

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING  
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON NOVEMBER 18, 2021 AT 7:30 PM**

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Board Members Present: Anthony Perugini-Chair; Adam Grippo-Vice Chair; Kathryn Hallen-Secretary; Anne Harrigan; Andrew Martelli; Timothy White

Board Members Absent: Faith Ham

Administrators Present: Jeffrey F. Solan, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools; Marlene Silano, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Vincent Masciana, Chief Operating Officer; Robin-Anne Carey, Director, Pupil Personnel Services; Mary Joscelyn-Gadd, Ed.D., Principal-Cheshire High School; Diana Burns, Principal-Chapman Elementary School; Kimberly Dessert, Principal-Darcey School; Scott Jeffrey, Principal-Highland Elementary School; Kevin Hanlon, K-8 Curriculum Coordinator; Ryan Murphy, Family and Community Engagement Coordinator

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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.  
Mr. Perugini led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
- C. Student Representatives. Annabelle Kailan, student representative for the 2021/22 school year, reported on recent events at Cheshire High School. Annabelle explained that Rowan was not present for the meeting because he was performing in a play. She reported on the Week of Giving with activities such as Toys for Tots, a supermarket challenge among students to collect food items, and there will be a PJ Day to collect funds for sick children. In addition, Annabelle reported on the upcoming in-person college fair where alumni will return to share about their college experiences. Lastly, Annabelle gave an update on sports and team standings. She reported that the Boys Soccer Team is advancing to the State Championships.

**2. PRESENTATIONS:**

**A. School Partnership Award – Darcey School**

Mr. Grippo, the Board of Education representative to Darcey School, introduced the school's recipient, Charlie Slaughter. Principal Kim Dessert nominated Mr. Slaughter. Charlie Slaughter is an Early Childhood Prevention Coordinator for the Connecticut Department of Children and Families and has a passion for children, parents, and providers to thrive in life. Mr. Slaughter is the program lead for the Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) and the Early Childhood Consultation Partnership Program (ECCP). He was awarded the first ever Circle of Security International Award in 2013. He has been instrumental in helping to spread Circle of Security Parenting (COS P), an attachment-based parenting intervention to CT communities and community organizations. Mr. Slaughter is interested in the

potential for using COS P to create a community-wide approach to build and support secure attachment in children.

Mr. Slaughter has supported Darcey School's Connecticut Community Foundation Circle of Security Parent Grant Team for the past six years. He continues to provide mentoring, emotional support, and a wealth of knowledge to their team. Darcey staff are so grateful for Charlie's leadership and unending support to grow this grant in the Greater Cheshire Community! Darcey School and the Cheshire Board of Education thank Charlie Slaughter for going above and beyond for the students of Cheshire. Dr. Solan presented Mr. Slaughter with a certificate and small gift.

Mr. Slaughter thanked the Board of Education for recognizing him. He said kids bring their attachment history all over the place, and it especially plays out at school. He said we have the best team in the State working to support children. There is a crew of people here in Cheshire Public Schools who are doing innovative work putting together a model that could be adopted by other schools. He said he is impressed with the high-quality people he gets to work with.

**B. Recognition of Retiring Personnel**

Dr. Solan introduced Kelly Lenz who recently retired after 24 years of service to Cheshire Public Schools. Dr. Solan said, back in May of 1997. Kelly submitted a letter of recommendation from Southern Connecticut State University. The writer stated that they observed many new educators, but Kelly Lenz clearly stands out as one of the best. Dr. Solan added that Kelly would forgo the traditional classroom experience to serve under Ralph Wallace and Gary Chesley as the Coordinator of School/Business Partnership. He said that was probably the last time Kelly's job description was static. Over the next 24 years, her talent and work ethic meant that she would become the Director of Adult Education, a writer, a director and producer of CPS Today, and even the most contemporary of roles, that of social media influencer. Dr. Solan said she did all of this with remarkable positivity, competence, laughter, and grace.

Ms. Lenz thanked Dr. Solan, and said that over the years, she has had the great privilege to work with incredible educators and support personnel. Dr. Solan presented Ms. Lenz with flowers.

**C. Recognition of Retiring Board Member**

Superintendent Solan said that tonight, the Board will recognize Kathryn Hallen, retiring Board of Education Member. He said the time and emotional energy required of a member of the Board is trying, even in the best of times. Ms. Hallen was appointed to the Board in December 2013. Over the past eight years, she has navigated the incredible highs and challenging lows that come with leadership. She did so with grace, dignity, and respect that earned her the position of Board of Education Chair in the 2018/19 school year. He thanked Ms. Hallen for the countless hours she committed to ensuring that the children of this community receive an outstanding education. On a personal note, he thanked her for the support

that she gave him, not only as a Superintendent, but also as a human being through some very difficult times. He said, on behalf of the Cheshire Public Schools, we thank you for your service. Dr. Solan presented Ms. Hallen with flowers and a small gift.

Ms. Hallen said she has spent the last eight years amazed by the staff that we have in the Cheshire school system, from Dr. Solan and his team in the Central Office, to every building administrator, every teacher, and every staff member. She said every school she has visited and every program she has seen has been so impressive, and our kids are benefiting from this amazing group of people every single day. Ms. Hallen said it has been a true honor to advocate for the teachers, administrators, and all staff who work for Cheshire Public Schools. Our kids are doing very well and they are doing well under really tough and challenging circumstances. She thanked Dr. Solan for his support. She thanked her fellow Board members, noting that they have had their ups and downs and don't agree on everything, but they are a great team who are trying to do what's best for the kids of Cheshire.

Each of the Board members thanked Ms. Hallen for her service.

3. **AUDIENCE**

None.

4. **REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES**

A. **CURRICULUM**

I. **Approval of Textbooks**

Ms. Harrigan said the Curriculum Committee recommends to the Board approval of the purchase of the following textbooks.

<b>Textbook</b>	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Inspire Earth Science	McGraw Hill	9
Precision Machining Technology	Cengage	10-12

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

**MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education approve the purchase of the following textbooks: *Inspire Earth Science* and *Precision Machining Technology*, as recommended by the Curriculum Committee.

Mr. White asked for an explanation of each of the textbooks. Ms. Silano said the textbook, *Precision Machining and Technology*, is used in the advanced manufacturing certificate program through Naugatuck Valley Community College. When we aligned our course with them, we also had to align our resources. This text has post-secondary readability and matches the

credits for the courses that they would get at the community college. *Inspire Earth Science* is updating an earth science textbook because the others were very outdated and published prior to the implementation of the NGSS, the new science standards. This textbook was chosen for the readability because it will be for a variety of levels, both the CP and the CCP Earth Science classes.

**VOTE:** The Motion passed unanimously, 6-0.

**B. FINANCE**

**I. Finance Report**

Mr. Grippo reported that we have expended and encumbered \$60,520,318, or 78.6%, through the first four months of the fiscal year. The vast majority of our encumbrances for Payroll, Transportation and Outplaced Tuition accounts have been entered with only minor adjustments expected through December. At this time, there are no major budget variance concerns to report. The recent increases in fuel prices are expected to negatively impact our budget lines for transportation fuel and heat and energy, but since these line items are relatively small, the overall impact to the budget is manageable.

As reported previously, we 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 if they become excessive, 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, as detailed below:

- ESSER II Grant - \$439,559 to be used by 9-23
- ARP ESSER - \$898,147 to be used by 9-24

The relatively low infection rate at this time, and the launch of booster vaccines for adults and vaccines for 5 to 11 year old children, will hopefully ease the health and financial uncertainty and mark the beginning-of-the-end of the pandemic.

Dr. Solan added that our entire budget line for heating oil, natural gas, propane, gasoline, and diesel fuel amounts to about \$700,000. With a 10% increase, we are looking at a \$70,000 variance in the budget. As Mr. Grippo reported, we have only encumbered \$60 million of the \$77 million budget, so we may be able to delay any variable purchases until we get a sense of what the fuel costs will be. He said they are not concerned, but are closely monitoring the accounts.

Mr. White asked if electric school buses were included in the trillion-dollar bill recently passed by the government. Dr. Solan answered that he did not know of anything specific to electric school buses.

Mr. Grippo noted that last year at this time they learned that Food and Nutrition Services was having financial difficulty, and asked if there is the same problem this year. Dr. Solan answered, no, this year we are in a much better place financially and, actually, the bigger problem is access to food.

Dr. Solan said they spoke with the Town Manager's office recently to try to devise a solution for budgeting that provides greater stability. He noted the Board intentionally agreed to under-fund the medical benefits account last year. In order to close the gap in our budget, we are going to need a significant operational budget increase to do that. He said we are working, as requested by the Board and Council last year, to devise a solution that might provide us greater stability moving forward.

## **II. Medical Benefits Update**

Mr. Grippo reported that for the month of October, claims were \$998,677, which is over the budgeted amount by \$168,874. This leaves us with a net medical benefit reserve amount of \$1.81 million, a two-month reserve. Dr. Solan added that we will be receiving Stop-Loss reimbursements and prescription rebates which will increase the reserve slightly. Ms. Harrigan added that it is important to remember that the \$1.5 million one-time contribution that went into this year's budget is really the only thing keeping us at the two-month claim reserve.

## **C. PERSONNEL**

### **I. Report on Meeting Held November 10, 2021**

Mr. White, Chair of the Personnel Committee, reported that the committee met in Executive Session to discuss the Superintendent's goals for this year. He said the Board will meet in Executive Session this evening to continue the discussion.

## **D. POLICY**

### **I. Policy Report**

Mr. Grippo, Chair of the Policy Committee, reported that the Committee reviewed policies for second and third readings.

### **II. Second Reading of Policy 5131.911 - Student Hazing/Bullying**

Mr. Grippo reported the Committee reviewed Policy #5131.911 - Student Hazing/Bullying. He explained that our attorneys reviewed the cumbersome policy, and they created a more concise version combining parts of our current policy, the recommended CAFE policy, and policies from other districts. Committee members reviewed this policy and were pleased with

the newest version. One of the most significant changes to the previous definition specified bullying as “repeated acts;” the new definition states that bullying could be a single act, if significant.

III. **Third Reading and Approval of Policy 4118.11/4218.11 - Nondiscrimination**

Mr. Grippo reported that after a thorough review, the Committee is recommending Policy #4118.11/4218.11 - Nondiscrimination for a third reading and approval. The following language will be added to the policy: *“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.”*

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

**MOVED** *that the Cheshire Board of Education give a third and final reading to Policy 4118.11/4218.11 Nondiscrimination, and direct the Superintendent to put said policy into immediate effect.*

**VOTE:** The Motion passed unanimously, 6-0.

E. **SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE**

Dr. Solan reported that the process has been moving in many different directions. Dan Hanson, who was referred to us through Colliers, has been working with Darcey staff to identify their programmatic needs. The two-elementary school plan incorporated Darcey programs moving into Highland School. There is a concern about capacity and programming at Highland. Mr. Hanson has toured both Darcey and Highland Schools with their principals, Dr. Solan, and Mr. Masciana. He has completed his review of the programming at Highland and will be meeting with Highland staff representatives tomorrow to finalize. Highland Principal, Scott Jeffrey, has been concurrently reviewing redistricting to accommodate the two new elementary schools. The hope is that by mid-December, they will have a clear picture about whether or not Darcey's programming will overlay into Highland. If not, there may be other options, such as to add it to the north end school. Soil testing to confirm that we can construct on those two sites is underway.

Ms. Hallen said that, since this is her last Board meeting, she must reiterate her concern about the way the process has unfolded. She said the two-elementary school plan has become the chosen project, and the Grade 6-8 middle school possibility has been pushed aside. She said this has become very much politicized, not by the Board, but by others. She said it is a disservice to the community, and the public should have a chance to weigh-in on both plans. She respects the work that the School Modernization Committee has done. The Board spent months and months doing that very same work a few years back and came up with a plan that

was about the same amount of money, and no one on the Town Council would allow any sort of proposal to go to the public. Ms. Hallen said she finds it disheartening that no one is saying the 6-8 middle school plan has some real benefits. She said she still has not heard a single thing that is compelling about creating the two new elementary schools, since we could deal with the enrollment issues by building the 6-8 middle school and a new Chapman. She said she would urge her fellow Board members to look at this again with fresh eyes, and from a fresh perspective, without the political overtones that have currently been driving this decision. Let us allow the community to figure out which of the two options makes more sense. She said she truly believes that for the kids of Cheshire, the 6-8 middle school is going to benefit the students in a much more fundamental way than the two elementary schools. She thanked Mr. Perugini for giving her the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Perugini said the Board Planning Committee will meet in December. He said another issue is finances and we have not heard from the Town Council to date. He said once we do, the Planning Committee will move forward a recommendation to the full Board of Education for a final vote. He said the consensus still seems to favor scenario six, but anything is possible. Board members will have an opportunity to make their opinions known, but he has received no confirmation from the Town Council that they are going to look at any other plan. Based on the consensus of the Board, we are not going to suggest otherwise.

**F. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES**

None.

**5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

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

**MOVED** that the Board of Education approve the Minutes from meetings held on October 21, October 25 and November 4, 2021.

**VOTE:** The Motion passed 4-1-1 (Ms. Harrigan abstained and Mr. White opposed).

**6. CORRESPONDENCE**

There was no correspondence.

**7. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

Regarding COVID-19, Dr. Solan said he is disappointed to report that this week has been the toughest week we have had to date, this year. Right now, there are 48 students quarantined and a number of positive cases. There are six positive cases at Highland, but every school except for Darcey has a positive student. However, to put this in perspective, last year on November 18, 2020, there were 284 quarantined compared to 48 presently. This is really a testament to our mitigation strategies, including vaccinations. He thanked Chesprocott for facilitating our vaccination clinic for 5 to 11 year olds.

The Superintendent reported that tomorrow, horses from Riverdale Farm in Durham are coming to Dodd as part of a therapeutic activity with our life skills program. They have been working with our school system for the past five years.

The Superintendent reported that this is the 100th anniversary of American Education Week. In his message to the staff, he shared that, particularly over the last two years, the role that public education has played specific to the Cheshire community has been critical in permitting our students to attend school every day. To have those social and educational connections continuing in their life has made our schools the metaphorical shelters in the storm. As such, we thought that an umbrella would be a nice gift for our staff, as well as Cheshire Public School masks. The umbrella comes with an app that allows you to plug in a particular percentage of precipitation chance and it will geo-locate you. When the precipitation chance exceeds that number that you plugged in, you will get an alert on your phone that says, "Cheshire Public Schools has you covered. Don't forget your umbrella." He told the Board he thought they deserved that umbrella, too.

**A. Response to CPSCOV19 emails.**

There were no emails received.

**B. District Profile and Performance Report**

The Superintendent noted that they are required to review the District Profile and Performance Report each year. The most recent year published was the 2019/20 school year. During the 2019/20 school year, we were impacted dramatically by COVID-19. The Superintendent compared data from the 2016/17 year to see if there were any substantial differences. Enrollment during that year was around 4,300 and then dipped to 4,199 in 2019/20, and is now back around 4,300. Our suspension and expulsion numbers were significantly lower, but several months of pandemic would influence that data. In 2016/17, we had 274 full-time educator equivalents, and now we have 268. There was a dramatic decline in media support staff from 12.7 to 6.0, most likely a reflection of our budgeting at the time. In 2016/17, 71% of our 11th graders were taking college and career readiness courses during high school. In the 2019/20 report, that percentage increased to 98%. The jump in 12th graders went from 92% to 97.8%. Another note, as we embark on budget season, is that our local percentage of the budget has risen from 81-82% to 84%, but note that our pilot money at the local level has also increased, so it is probably close to an offset. In 2016/17, our persistence rate of students who enter college as freshmen and continue on to a sophomore year increased from roughly 94% to 95.6%. Our four-year cohort graduation rate is exceptionally high at 97.6%. The Superintendent said this report is available to the public on the State of Connecticut's website.

Mr. White mentioned a town in Massachusetts that reached a 98% vaccination rate and they began an unmasking trial. He asked the Superintendent if he is thinking about the metrics for unmasking. Dr. Solan answered that they started thinking about this in July and August when it was uncertain as to whether or not the State



would require masks. Currently, the State requires masks, but at that time, Dr. Solan sent the State Department of Education a proposal to review a combination of variables including staff and student vaccination rates, the positivity rate in the community, and hospitalization rates specific to our community. Although it is a moot point at the moment, it is something of which we are conscious. We believe that it is critically important to keep every student in school all day, every day, and to follow the steps that support that objective. He said the advice is that access to vaccinations is a step that will get us toward that goal. So we continue to employ those strategies, and we continue to employ mitigation efforts like distancing to the greatest extent possible at lunches and our cleaning protocols.

Mr. White mentioned mental health and asked if there are any concerns within the school system. Dr. Solan answered that they are closely monitoring the mental health of the students. He said they work very closely with Youth and Social Services and other providers in the community. He said this is not only a Cheshire issue or an American issue, it is a global issue.

Ms. Silano added that it is important that social emotional learning (SEL) has been a focus area, and we have really looked at ways to embed student supports into regular teacher instruction. As an example, today we had a speaker come to our administrative team meeting and talk about ways of promoting social emotional learning, even in a math class. This includes helping students to learn how to handle frustration, and if you know how to deal with frustration with a math problem, you're more able to then apply that to other situations in your life. The importance of embedding those SEL strategies within instruction is really important.

8. **OLD BUSINESS**

None.

9. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **Chairperson's Update**

Chairman Perugini noted that he, Mr. Grippo, and Dr. Solan attended the CABA Convention. The Education Secretary, Mr. Cardona, livestreamed from Washington. He holds Connecticut in high regard, especially for Education, and it is nice to know that we have a strong proponent in Washington. He said that he and Dr. Solan held a conference session on leadership and divisive times with Patrice McCarthy. He said Cheshire is not the only Board that has seen negative public reactions, every School Board in Connecticut is facing some kind of scrutiny.

Mr. Perugini noted that he was on an ACES governance call today and they said ACES offers a teacher residency program through CREC, as Dr. Solan mentioned a few months ago. This program is a fast-track for people of color to become educators to help fill the gap in diversity. They now have more candidates enrolled in the program than they have seats available, which is incredible because we can't find enough folks to fill those positions across the United States.

**10. ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Ms. Hallen, and seconded by Mr. White, the meeting was adjourned into Executive Session at 9:14 p.m. to discuss the Superintendent's evaluation, including Superintendent Solan, with no business to follow. Executive Session adjourned at approximately 10:00 p.m.

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: 12/8/2021.