

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING
HELD VIRTUALLY MARCH 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

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 the Cheshire Public School's 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 including SAT testing, the upcoming spring musical, spring sports and Best Buddies.

2. AUDIENCE

None.

3. REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

A. CURRICULUM

I. Report on Meeting Held March 9, 2021.

Ms. Ham reported that at the meeting held on March 9th, the Committee reviewed a number of informational items such as celebrating Black History Month. Representatives from the elementary, middle, and high schools shared samples of their activities. Kevin Hanlon, K-8 Curriculum Coordinator, shared a brief overview of kindergarten through eighth grade student performance in reading (Reading Inventory) and math (Easy CBM). In reading, students are performing at or near the level of performance in each grade level as compared to last year. In math, students are performing at or above the level of performance in each grade level as compared to last year. Mr. Hanlon provided an update on teacher professional development.

Also during the Committee meeting, a letter submitted by Mr. Jack Bestor was read into the record. Mr. Bestor requested that the district request a waiver from the State. The letter discussed Smarter Balanced Assessments (SBAC). Per Ms. Ham's request, Ms. Silano provided background information on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the SBAC and how the assessment results are used. Cheshire High School student engagement and expectations were discussed by the Committee. Dr. Mary Gadd, Principal at Cheshire High School, gave a report that included four main topics: In-person learning, upcoming events, Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and the homework policy. Dr. Gadd indicated that there are three hundred more students attending school in-person four days a week and they are looking to increase that number further. Events such as prom and graduation are being planned to be in-person, outside events. In addition, the Cheshire High School homework policy is being reviewed. The current purpose of homework as stated in the policy continues to represent the beliefs about homework at Cheshire High School. The parts of the policy that relate to the amount of time students spend on homework is being reviewed for likely revisions/updates.

Ms. Ham said she understands Mr. Bestor's request, but agrees with Ms. Silano who said they will get some valuable information from the testing this year. Ms. Ham doesn't agree with asking for the waiver.

Dr. Solan and Chairman Perugini stressed that we do not teach to the test. We teach our students the standards and to be good problem solvers who understand the content.

B. FINANCE

I. Finance Report

Mr. Masciana reported they are 8 months into the budget year and have expended and encumbered \$65,219,659, or 87.4% of our \$74,593,926 operating budget for fiscal year 2020-21. They received the \$706,075 allocated to Cheshire in Coronavirus Relief Funds from the State and have use of the \$200,000 available in the Unexpended Education Funds Account to help balance our budget. Regarding Revenue, \$85,264 was received from the Elementary and Secondary Emergency School Relief Fund that was used for the broadcast classrooms. The \$706,075 received from the State was applied to our budget accounts and used to offset COVID-related expenses incurred through December. Mr. Masciana said they were anticipating \$1.3 million in COVID related expenses. Fortunately, the estimated expenses will only be about \$1.2 million, so the savings will be used for tent and table rentals for this spring. He also reported that they thought they would have to make up about \$300,000 after the reimbursement from ESSER and the CARES Act but noted it is

only about \$291,000. He said we are on track to end the year with a balanced budget.

Mr. Masciana reported they were notified that they will receive ESSER II funding in the amount of \$439,559 that we can use for COVID related expenses such as learning loss, technology improvements, preparing schools for reopening, testing, repairing and upgrading projects to improve facilities including air quality in school buildings, etc. The funds can be used through September 2023.

Lastly, Mr. Masciana reported that Cheshire will be receiving about \$1.91 million through the American Rescue Plan. The funding can be used through October of 2024.

Mr. White asked about the cap on discretionary spending. Mr. Masciana said it is currently at 60% and he anticipates releasing up to 80% in April. Mr. White said he recommends leaving the cap on the discretionary accounts at 60% until they have conversations with the Town Council.

II. Medical Benefits Update

Mr. Masciana reported that February claims were \$815,895. For the month the net change to reserve was a decrease of \$7,071. As of the end of February, the trust fund balance is \$996,848. He also shared that he just learned we will receive about \$250,000 in prescription rebates.

C. PLANNING

I. Report on Meeting Held March 11, 2021.

Mr. Martelli reported that a Planning Committee Meeting of the Whole was held on March 11th. He said the meeting was to discuss the School Modernization Committee scenarios. He said he will report on this under the School Modernization Committee Update. Survey results showed that an overwhelming 86% of respondents are in favor of a modernization plan. He said the survey did not touch on the overall cost of the projects to the taxpayers. The Committee reviewed scenarios under consideration.

D. POLICY

I. Report on Meeting Held March 2, 2021.

II. First Reading of Policies

The Committee reviewed five policies that require only minor changes, reflecting updated protocols and updating the Chief Operating Officer's title. Some of these policies have not been updated since 1996. Mr. Grippo gave a first reading to Policies 3170 – Business – Budget Implementation; 3300 – Business – Expenditures, Expending Authority, Purchasing Guides; 3326.1 – Business – Paying for Goods and Services;

3516 – Business – Accident Prevention and Reporting; and 3541.45 – Business – Student Transportation Insurance.

The Committee next discussed Bylaw 9325.43 - Attendance at Meetings via Electronic Communications. Mr. Grippo said that he and Mr. Perugini discussed the continued use of remote meetings with local legislators. They asked the legislators to advocate for the Board to change the FOIA law. This Bylaw will continue to be tabled while they await feedback from legislators.

The Committee reviewed Policy 5117 – Students – School Attendance Areas so they had a better understanding of our policy and procedures as they review redistricting through the School Modernization Committee. The Committee also reviewed Policy 5118 – Students – Nonresident Attendance. Dr. Solan explained there are certain times when non-resident students are allowed to attend Cheshire Public Schools tuition-free. While historically we have not accepted tuition based-students, Dr. Solan said he was considering opening up a lottery of 10 seats to out-of-district high school students. Committee members voiced concerns including the pandemic and charging tuition for public schools.

Dr. Solan noted that this was just an initial discussion and he wouldn't suggest making a change until after the budget is finalized. Mr. White said, in addition to other concerns, he does not agree with charging tuition for public school.

E. SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE

Mr. Martelli noted that the Committee started with 12 different scenarios and they are now down to two preferred options. He said scenario 1A is off the table. This was the scenario with an elementary school enrollment of 858 students with Dodd as the initial project. The major issue with this scenario was the redistricting.

Scenario 2A has a new 6-8 Middle School with an 8-year high enrollment of 1,172 and a new Chapman School either on the current school site or a site to be determined. The 8-year high enrollment for K-5 is 515 students. The Phase #1 Estimated District Share: Low \$102.3M; High \$124M.

Scenario #6 includes two 660-student elementary schools; one in the north end and one in the south end of town that would replace the existing Norton and Chapman Schools. Darcey Kindergarten moves to Doolittle School and the PreK program moves to Highland School. Phase #1 Estimated District Share: Low \$71M; High \$86.6M.

Mr. Martelli shared the redistricting boundaries for Scenario 6 for the two new elementary schools. Grade 6 remains in elementary schools. Darcey, Chapman and Norton will be closed. Two new Elementary Schools will be built – one in the north end and one in the south end of town. Darcey PreK Programs move to Highland School. In Scenario 6, the functional student capacity is as follows:

Doolittle	606
Highland	827
New Elementary-South	682
New Elementary-North	682
<hr/> Total Elementary	<hr/> 2,797

Mr. Martelli shared attendance zone maps, enrollment projection and utilization (on file). The redistricting percent for Scenario 6 is only 14%.

The School Modernization Committee had two important votes at the meeting. One was to keep the 6-8 middle school plan. The Committee decided to recommend to the Council and Board two plans – a preferred plan and then a second option with costs, etc. The Committee wants to get community reaction to the options. The Committee voted (10-3) that the preferred plan is Scenario 6 and the secondary option is Scenario 2A.

Discussion:

Ms. Hallen said she doesn't understand the concept of a preferred and backup option. Either they are put out equally or don't bother with the second option. She also said that she does not believe there will be a Phase II anytime soon considering how long it has taken them to get to Phase I. She said looking at the plans, she wants the best plan possible. A 6-8 middle school will serve the community for the long-run. Ms. Hallen said it is not right that the Plan goes to the Town Council before the Board of Education. The Board has more expertise. It is more than costs, it is what is best for the students. It should be the Board's preference, and the Town Council can weigh in on it. Mr. Perugini clarified that the Council will not decide. The Committee will deliver plans to both the Board and Council. The Council will look at it from a financial perspective and the Board will examine it from an educational perspective and the two entities will come together to finalize a plan.

Mr. White inquired about access at Norton. Dr. Solan said the access problem at Norton is unresolved and would be a huge hurdle to clear. He said if you were to add 150 people at Norton, you are onlyacerbating the problem. Mr. Martelli added that it is hard to have a "neighborhood" school and at the same time have good access. He said Colliers put together a list of potential parcels.

Mr. Grippo asked what made one option preferred over another. Mr. Martelli answered that Scenario 6 is more defined and has the most documentation.

Ms. Ham asked what the mandate was that was given to the SMC. Mr. Martelli said there is a Mission Statement. Dr. Solan said their website states “The SMC is tasked with developing recommendations for modernizing our schools that will address the educational needs of CPS students in the 21st century while considering the fiscal impact on the residents of Cheshire.” Ms. Ham suggested that the Committee now go back and review the scoring system, which was a prioritization system, to see if it lines up with the scenario they have chosen.

Ms. Harrigan said she completely agrees with what Ms. Ham suggested because the Committee has lost sight and forgotten that they did prioritize the projects based on a rubric. One of the considerations was how the plan will affect the community as a whole, and the middle school was a major consideration. She said the State has told them they need the community to speak to the Committee and to be part of the decision making process. She said they have an opportunity for a state-of-the-art middle school that will benefit all of the children in our district. She said she is afraid the Committee is beginning to focus on dollars and cents and how it will impact the taxpayer. She said the taxpayer has had a break for the last 50 years but it is now time to update our schools. A new 6-8 middle school will also eliminate the enrollment issue at the elementary school level. She said she would like to see both of the proposed options vetted by the community.

Mr. Perugini said 10 out of 13 members of the committee decided to move the two elementary schools forward for a number of reasons, such as the size of the schools, two new buildings and taking two older schools off-line. He said the SMC will not decide what is best based on programming as that is the Superintendent’s and Board’s responsibility. He added that both options will be coming to the Board of Education. Mr. Perugini said when the Board discusses these options, they have to quantify their decision. He has heard a lot of qualifications regarding a 6-8 middle school and has an idea of what the educational priming could be, but there are four new Board members who were not involved in those presentations from six years ago. He said they need to refresh the information and provide a great deal of information to the community.

F. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES

None.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION by Mr. Grippo and seconded by Ms. Hallen

MOVED that the Board of Education approve the Minutes from meetings held on February 18, 2021 and March 4, 2021.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

5. **CORRESPONDENCE** (copies of correspondence on file.)

A letter was received by Jack Bester regarding the history of SBAC, and asked questions about our assessments. Dr. Solan said this letter was addressed at our Curriculum Committee meeting. At the 1:10 mark, Ms. Silano goes into great detail regarding the SBAC and how Cheshire Public Schools utilizes that information and how we engage with interim assessments to determine how our students are doing, as well as how much time is committed to administering the assessments.

6. **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

A. **Audience via CPSCOV1D19@cheshire.k12.ct.us**

Parent, Jessica Zenowitz sent an email regarding the early release days being added. She said it is not fair to parents who are working and have hired already a sitter to cover Wednesdays. She said some parents work out of the house (in schools, no less) and can't just be home to cover half days. It's impossible to keep up with the ever changing schedule. Dr. Solan said he appreciates her frustration. He explained the reasons for the recent changes in the school calendar.

An email was received from parent, Stephanie Golino who said it has come to her attention that due to COVID accommodations, the children are now having lunch first and recess after. She said she has heard that many children are having stomach aches, including her own, after eating lunch and having recess directly after. Dr. Solan responded that this is a school-based issue and he will pass the email on to Principal Grillo at Norton School.

An email was received from parent, Jemma Williams regarding remote learning and quarantining next year. She said with all the weekly early dismissals that have been added throughout this school year for teacher professional development related to remote school, that all the additional training and time is not wasted next year. She asked if the district will continue to provide students with tech devices to access remote school as needed for these quarantines. She also asked if the Superintendent anticipates that next year they will also require so many early dismissals for teacher training & support. She said she is also interested to hear what the state releases for guidance about remote learning days for weather. I personally felt that only two real snow days was a shame for the kids and adults alike, especially those parents who have to manage their child's learning on remote learning days. Dr. Solan responded that we will continue to provide technology to all of our students, regardless of whether or not they have to quarantine next year. Of course, if they do, they will be better prepared. He said he doesn't anticipate needing the same number of early dismissals next year and

certainly appreciates the hardship it creates for parents. It was a necessary evil this year to provide as much in-person learning at the highest quality possible. The State has not yet provided guidance on whether or not we can use remote days in place of snow days next year. If the option is available, he will survey our parents and staff to make a well-informed decision which will be shared with the community.

B. COVID Update

Dr. Solan said there has been an uptick in positive cases. He said it isn't student to student transmission but has been spreading between family members. He noted they will be quarantining 50 students at Cheshire High School tomorrow because of two positive students who had close contact during activities (two separate activities) outside of school. He said he would like to remind the community to practice mitigation strategies - washing your hands, wearing masks and urged people to get vaccinated if eligible. He said there has been a significant swing to more people electing in-person learning.

On March 9th, 373 teachers and IA's were vaccinated and another 133 individuals, mainly substitutes and coaches, were vaccinated today. The 373 are scheduled to get their second dose on April 6th. There will be a remote learning day on April 7th because data is showing a greater number of people having a reaction to the second dose, and there are not enough substitutes to cover absences. He said he is pursuing vaccinations for students aged 16 and up pursuant to State guidelines. He is having discussions with area districts as well as Chesprocott.

Regarding the emotional impact of this pandemic, if the number of remote learners were to hold at the current levels through the end of the school year, Cheshire has approximately 800 students who will not have set foot in a school building in 17 months. They are actively engaging remote learners to encourage in-person attendance prior to the end of the year. They are also actively planning a return-to-school camp to engage remote learning students in August to support the transition back to school in partnership with Cheshire Youth and Social Services.

Superintendent Solan reported that March is Board Member Appreciation Month. He said he appreciates the amount of time our Board members devote to improving the educational experience of our students.

Mr. Grippo asked if the 50 students quarantining is the result of a sporting event. Dr. Solan said not to his knowledge. The quarantining is due to two different students who tested positive with one of which could be related to the play.

Mr. White said in regard to remote learners, he encourages parents to reach out to other parents to connect kids together and asked if schools can send out

distribution lists. Ms. Silano said teachers cannot give out those lists, but the PTA/PTO's have been very good with compiling and distributing these lists.

Mr. White said a group called Sustainable Cheshire had reached out to him today regarding the town fleet of vehicles and moving from gasoline to electric cars. He asked about our fleet and their replacement cycle. Mr. Masciana responded that we have vans and pickup trucks and three type-2 buses that are owned by Cheshire Public Schools. He said they are replaced when they age out and are no longer repairable. Mr. Masciana asked Mr. White to forward the information to him.

Mr. Grippo asked if the Superintendent will mandate in-person learning once teachers are fully vaccinated in May. Dr. Solan said he is mandated by the Governor's Executive Order to provide remote learning. He said most will be fully vaccinated by April 21st. He would also love to see kids vaccinated before proms and graduation.

7. **OLD BUSINESS**

None.

8. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **Healthy Food Certification**

Mr. Masciana explained that Connecticut General Statutes require that all Connecticut public school districts that are eligible to participate in healthy food certification take action to certify whether all food items sold to students will or will not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards. It is the recommendation of Administration that the Board vote that they will meet Connecticut Nutrition Standards for the 2021/22 school year. He noted that by participating in this certification, we get an additional \$.10 per reimbursable meal, approximately \$30K per year.

Discussion

Ms. Ham asked if there is a cost to comply with this mandate. Mr. Masciana said there is no cost involved. Ms. Ham said as she has mentioned before, she is opposed to mandates.

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

MOVED that Pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the Cheshire Board of Education certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022. This certification shall

include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to, school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or by non-school organizations and groups.

VOTE: The Motion passed 6-1 (Ms. Ham opposed).

MOTION by Mr. Grippo and seconded by Ms. Harrigan.

MOVED *that the Cheshire Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An “event” is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The “regular school day” is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held, and must be the same place as the food sales.*

VOTE: The Motion passed 6-1 (Ms. Ham opposed).

MOTION by Mr. Perugini and seconded by Ms. Harrigan.

MOVED *that the Cheshire Board of Education will allow the sale to students of beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the beverages are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An “event” is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting or extracurricular activity. The “school day” is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held, and must be the same place as the beverage sales.*

VOTE: The Motion passed 6-1 (Ms. Ham opposed).

B. Chairperson's Update

Mr. Perugini said during Board Member Appreciation Month, he wanted to thank all Board members for all of the work they do. He noted there is one more School Modernization Committee meeting. He urged the community to email the Committee with questions, concerns or additional things you would like to see included.

9. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Ms. Ham, and seconded by Ms. Hallen, 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: 4/9/2021.