

**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING
HELD VIRTUALLY JANUARY 26, 2021 AT 7:00 PM**

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

Board Members Absent: Anthony Perugini-Chair

Administrators Present: Marlene Silano, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Vincent Masciana, Chief Operating Officer; Robin-Anne Carey, Director of Pupil Personnel Services

Public access made available through live streaming the Cheshire Public Schools YouTube Channel at www.youtube.com/cheshirepublicschools. Public comments were accepted at CPSCovid19@cheshire.k12.ct.us.

1. CALL TO ORDER – 7:02 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. Grippo led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

2. AUDIENCE

None.

3. PUBLIC BUDGET REVIEW AND DISCUSSION REGARDING SUPERINTENDENT’S RECOMMENDED BUDGET.

Mr. Masciana said tonight they will be reviewing Instructional Expense, Support Services and Maintenance & Operations. He said at the next meeting on January 28th, they will cover answer any questions asked by Board of Education members and the public. He reviewed the budget request of \$78,487,052, an increase of \$3,893,126 (5.22%) over the current budget.

Instructional Expense

Mr. Masciana said this account represents 5.8% of the budget. They are requesting a 1.65% increase of \$74,320. Included in this account are: Special Education - Tuition, Special Education, Pupil Services, Instructional Supply, Textbooks/Software/ Curriculum, New & Replacement Equipment, Staff Training, Library/Periodicals/Media, and Testing & Adult Education Supplies. He said this account is basically being held “flat” because they have to make up the deficit in Medical Benefits. The only areas they are looking to increase modestly are Replacement Equipment, New Equipment and Staff Training. The training that needs to be done is either because it was put off this year due to the pandemic or it is training in conjunction with remote learning.

		EXPENDED *	BUDGET	PROJECTED	REQUESTED	CHANGE	% inc/ % dec
		2019/20	2020/21	2020/21	2021/22	(FromBGT)	
130	STAFF TRAINING	\$ 141,809	\$ 184,300	\$ 184,300	\$ 196,700	12,400	6.73%
323	PUPIL SERVICES	\$ 779,844	\$ 757,096	\$ 757,096	\$ 790,302	33,206	4.39%
560	TUITION OUTPLACEMENTS	\$ 2,178,800	\$ 2,241,950	\$ 2,241,950	\$ 2,220,664	-21,286	-0.95%
611	INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPLY	\$ 420,796	\$ 463,313	\$ 463,313	\$ 463,313	0	0.00%
641	TEXTBOOKS/SOFTWARE	\$ 392,107	\$ 450,000	\$ 450,000	\$ 450,000	0	0.00%
642	LIBRARY/PERIODICALS	\$ 71,588	\$ 60,000	\$ 60,000	\$ 60,000	0	0.00%
643	CURRICULUM MATERIALS	\$ -	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000	0	0.00%
644	LIBRARY/MEDIA SUPPLIES	\$ 23,546	\$ 41,929	\$ 41,929	\$ 41,929	0	0.00%
645	TESTING SUPPLIES	\$ 55,114	\$ 69,926	\$ 69,926	\$ 69,926	0	0.00%
689	ADULT EDUCATION SUPPLIES	\$ 17,395	\$ 16,650	\$ 16,650	\$ 16,650	0	0.00%
730	REPLACEMENT EQUIPMENT	\$ 117,831	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 125,000	25,000	25.00%
731	NEW EQUIPMENT	\$ 98,781	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 125,000	25,000	25.00%
	INSTRUCTIONALEXPENSE	\$ 4,297,611	\$ 4,510,164	\$ 4,510,164	\$ 4,584,484	\$ 74,320	1.65%

Mr. Masciana reviewed Special Education costs by year and said this year's request of \$19,435,391 is consistent with prior years.

Ms. Harrigan said she is very concerned with the number of line items that are being held flat, and asked if \$25,000 is enough for Replacement Equipment and New Equipment because we have deferred some of these costs for too long. Mr. Masciana said this is the result of trade-offs per the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent because of the high budget request for Medical Benefits. He said there are always things that we would like, but they are trying to balance those items with the high request to restore the medical benefits account. Ms. Harrigan said a school systems should always be moving forward and investing in what we will need to teach children going forward. We have not adequately funded many areas for many years. Ms. Ham said she agrees with Ms. Harrigan that we are cutting into the bone. She said we need to fight back against the mandates.

Mr. Grippo asked what the increases were earmarked for in New Equipment and Replacement Equipment. Mr. Masciana said for the most part, the increases will be for equipment for the classrooms. Mr. Grippo asked if it is for new SmartBoards and Mr. Masciana answered, no, it is to keep our current equipment running. Mr. Grippo asked if there is anything budgeted to move forward as far as technology is concerned. Mr. Masciana said no, that is not included in this budget.

Special Education

Mr. Masciana introduced Robin-Anne Carey, Director of Pupil Personnel Services who presented on the Special Education program. She reviewed the continuum of services provided from the least restrictive setting to the most restrictive (homebound, outplaced) based on student needs. Ms. Carey said that the number of students with IEPs has increased to over 350 students. Factors that may have influenced the higher numbers is that kindergarteners have been having a hard time separating from their parents, requiring more support. In addition, more students are being impacted by anxiety. Another factor is that they are now mandated to identify students with dyslexia.

She said there has been a rise in Grade 9-12 students who require IEPs. Ms. Carey also noted that in the past, transition students were exited at age 21. There is a new mandate which requires services to be provided to transition students until age 22.

Outplacements have dropped because they implemented the Bridges program at Doolittle and Dodd and the RISE program at Cheshire High School. Students are outplaced only when we have exhausted all of the district resources and have not been able to meet the needs of the student. Once a student is outplaced, they are monitored to see when they are ready to return to our district. Ms. Carey reviewed the in-district programs including intensive programs, therapeutic programs and the Bridge to Life/College/Community Life program.

Compared with other schools in DRG B, Cheshire is the 4th lowest for student outplacements. Our numbers are also lower than the State average for various disabilities. Ms. Carey said she hopes that the Board of Education and Town Council can continue to support the Special Education budget.

Mr. White asked about truancy in relation to the pandemic. Ms. Carey said, for her students, it is mainly school avoidance. Students, who have anxiety, are doing very well being able to stay home, but those students who need more structure are struggling.

Ms. Carey explained that outplacement tuition costs can range between \$50,000 to close to \$200,000 depending on the supports that a student may need. The average tuition is about \$80,000 per year. Mr. Martelli asked if any of the staff who were added last year helped to keep those numbers down. Ms. Carey answered, yes, and our in-house programs also help to keep our students in our district. Mr. Martelli asked how many additional students we have to provide services with the mandate to service students through age 22. She answered that this year we had to call back three 21 year old students who were already exited out. These students will be exited again during this year as they turn 22.

Ms. Hallen asked what it is that draws people to Cheshire for our Special Education program. Ms. Carey said typically, it is a child with a unique need and the child's doctor makes a recommendation for the student to attend Cheshire Public Schools. Ms. Hallen noted that our early intervention program is very good.

Ms. Ham asked if the entire cost of outplacement is our district's responsibility. Ms. Carey said our responsibility is to educate the student, no matter what the cost. She asked Mr. Masciana to factor out the IEP students from our per pupil expenditure. Mr. Masciana said he will get that information to her.

Mr. Grippo asked about the special education high school students at the high school, and if we have the resources to help these students who have not been in class full-time. Ms. Carey replied that these students have not been hybrid, they have had in-person

instruction four days every week. She said they will have plans in place to help students adjust.

Mr. Grippo asked Ms. Silano if we plan to do the Safe School Climate Survey this year. Ms. Silano responded that yes, it is a State Department of Education required survey that is administered every two years. It will be administered in the spring. She noted that the majority of the questions are mandated by the State. Mr. Grippo thanked Ms. Carey for her presentation.

Support Services

Support Services represents 8.9% of the budget. The request is for \$6,997,747, a 4.20% increase. Mr. Masciana noted that this account has been “flat” the last five years.

		EXPENDED *	BUDGET	PROJECTED	REQUESTED	CHANGE	% inc/
		2019/20	2020/21	2020/21	2021/22	(From BGT)	% dec
330	OTHER PROFESSIONAL SERVICES	\$ 963,133	\$ 624,100	\$ 624,100	\$ 808,603	184,503	29.56%
440	RENTALS/LEASES	\$ 246,827	\$ 335,975	\$ 335,975	\$ 326,555	-9,420	-2.80%
510	PUPIL TRANSPORTATION	\$ 3,083,871	\$ 3,550,128	\$ 3,550,128	\$ 3,627,790	77,662	2.19%
520	PROPERTY INSURANCE	\$ 78,781	\$ 97,012	\$ 97,012	\$ 97,012	0	0.00%
521	LIABILITY INSURANCE	\$ 87,967	\$ 96,764	\$ 96,764	\$ 96,764	0	0.00%
522	TRANSPORTATION INSURANCE	\$ 41,470	\$ 45,618	\$ 45,618	\$ 45,618	0	0.00%
530	TELEPHONE/INTERNET SERVICES	\$ 141,188	\$ 122,300	\$ 122,300	\$ 154,300	32,000	26.17%
531	COMMUNICATIONS	\$ 39,522	\$ 62,318	\$ 62,318	\$ 62,318	0	0.00%
580	TRAVEL/CONFERENCE	\$ 37,594	\$ 65,817	\$ 65,817	\$ 64,288	-1,529	-2.32%
590	OTHER SERVICES	\$ 247,394	\$ 276,070	\$ 276,070	\$ 278,611	2,541	0.92%
610	OFFICE SUPPLY	\$ 83,138	\$ 90,000	\$ 90,000	\$ 90,000	0	0.00%
627	TRANSPORTATION SUPPLY	\$ 244,314	\$ 355,000	\$ 355,000	\$ 351,306	-3,694	-1.04%
690	OTHER SUPPLY	\$ 24,335	\$ 9,750	\$ 9,750	\$ 9,750	0	0.00%
732	CAPITAL EQUIPMENT	\$ 1,070,964	\$ 923,930	\$ 923,930	\$ 923,930	0	0.00%
810	DUES/FEES	\$ 71,714	\$ 60,902	\$ 60,902	\$ 60,902	0	0.00%
	SUPPORT SERVICES	\$ 6,462,212	\$ 6,715,684	\$ 6,715,684	\$ 6,997,747	\$ 282,063	4.20%

Mr. Masciana said that Other Professional Services are increasing by \$184,503. This is because we moved our MUNIS software to a cloud-based software service. It also includes adjustments for accounts that were budgeted too low for a few years. Next, he reviewed the Transportation category, noting that we have a reduction in this account because we are not running field trips.

Mr. Grippo asked about fuel costs. Mr. Masciana stated that he is comfortable with what is budgeted in that line item. Mr. White said he would like to electrify and de-carbonize our transportation budget in the not-so-distant future.

Maintenance and Operations

This account represents 5% of the overall budget. The request this year is \$3,948,262, an increase of \$370,036. Thirty-six percent of this account is Utilities and Heating; 33% is Building Maintenance and Repair, 20% is Building Cleaning Services, 7% is Maintenance Supply and 4% is Equipment Maintenance and Repair.

		EXPENDED *	BUDGET	PROJECTED	REQUESTED	CHANGE	% inc/
		2019/20	2020/21	2020/21	2021/22	(FromBGT)	% dec
410	PUBLIC UTILITIES	\$ 802,282	\$ 1,043,458	\$ 1,043,458	\$ 1,080,518	37,060	3.55%
420	MAINTENANCE/REPAIR EQUIPMENT	\$ 160,233	\$ 152,100	\$ 152,100	\$ 152,100	0	0.00%
430	MAINTENANCE/REPAIR BUILDINGS	\$ 1,906,413	\$ 1,832,275	\$ 1,832,275	\$ 2,089,772	257,497	14.05%
613	MAINTENANCE SUPPLY	\$ 450,487	\$ 205,650	\$ 205,650	\$ 271,000	65,350	31.78%
620	HEAT/ENERGY	\$ 306,228	\$ 344,743	\$ 344,743	\$ 354,872	10,129	2.94%
	MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS	\$ 3,625,643	\$ 3,578,226	\$ 3,578,226	\$ 3,948,262	\$ 370,036	10.34%

Mr. Masciana noted the average age of our buildings is 70.25 years. He said our buildings are not only used during the day for our students, but also after school and weekends for school and community events.

Capital Budget

Mr. Masciana explained that the Capital Budget is being discussed in the Planning Committee and a recommendation will be coming to the full Board. The Capital Budget is used to fund building improvements, construction, the purchase of equipment, acquisition of land, etc. with a project cost of \$110,000 or more, an expected life of five years or more, and with a non-recurring nature. The Town Council annually approves a Five-Year Capital Expenditure Plan and funding for the Annual Capital Budget.

Mr. Masciana reviewed the Building Maintenance Capital Non-Recurring Fund that currently has a \$233,627 balance. They have only requested \$16,000 in last few years.

Ms. Ham asked if they are reprioritizing capital projects as the School Modernization Committee hones in on projects. Mr. Masciana responded that the next sequence for the School Modernization Committee is to look at the financing overall. The Capital Plan the Planning Committee is reviewing is if there is no school modernization plan. Should they make modernization plan improvements, there will be Capital Plan reductions. Mr. White added that he wants to see net zero schools as part of the plan.

Mr. Grippo announced the next meeting, the Public Information Meeting will be held next Thursday at 7 pm.

4. ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,

 Adam Grippo, Board Vice Chair

Attest:

 Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

Filed at the Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, Cheshire: February 22, 2021.