

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING
HELD VIRTUALLY FEBRUARY 18, 2021 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

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 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 – 7:30 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.
- C. Student Representatives. Lucy Helene and Josh Goldstein, student representatives for the 2020/2021 school year, reported on recent events at Cheshire High School. Lucy reported that regional league contests have begun for ice hockey, basketball, skiing and swimming. The season will run until March 28th. Cheshire High School was given the CIAC Sportsmanship Award which is for overall sportsmanship, community service and maintaining a CIAC Class Act status. She also reported that nine senior student athletes signed letters of intent for college sports. The scholarship booklet for seniors was released on February 4th with over 70 scholarships for seniors. Applications are due March 12th. Josh reported that Cheshire High School's celebration of Black History Month includes poetry by modern black artists. Each morning in February, a student reads a piece by an African American artist. Josh reported that the spring musical rehearsals are underway. They are holding in-person, masked and socially distanced rehearsals for Little Women. The plan is to film the musical in March and then sell tickets to a streamed version, hopefully in May. He thanked Mike Solimine and the other staff who are working to make this happen.

2. AUDIENCE

Dr. Solan read an email from Jami Ferguson, 105 Copper Beech Drive, who extended her gratitude to the members of the community who volunteered to serve our town on the school modernization committee. She said it appears to be an enormous project that, by its nature, could be a full-time job for each one of them. She said as time is ticking toward the State's grant application deadline, she implores all Board members to actively participate and assist the Committee so they're able to meet this fiscal year's deadline. She said the students, faculty and taxpayers can't afford to risk another's year's delay, which may very well happen if the grant application isn't submitted before June 30, 2021.

3. **REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES**

A. **CURRICULUM**

I. **Report on Meeting Held February 8, 2021.**

Ms. Ham, the Chair of the Curriculum Committee reported on the meeting held on February 8th. It began with email correspondence from Mr. John Bestor (Cheshire resident). The correspondence regarded Mr. Bestor's request for the Board to consider a non-binding Board of Education vote to request a waiver from participating in the State Smarter Balanced Assessment. Ms. Silano addressed Mr. Bestor's concerns by noting the administration of the test will show how much the students have grown and also the impact COVID has had on student learning.

Mr. Kevin Hanlon, K-8 Curriculum Coordinator, shared a summary of the five year English Learners Program Evaluation presentation and a report to the Cheshire Curriculum Council from November 2020. Key items in the report included reflections on the impact of the previous CCC goals on improved EL student performance and future goals to further refine individual plans for students, improve social-emotional supports and family communication, and provide continued professional development for teachers.

Mr. Sean McKeown, Career and Technical Education Department Chair, gave an update on the supplemental Perkins Grant. Highlights of the update include purchasing a Trak Knee Mill and Tormach Milling Machine. Ms. Ham encouraged all to watch the presentation on the CPS YouTube Channel.

Next, Ms. Ham reported that they received an update on an overview of the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade PSAT results from the fall of 2020. A copy of the presentation is on file. She noted PSAT increases in complexity from Grade 9 to 11 in both Evidence-based Reading and Writing (ERW) and Math. She reviewed the benchmarks and scores for each grade and subject area. In each area, Cheshire student scores were higher than the benchmarks and higher than the DRG B average.

The Committee next heard a Social Emotional Learning presentation from Ms. Silano. A copy of the presentation is also on file. The presentation focused on the current and upcoming district work on equity. The presentation highlighted the connection between social emotional learning, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional (CASEL) Standards and Equity. Ms. Ham shared that the district's goal of equity work is to address educational disparities in transformational ways to foster long-term change that sustains bias-free environments by redressing the underlying organizational and institutional conditions that produce the everyday manifestations of inequity. With guidance from SERC, the district is

developing an equity policy. To date, two committees have been formed, a District Equity Leadership Team and the Administrative Council. Ms. Ham said that SERC will provide training. She reviewed the next steps, including:

- Equity Policy
- Equity Transition Plan
- Equity Audit
- Develop School Equity Leadership Teams
- Summer Book Club: *Unconscious Bias in Schools: A Developmental Approach to Exploring Race and Racism*
- Curriculum Writing Institute
- Hiring/recruiting practices
- Continue to implement Responsive Classroom
- Continue to learn about and implement Restorative Practices
- Continue CHS Club - RAMS Against Racism
- African American Black, Puerto Rican Latino Studies Course – 2021

Mr. Grippo asked if the equity policy will be going through the Board of Education Policy and if it is written by CABE. Ms. Silano replied that the policy is not written yet; the Committee is working on that with SERC. They are also reviewing what other districts have done. She said when they have a policy, it will go to the Policy Committee. Mr. Grippo asked for the name of the author of the summer book club book. Ms. Silano replied that it was written by Tracey Benson. She explained that only the administrators are reading this book. Over the summer, they read a number of books and then get together to discuss them. She said she will get a copy of the book to anyone who would like one. Mr. Grippo asked if Board members can attend a training. Ms. Silano said she looked into a couple of options and is waiting for pricing. She said she will get the information to the Board. Ms. Ham said she thinks the entire Board should read *Unconscious Bias in Schools: A Developmental Approach to Exploring Race and Racism*. She said it is important to understand what is being proposed and to be part of the conversation.

Mr. White said in regard to Mr. Bestor's comments, he is sympathetic with his comments, as he has never been a fan of testing. Mr. White asked if there was a trend to the PSATs. Ms. Ham said we have very strong reading and writing scores, but math scores are not as high. Ms. Silano added that we are going to continue to strengthen the math program. The scores are good, but there is room for improvement. Ms. Silano said in regard to the assessments, , the total amount of testing time in grades 3 – 5 is 4 hours and in grades 6 - 8 the total is 4.5 hours. She said they can stop when they need to or administer over multiple days.

Mr. Grippo asked if parents can choose to have their child opt out of the test. Dr. Solan answered, no, we are required to have all students take the test. We respond to parents and explain that to them. The State does not permit a formal “opt out.”

Mr. Perugini added that CAFE has an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion series of 4 or 5 hour-long webinars that are helpful.

B. FINANCE

I. Finance Report

We have expended and encumbered \$63,904,119, or 85.7% of our budget through the first seven months of the year, including the encumbrances for our largest account categories, namely the payroll and transportation accounts. We are now past the mid-point of the year and while there continue to be variables and unknowns, particularly related to the pandemic, we fully expect to meet our 20-21 budget. This is based on the assumption that we receive the \$706,075 allocated to Cheshire in Coronavirus Relief Funds from the State (it has been approved), use the \$200,000 available in the Unexpended Education Funds Account, and continue to aggressively manage our non-payroll expenditures. He said they increased the expenditure cap from 40% to 60%.

II. Medical Benefits Update

Mr. Masciana said that claims came down to a more normal level, dropping to \$730K. He noted that it is the beginning of HSA plan year, meaning employees are meeting deductibles over the next few months which brings claims costs down. The fund balance went up \$34,000 and they received \$75,853 in Stop Loss Reimbursements. As of January 31st, the trust fund balance is \$1,004,619, which is 1.26 months of claims reserves.

Mr. Perugini asked if there have been any discussions with the Town. Mr. Masciana said that he and Sean Kimball, Town Manager, provided an update to the Town Council Budget Committee. He said both the Town and Board are experiencing a significant reduction in our trust funds.

Ms. Ham asked the Superintendent to speak about the Governor’s proposed budget. Mr. Masciana said outside of mandated legislation, the most important thing is the Excess Cost Sharing Grant. We receive \$9.3 million per year and that is still intact. Dr. Solan said the state statute was slated to reduce ECS funding for many of the more affluent communities across Connecticut. It seems that when the Federal money came in, they kept the ECS money flat. That is about \$400,000 over two years that we wouldn’t have received. On the flip side, it cost Waterbury about \$20 million. He said there will still be much debate and deliberation

C. PLANNING**I. Report on Meeting Held February 4, 2021.**

Mr. Martelli, Chair of the Planning Committee reported, on the meeting held February 4, 2021. He reported that they received a report from ECG Engineering, P.C. who examined the facilities for possible rooftop and ground-mount solar installations. The presentation provided information on where there could be potential installations. At Cheshire High School, there is a 3-acre wooded site towards the canal and linear trail that could potentially generate 90% of power required at Cheshire High School. The Committee decided this was too much to consider at the moment with School Modernization work in progress. They also identified locations at Doolittle and Highland, and they will investigate further. They will continue working to meet the relevant deadlines for funding.

Mr. White said because of possible government incentives, it would behoove us to move forward. Ms. Harrigan said as we are modernizing our buildings, we will be renovating our roofs and suggested postponing until the School Modernization Plan is finalized. Ms. Hallen said everyone is in favor of solar energy, but it is hard to make decisions until we know what the Plan will be. Mr. White said in regard to the school modernization plan, we will more than likely continue using the parcels and added that the incentives will be ramping down over the next 12 to 24 months. He feels moving forward as expeditiously as possible while balancing with the school modernization plan is a prudent thing to do.

D. SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE

Mr. Martelli said at the last meeting, there was a spirited discussion of where they are and where they need to go. Mr. Martelli shared a document that he created which details the two options that are being reviewed, along with the costs.

Scenario 1A**Phase I**

- New North End Elementary School (850-1,000 students)
 - \$62.6 Million Total Project Cost (35.72 Rate)
 - \$40,239,280 Local Share
- Renovate as New – Dodd 7 & 8 Middle School
 - \$85,450,000 Total Project Cost (45.72% Rate)
 - \$46,382,260 Local Share
- Close Darcey & Chapman School
- Move Darcey Program to Highland (Costs as CIP)
- September 2023 Construction Start – September 2025 Completion
 - \$148,050,000 Total Phase I Project Cost

- \$86,621,540 Local Share

Phase II

- Renovate Norton School
 - \$34,500,000 Total Project Cost
 - \$18,726,600 Local Share
- Renovate Doolittle School
 - \$42,900,000 Total Project Cost
 - \$23,286,120 Local Share

Phase III

- Renovate Cheshire High School
 - \$194,000,000 Total Project Cost
 - \$105,303,000 Local
- Potentially Rebuild Cheshire High School – TBD
 - \$419,450,000 Total Project Cost
 - \$253,337,460 Local Share Cost
- Project Costs do not include Humiston Program / Offices
- Occupied Renovations of School Buildings
- Cheshire High School to be Complete in spring 2034

Scenario 2A

Phase I

- New 6-8 Middle School
 - \$130,000,000 Total Cost
 - \$83,564,000 Local Share
- New Chapman School (Approx. 500 students)
 - \$33,200,000 Total Cost
 - \$21,340,000 Local Share
- Both Schools open 2025 School year
- Darcey School Closes – Highland receives renovations for Darcey Program CIP
- Dodd remains as swing space allowing other buildings to be renovated empty
 - \$163,200,000 Total Phase I Project Cost
 - \$104,904,000 Local Share

Phase II

- Doolittle Renovated as new
 - \$47,200,000 Total Cost
 - \$25,620,000 Local Share
- Norton Renovated as new
 - \$35,500,000 Total Cost

- \$19,629,000 Local Share

Phase III

- Renovate Cheshire High School \$194,000,000 Total Cost - \$105,303,000 Local
- Potentially Rebuild Cheshire High School – TBD
- 2032 Total Project Completion Date
 - \$439,900,000 Total Project Cost
 - \$274,497,720 Local Share Cost

Option 2A is approximately \$20,000,000 more expensive.

Ms. Hallen asked if the Committee is leaning towards one or the other of these options. Mr. Martelli said both of these options are under consideration. SLR (Milone and McBroom) is looking at a redistricting study based on the two options as proposed. This study will show how many actual bodies will be in each of the school buildings. He said they will not have that information until next week. At the meeting, the Committee decided to ask the Town Council for an extension until June 1st to bring the presentation to the Board and Town Council for final review.

There was extensive discussions among the Board members regarding the two options. The Board discussed the increase in elementary enrollment and how it will be addressed. Dr. Solan said, ideally, elementary enrollment should be 600 students or less. Highland has over 800 and is one of the largest in Connecticut. They also discussed new buildings versus renovate as new construction.

Ms. Hallen asked what the Board's timeline is and if there is anything the Board can begin working on now to expedite the process. Mr. Perugini said they are waiting for the entire Plan to be received from the School Modernization Committee. When decided, it will need to be reviewed by the Council, the Board, as well as the community. The Board discussed various timelines. Mr. Martelli said if they don't make a June 30, 2021 deadline, they can still have a project that goes to referendum in November and if approved at referendum, they can begin the design phase and then submit the project to the state in June, 2022. Ms. Ham voiced her concerns about a Grade 6 - 8 Middle School concept and said she needs to see information in order to make an educated guess. Dr. Solan said he will forward information to the entire Board. All Board members seemed to be in agreement that they do not want a 1,000 student elementary school as mentioned in Scenario IA. Mr. Martelli said they will receive a report from the SMC in the next few weeks and at that point we will have a much better idea. Mr. Perugini said they will have a Planning Committee of the Whole meeting in the next few weeks so the Board can discuss a 6-8 Middle School and the enrollment at elementary schools.

E. CALENDAR COMMITTEE

Ms. Harrigan reported on the Calendar Committee meeting held on February 10, 2021. The Committee reviewed the draft calendar for 2021-2022 and the proposed draft calendar for 2022-2023.

I. Approval of 2021/2022 School Calendar

Ms. Harrigan reported that the draft calendar was approved last year by the Calendar Committee. The first day of school for students will be August 31, 2021. Convocation is scheduled for August 26, 2021, Professional Development (PD) days will be held on August 27 and 30, November 2, 2021 and March 18, 2022. Cheshire Public Schools will be closed on the following days: Labor Day (September 6, 2021), Rosh Hashanah (September 7, 2021), Yom Kippur (September 16, 2021), Columbus Day (October 11, 2021), Thanksgiving Break (November 25 - 26, 2021), Winter Recess, including Christmas and New Year's Day (December 24, 2021 - January 1, 2022), Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (January 17, 2022), February Recess (February 21 - 22, 2022), April Break (April 11 - 14, 2022), Good Friday (April 15, 2022), and Memorial Day (May 30, 2022). With no snow days, the last day of school for students would be June 9, 2022 and the last day for teachers would be June 10, 2022. Snow days will be made up June 10 – June 30, 2021. Additional snow days needed beyond these 15 days will begin with April 14, 2022 and move backward.

MOTION by Ms. Harrigan and seconded by Ms. Hallen

MOVED *that the Cheshire Board of Education adopts the 2021/22 School Calendar as presented.*

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

II. Approval of Proposed Draft 2022/23 School Calendar

Ms. Harrigan next reviewed the 2022/2023 proposed draft school calendar as recommended by the Calendar Committee. The first day of school is scheduled for August 30th making the last day of school June 9th. Convocation is scheduled for August 25, 2022. Professional Development (PD) days will be held on August 26 and 29, November 8, 2022 and March 17, 2023. Cheshire Public Schools would be closed on the following days: Labor Day (September 5, 2022), Rosh Hashanah (September 26, 2022), Yom Kippur (October 5, 2022), Columbus Day (October 10, 2022), Thanksgiving Break (November 24 - 25, 2022), Winter Recess, including Christmas and New Year's Day (December 24 – December 31, 2022), Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (January 16, 2023), February Recess (February 20 - 21, 2023), Good Friday (April 7, 2023), April Break (April 17 - 21, 2023), and Memorial Day (May 29, 2023). With no snow days, the last day of school for students is

scheduled for June 9, 2023 and the last day for teachers is June 10, 2023. Snow days will be made up June 13 – June 30, 2023. Additional snow days needed beyond these 15 days will begin with April 15, 2023 and move backward. Ms. Harrigan noted that this calendar is not final until approved by the Board next year.

MOTION by Ms. Harrigan and seconded by Ms. Hallen.

MOVED *that the Cheshire Board of Education adopt the 2022/2023 Proposed Draft School Calendar as presented.*”

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

F. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES

None.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION by Mr. Perugini

MOVED *that the Board of Education approve the Minutes from meetings held on January 21 and February 4, 2021.*

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

5. CORRESPONDENCE

Ms. Hallen reported that they received a letter from Debra Manke, teacher at Norton School and our Teacher of the Year, requesting that early dismissals be added the next year’s school calendar to allow teachers to collaborate and have planning time. She said the early dismissals this year have been very beneficial.

6. SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

The Superintendent gave a brief COVID-19 overview reporting that in-school spread has not been a factor based on the important considerations of mitigation strategies. We have very few positive cases. He reported that our percentage of remote learners in the district is 19.66, compared to 25% in January. He explained the steps at Cheshire High School going forward. He said that Dr. Gadd issued a survey to all parents to assess interest in adding in-person learning time for students. There were 266 students who expressed the desire to return 4 days per week (or roughly 133/cohort). He said they will bring those students back to the building 4 days a week on March 1st and still maintain seating capacity. Lunch waves also conform to capacity limits and they are retaining Wednesday for remote learning as a priority to hold a full class in the same modality.

The Superintendent gave an update on getting vaccinations for our teachers. He said the State has not yet prioritized teachers, but we have been able to get about 100 teachers vaccinated on a stand-by basis through Chesprocott. He said he will continue to advocate to get all of our teachers vaccinated as quickly as possible.

7. **OLD BUSINESS**

None.

8. **NEW BUSINESS**

Mr. Perugini noted that he was recently quoted as saying the Town Council, “must pass the budget as adopted” and clarified that what he said was that the Council will be clever in how they help us address the medical benefits trust fund and he hopes they will pass the educational portion as-is. Mr. Perugini announced the upcoming meetings.

9. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Ms. Hallen, and seconded by Mr. Grippo, the meeting was adjourned at 10:30 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: March 11, 2021.