationale behind their move to the hybrid model. Factors included population, room capacity and use of mitigation strategies. Three committees researched and contributed to the development of the full plan: Health & safety practices and logistics; Teaching and learning practices; and Social and emotional considerations for the return to school.

Dr. Gadd reviewed the logistical challenges that would compromise health. The daily total population on a regular day is 1,600 students, adults and visitors. All of the class sections, yearlong and semester, represent a total of 16,000 transitions. She said that moving nearly 1,600 people (adults and students) eight times a day through 11 foot wide hallways and providing 6 feet of social distancing for 1365 students to eat lunch unmasked make it impossible to cohort given the complexity of the high school schedule. With that many people, it is impossible to effectively contact trace with full population back in the building.

She said they put together a block schedule that enables maximizing instructional time; limits transitions by moving from a six period day to four; allows for mask breaks and increases passing time to move students to the next class in waves to limit hallway traffic.

Dr. Gadd clarified that students attend school in-person two days and remotely one day. On the alternate, self-directed learning day, students will complete teacher directed work, and they can access synchronous, live-streamed classes as the technology is available. Teachers will make every effort to see their students as often as they can on alternate days. She noted that they don't have the technology for everyone to simulcast and they continue to investigate workarounds using all available technology. She said out of 20 high schools in DRG B, 19 are following the hybrid model and only one is full time in-person.

She shared that colleges and universities have altered their entrance criteria given the nationwide impact of COVID-19 on traditional, in-person learning. Many Colleges and Universities have gone standardized "test-optional."

Principal Gadd said that Cheshire High School continued to use letter grades for the 19-20 school year; therefore, colleges will have more concrete information



about student academic performance. The NCAA is also making shifts in their requirements in response to the pandemic. Most colleges are employing a hybrid program for their students returning to school this fall, so our students will be learning in a format similar to what they will likely experience at the collegiate level.

Ms. Ham said the students will be receiving 110 minutes of instruction, and asked how much is the usual. Ms. Gadd said that typically it would be 168 minutes. Ms. Ham said she thinks that many parents are upset with that and also feel that the two days of remote learning are just homework days. She said she also is concerned. Ms. Gadd said that attendance will be taken for each class and they will also be seeing their teachers in-person.

Mr. Perugini asked why we do not have the hybrid model at the other schools. Dr. Solan said they are doing hybrid at the high school only because they could not effectuate mitigation strategies at that level. They are able to cohort and social distance at the middle and elementary levels.

Dr. Solan reported that the state has issued an addendum specifically to music which states that wind instruments require 12-feet of social distancing. Unfortunately, the marching band season has been canceled. They are looking at alternatives to provide music instruction to small groups.

Ms. Silano reported that the Peck Jones request was approved by the Town Council. The request for funds was made for a few different needs: the budget line item for library and periodicals had been reduced during the budget process, in addition, when we went to a full-day kindergarten program, our students began performing well in reading, leaving us with a need to fill primary libraries with texts at higher levels and we also wanted to enhance reading materials at Dodd and the high school in response to culturally responsive curriculum and offer a diverse assortment of materials. The grant is part of a set of funds set aside to support enhancements to the education program. The funding is in the \$20,000-\$25,000 range.

Mr. Perugini noted that there is legislation that has been passed regarding a full year course focusing on Black and Latino studies. Dr. Solan noted that it is optional this year, but mandatory for next year.

Mr. Perugini asked Superintendent Solan to report on the survey results. Dr. Solan said across K-8 there are roughly 85% in-person versus 15% remote. Dr. Gadd said the last time she checked, the high school responses were 14% remote learners and 86% in-person.

Mr. Masciana reported that the state has mandated buses run no more than 70% capacity but our district is going to run at 50% capacity. On top of that, there will be even less on the buses because of remote learners. Students and drivers must wear masks.

Mr. Grippo asked if we have heard from teachers, and how many are coming back. Mr. Masciana said it is not only teachers but all staff. A survey was sent in July asking if staff would be able to return. About 100 responses were received from employees who said they were unsure or not able to return for a variety of reasons. Each of those employees were sent a detailed explanation of what their leave options might be or what their accommodations could be. As of today, there are about 63 formal requests. They have responded to all of those requests in concert with our attorneys. We have had some employees retire or resign because they are not comfortable coming back. There may be more after the FMLA runs out for some employees.

Mr. Grippo asked if parents can change their minds and switch between remote and in-person learning. Dr. Solan answered that the parents have the first two weeks to switch and then it's a 4-week commitment. Mr. Grippo asked if a vaccine will be legally mandated. Dr. Solan answered that is determined by the State.

Mr. Perugini noted that he mistakenly skipped over correspondence and asked Ms. Hallen if there was any.

Ms. Hallen responded that there were three letters. Copies of the letters will be on file. AnnMarie Kemp asked if a hybrid model is in the best interest of the students and is concerned about the self-directed learning days. Another letter was received from Marléna Soble asking that it be entered into the record. The letter relates to the School Modernization Committee and the issue involving Matt Bowman and states she has concerns relating to the process involved on the Town Council side and the lack of deference that was paid to the request of the committee to have Mr. Bowman removed. She felt the issue should have been heard publicly and not in Executive Session. Lastly, a letter was received from past Town Council chairs asking that, as a community, at no time should the public attack the family members of elected officials.

9. **OLD BUSINESS**

None.

10. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **Chairperson's Update**

The Chair announced upcoming meetings.

11. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mr. Perugini, and seconded by Ms. Hallen, the meeting was adjourned into Executive Session to discuss union negotiations including Superintendent Solan, Mr. Masciana and Ms. Silano at 10:30 p.m. with no action to follow

Respectfully submitted,

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Anthony Perugini, Board Chair

Attest:

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Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

Filed at the Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, Cheshire: 9/17/2020.