

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON SEPTEMBER 23, 2021, 2021 AT 7:30 PM**

Board Members Present: Adam Grippo-Vice Chair; Kathryn Hallen-Secretary; Faith Ham, Anne Harrigan, Andrew Martelli, Timothy White (7:36)

Board Members Absent: Anthony Perugini-Chair

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 .
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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.
In Mr. Perugini's absence, Mr. Grippo led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
- C. Student Representatives. Cheshire High School Principal, Dr. Mary Gadd, introduced Annabelle Kailan and Rowan Scassellati, the Board of Education Student Representatives for the 2021/2022 year.

Annabelle Kailan is a phenomenal young woman who is driven, motivated, and compassionate. She has taken some of the most rigorous classes that Cheshire High School offers and has done exceptionally well. Annabelle is a dedicated member of the Cheshire High School community beyond the classroom. She has been involved in student senate since 9th Grade, holding both Vice President and Senator positions. Annabelle has also been a member of the Cheshire High School Marching Band and the Body Positivity Club. Teachers commend Annabelle for her unique insight, as she often considers other people's perspective and how it impacts everyone. She has a great sense of community and truly cares for others.

Rowan Scassellati is an extremely high achieving student who has taken one of the most rigorous courses of study possible at Cheshire High School. His teachers are effusive in their praise of his effort and enthusiasm. One teacher even commented that it was an honor to be his teacher. Rowan is also heavily involved in our school and the surrounding community. He is a youth soccer referee and has also participated in many drama productions at Cheshire High School. Rowan is cooperative, dedicated, generous, thoughtful and motivated.

The representatives said they are excited and ready for this student representative role and gave a brief update. Annabelle reported that Class Officers were elected

yesterday for all grade levels at the high school. Rowan announced a pep rally is planned for tomorrow, weather permitting. Board members welcomed the representatives.

2. PRESENTATIONS

A. Teacher of the Year

Superintendent Solan said that Cheshire Public Schools is proud to announce the selection of Lindsay Grant as the 2021-2022 Teacher of the Year. He said Lindsay is an elementary teacher at Highland School and is beginning her 7th year in the district. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, a Bachelor of Science in Education, Honors Program, and a Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Connecticut. While at UCONN, Lindsay received the Connecticut Women's Center Outstanding Senior Women Academic Achievement Award as the honoree for the NEAG School of Education. Her Honor Thesis was entitled "Academic Self-Concept and Student Preferences for Grouping Formats in Elementary Reading Instruction."

Lindsay began her teaching career at Highland School in 2014 where she taught 3rd GRADE for six years. She moved to the 4th grade this school year. At the district level, she has served on the Personalized Learning Task Force and the Cheshire Strategic Planning Committee, and has represented her Grade level on the Safety and Technology committees at the school level. In addition, Lindsay has volunteered as a Teacher Mentor for groups of students working on projects for the CPS STEAM Expo. She enjoyed working with these students as they developed a magnetic levitation train and composed a classical music piece in the style of a baroque fugue. Outside of Cheshire Public Schools, Lindsay has taught traditional and therapeutic horseback riding lessons to riders ages 3+ for the past ten years.

In her Teacher of the Year nomination letter, a Highland parent wrote this about Lindsay:

*"If you have a child, you know the angst of waiting to learn who their next classroom teacher will be. If you are an educator, you have an inside perspective of *just* how much a year with the right teacher can do to change the course of a child's life. My daughter has been forever changed by her time in Lindsay Grant's classroom. I have seen Lindsay's professionalism and deep knowledge about her students' individual strengths and weaknesses, her ability to rise to new challenges with grace and positivity, and her outstanding teaching expertise."*

Administrators, colleagues, and parents agree that Lindsay is a gifted educator and consummate team player, but her students love her because she pushes them to be better students, to persevere when things are difficult, and to view education as an opportunity.

3. **AUDIENCE**

Liz Linehan, 405 Sycamore Lane.

State Representative Linehan said she is here tonight as a mom, to thank the Teacher of the Year, Lindsay Grant. Ms. Linehan was very complimentary to Ms. Grant and said that Ms. Grant changed her and her child's life. She said when her son looks back he will always remember Mrs. Grant.

Christopher Affie, 204 Peck Lane

Mr. Affie thanked everyone for a great start to the year. He said he wanted to thank Maura Esposito from Chesprocott and all of the Board members who supported her at the last meeting. He said Ms. Esposito is the reason we did not miss any school last year. He said he wished the Governor did not mandate masks throughout Connecticut and that it should be based on a metric. He is in favor of parent's choice. He thanked Mr. Perugini for taking time to listen to him.

Terry Terzakis, 226 Mixville Road

Mr. Terzakis thanked the Board for everything they do. He said he is commenting on the School Modernization plan and the chosen scenario. He said many residents he spoke to were shocked that the Committee chose the plan with two elementary schools over the 6-8 middle school plan. He said that if the Board reads the forum and listens to the town, it is clear that the 6-8 middle school is the overwhelming choice. He said he has heard that the reason they are going forward with the two elementary schools option is because that scenario costs less money. He urged the Board not to "go cheap" and do it the right way. He said Dodd is in the worst physical condition of all of the schools and is too small. He suggested allowing resident's voices be heard through a pre-referendum.

4. **REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES**

A. **CURRICULUM**

I. **Report on Meeting Held September 13, 2021**

Assistant Superintendent Silano, gave an overview of the first annual Curriculum Writing Institute. The institute took place for five days on June 24, 25, 28, 29, and 30. The institute was facilitated by consultant Linda Van Wagenen and included approximately 80 teachers.

Marlene Silano provided a report on the Smarter Balanced Assessment data from the 2020-21 school year and the NGSS Assessment Data from the 2020-21 school year. This is the second administration of this assessment.

The Committee reviewed an overnight field trip request and the State assessment calendar for the 2021-2022 school year.

Mrs. Silano shared an update on Flexibilities for Implementing the Educator Evaluation Pplan this year. The district level committee reviewed the proposed flexibilities from the State and have approved adopting the flexibilities for Cheshire.

II. Educator Evaluation and Support Plan – Flexibilities for Implementing the Guidelines for Educator Evaluation for 2021-22.

MOTION by Ms. Ham and seconded by Ms. Harrigan.

***MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education adopt the Flexibilities to the Fundamental Requirements of the Connecticut Guidelines for Educator Evaluator 2017 for the 2021-22 School Year.*

Discussion:

Ms. Silano explained that flexibilities were adopted last year. This year, rather than formal announced observations, there will be more-frequent and unannounced observations. The flexibilities will include an overall summative evaluation. A committee of teachers reviewed and approved these flexibilities and now the Board must approve as well.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

B. FINANCE

I. Finance Report

Mr. Grippo gave the Finance Report. The approved budget for the 2021-2022 fiscal year is \$77,001,052; they have expended and encumbered \$52,566,296 through the first two months of the year. While the vast majority of our encumbrances for Payroll and Transportation have been entered and there are additional encumbrances and adjustments that affect several account categories including Payroll and Outplaced Tuition and some grant offset adjustments that will be most likely be completed in September. At this time, there are no major variance concerns to report. They expect that there will be lingering uncertainty as to the extent of COVID-19 pandemic related expenses especially for student and staff health, safety and protective needs such as tent rentals, intraday cleaning as well as the purchase of PPE and disinfecting supplies. While these safety-related expenses are not expected to negatively impact the operating budget, they will reduce the funding that is available for learning loss and academic needs that we intend to allocate to the two available Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) grants that total \$1,337,706.

Dr. Solan added that they worked with the Town to move Workers' Compensation coverage from CIRMA to Travelers as of July 1, 2021 and have seen significant savings of about \$100,000.

II. Medical Benefits Update

Mr. Grippo reported that the claims for the month of August were higher than anticipated at \$1,131,977. The reserve balance is \$2,114,335 or 2.35 months of reserves.

C. POLICY

I. Report on Meeting Held September 22, 2021.

Mr. Grippo reported on the meeting held the previous evening where they reviewed policies for First and Second readings.

II. Review Policies for a First Reading.

Mr. Grippo gave a first reading to revised draft Policy 4118.11/4211.11 Nondiscrimination. Changes to this policy are required due to changes in State statute. The following language is being added: "*Race is inclusive of ethnic traits historically associated with race, including, but not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles. "Protective hairstyles" includes, but is not limited to, wigs, headwraps and hairstyles such as individual braids, cornrows, locs, twists, Bantu knots, afros and afro puffs.*"

III. Second Reading of Policies

Mr. Grippo reviewed Policies 4000.1 Personnel Certified/Non-Certified-Title IX/5145.44 Students–Title IX. These are new policies and regulations. Dr. Solan noted the Office of Civil Rights issued revised guidance under the Trump administration on how to manage sexual harassment. Mr. Grippo said this policy is based on Federal Law and we are bound to follow it.

Lastly, Dr. Solan brought forward a draft document regarding a civility code. Committee members were curious about the document, but voiced concerns on whether a code was necessary.

Mr. White said he is saddened that our society is at the point that we are even discussing such a document. He said he thinks there is only a small minority of the public who are uncivil. He feels we can make our points and present them civilly.

Ms. Harrigan asked if this is a code for the schools or the whole school system. Dr. Solan said that it could be whatever we want it to be. It is a guidepost for the school community and is only a consideration right now.

He explained that former Director of Pupil Personnel Director, Tracy Hussey, brought forward this document a few years ago.

Ms. Ham asked if the Board could review the document. She said she gets uncomfortable with imposing any kind of code. She said we have seen incivility in the last few weeks, and she does not think we need a code to know what not to do.

Ms. Hallen said she wanted to clarify that this is only something that the Superintendent presented that we may want to start thinking about. There is no policy to look at now. If it gets to the point of being a policy, the entire Board would have the opportunity to review it. This was only a preliminary discussion.

Mr. Grippo said there were many points that made the Committee uncomfortable. He said the meeting was recorded and can be viewed on our YouTube channel for anyone who wishes to watch.

D. SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE

Mr. Martelli said the Town Council had a special meeting on September 21 and authorized Colliers to continue to do fit-tests on the Marion Road/Jarvis Street property. They also continue to look at the Norton School site. The Town Council asked Colliers to look into the cost of integrating the Darcey program with Highland School. There will be another meeting in two weeks and after that meeting, there will be a Board of Education Planning Committee Meeting of the Whole where the entire Board can discuss the plan. The Council is moving forward with the two-elementary school option at this time.

Dr. Solan added that Colliers is doing modeling at the corner of Marion and Jarvis, which would be the site for the Chapman School replacement. He noted that the Council also asked Colliers to look at placing Humiston and Central Office on that same site.

Ms. Harrigan expressed deep concerns with moving forward with the two elementary proposal without considering the 6-8 Middle School proposal. She said she does not feel they received enough feedback from the public and would like more community feedback before moving forward.

Mr. White and Ms. Ham disagreed with Ms. Harrigan and said they both feel we should not spend more money on a survey and they believe the community is comfortable with going forward with the two elementary school plan. Ms. Ham said it was not a close vote; it was a 9-3 vote by the Committee for the two-elementary school plan.

E. **OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES**

None.

5. **Approval of Minutes**

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

MOTION - *“Moved that the Board of Education approve the Minutes from meetings held on August 11, August 12 and September 2, 2021”*

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

6. **CORRESPONDENCE**

Ms. Hallen read two emails:

Travis Roher emailed regarding masking the students. Mr. Roher is against masking and against the Governor’s mask mandates.

Arielle Harrison emailed to ask that the Board make decisions about health and safety protocols based on the advice of medical and public health experts, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

7. **SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT**

Dr. Solan reported that Cheshire High School Choral Director, Greg Bell, was approached by a few of his students about writing a school song. There was talk that there may have been one many years back, but they cannot find a record of it. He asked the public that if anyone has a record of a Cheshire High School alma mater school song, to please share it with him.

The Governor has called a Special Session of the Legislature to consider extending Executive Authority. If it is extended, he has been clear that he will extend the mask mandate through February. In addition, all employees in school settings are required to be vaccinated, claim an exemption, or be tested weekly. He said we have 819 staff members, three medical exemption requests, ten religious exemption requests, and twenty-nine are opting for weekly testing, 768 staff are fully vaccinated, which is 94% of our workforce. He said we are highly vaccinated as an organization. He thanked the Board for their support in getting our staff vaccinated.

The Superintendent reported that Cheshire High School we won the Commissioner’s Award for the FAFSA Challenge. He also reported the boiler installations coming along at Doolittle and Highland.

Ms. Ham asked if the district is able to override a person’s exemption from vaccination. Dr. Solan answered, yes. All medical exemptions are reviewed by our medical advisor

and religious exemptions are reviewed by our attorney. He added that with exemptions, staff will still be required to test weekly.

Mr. White asked if there have been studies done on children's facial cues. He said he recently read an opinion piece in "The Atlantic" regarding masking. He said there have been studies that compare benefits vs. costs. There is a benefit to masking, but we do not yet know the cost to our students. Dr. Solan said he does not track those things, but there has been research regarding a child's ability to read emotions with masks on and read expressions in the eyes. The research said it is possible, although it is not with the same accuracy, as without a mask. Mr. White said we are not able to say with certainty that the benefits outweigh the costs. He said some people are being ridiculed for challenging the situation, and we need to be respectful of other people's ideas. He said some of our parents have valid concerns with masking.

8. OLD BUSINESS

None.

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Chairperson's Update

Mr. Grippo said he would like to commend Dr. Solan and Chairman Perugini for a well-received presentation to CABA regarding navigating turbulent times in public meetings. Mr. Grippo reviewed upcoming meetings.

10. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Mr. White, and seconded by Ms. Hallen, the meeting was adjourned at 9:03 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: 10/15/2021.