

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON JANUARY 20, 2022 AT 7:30 PM**

Board Members Present: Anthony Perugini-Chair; Adam Grippo-Vice Chair; Anne Harrigan-Secretary, Faith Ham, Andrew Martelli, Samantha Rosenberg, 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 CPS Covid19@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.

Ms. Silano called for a Moment of Silence for Susan Zwick, a retired Cheshire High School teacher who recently passed away.

- C. Student Representative. Rowan Scassellati, student representative for the 2021/22 school year, reported on recent events at Cheshire High School. He reported that midterms will be taking place soon. In preparation, the LINK Crew is again holding Cocoa and Cram, where crew leaders tutor freshman and this year, sophomores as well. He reported that spring sports registration will begin soon, and the orchestra and chorus groups were able to hold in-person concerts.

2. PRESENTATIONS

A. School Partnership Award – Doolittle School

Ms. Ham, the Board of Education representative to Doolittle, introduced the school's recipient, Trip Sanders. Mr. Sanders was nominated by Principal, Amy O'Brien, who said Mr. Sanders has gone above and beyond for Doolittle School over the last three years. Mr. Sanders teaches at Quinnipiac University and when he learned last year that we were having a substitute shortage, he called the school and immediately asked how he could help. He shared that, although he teaches a few courses at QU, he was available to come to Doolittle to help us out a few days a week. He signed up right away for Kelly Services and became our first Kelly Services substitute. To this day, when we are short-staffed, we call Trip on the phone and he comes right over if he can. He has stepped in to substitute for all staff members and has been a Teacher's Assistant, Instructional Assistant, and Classroom Teacher. We are so happy to have him and we have truly been able to count on him to be there for us. Not only has Mr. Sanders given his time to our students in the classroom, but he also began the Doolittle Ski Club last school

year. He has organized this club once again this year. The club will resume in January and February for students in Grades 2-6. He worked with the team at Mount Southington to organize a reduced group price for Doolittle families. Mr. Sanders is also very active in Scouts and has been instrumental, along with other parents, in teaching the children to take part in service projects. Most recently, Pack 198 did some spring cleaning for us at Doolittle School. They are in the process of working on and updating the "Remembrance Garden." Doolittle School thanks Trip Sanders for all he has done and continues to do for the Doolittle School Community. The Cheshire Board of Education thanks Trip Sanders for going above and beyond for the students of the Cheshire Public Schools. Mr. Sanders was presented with a certificate and small gift.

3. AUDIENCE

None.

4. REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

A. CURRICULUM

I. Report on Meeting Held December 13, 2021 and January 10, 2022 .

Ms. Ham reported that, at the December meeting, Dr. Solan, Michelle Piccerillo, Tom Veivia, and Dr. Gadd gave an overview of Mental Health First Aid as a possible approach to consider for Cheshire High School. The overview included adult, youth, and teen programs that teach participants to assess, listen, give, and encourage (ALGEE) in situations where a person may be at risk. She said the Committee agreed it was vital for the high school to study this further. The program would be targeted toward sophomores. She reported that the Committee had a spirited discussion on what students are reading at the elementary level, and what skills they are learning. Anne Marie Wintenburg and Kevin Hanlon led a presentation on what is going on in the elementary schools in our reading program. They included information on the role of Mentor Texts, which are under the Junior Great Books, which include independent reading, books and read-a-louds in reading instruction. They also discussed the design of the classroom libraries at various grade levels. Next, Mike Papa, Scott Conway, and Tom Lewoc gave an overview of the student data privacy as it relates to district practices. The State student data privacy laws, the district software review and approval process, the use of the Learn Platform, parental rights/requests, and instruction in digital citizenship were main topics of the presentation.

At the January 10, 2022 meeting, they continued the discussion regarding a process for reconsideration of library books/classroom resources. Marlene Silano shared with the Curriculum Committee members the current Policy #1312 Community Relations Public Complaints, which addresses requests to reevaluate texts or instructional materials. The policy was adopted in 1996. The Committee members requested the CABE

model policy to review for the next meeting with the possibility of forwarding a recommendation to the Policy Committee.

Cheshire High School teachers, Dawn DeMeo and Erin Griffiths, gave an update on the first year of the high school elective course, African American, Black, Puerto Rican/Latino Studies. By next year, all schools in the State will be required to offer the course as an elective. They went over the syllabus, which is divided into two semesters. The first semester focuses chronologically on African American Studies. And the second semester focuses more thematically on the Puerto Rican and Latino Studies. Ms. DeMeo and Ms. Griffiths reported that student engagement has been high in the class.

Next, the Committee reviewed changes that are going to be made to the elementary report card to incorporate characteristics of the graduate with a focus on Visions of the Graduate, particularly focusing on complex linking. And then finally, they continued their discussion of what students are reading. Kristen Shanley and Kevin Hanlon gave an overview of what the students are reading at Dodd Middle School in whole classes, independently by individual students, and through the book clubs, and how each is connected to the standards throughout the year.

B. **FINANCE**

I. **Finance Report**

Mr. Grippo reported that the Finance Committee has been meeting to discuss the 2022/23 Superintendent's recommended budget. The next meeting will be on January 25, 2022.

Mr. Masciana noted Board members received a Finance Report through December 31, 2021. He said that not much has changed since the November report. He said there will be some minor variances caused by fuel price increases, and general inflation, which are certainly manageable within the context of the budget. The non-payroll expenditure cap is at 50% right now, and it will hold there through the end of January. At that point it may be raised to 60% or possibly 70%, if things continue to trend the way that they are now. Mr. Masciana noted the persistence of the pandemic and that they are still seeing associated costs within the operating budget such as tent rentals and intraday cleaning. He said these costs most likely can be managed through the operating budget. If need be, there is grant funding that can be used, but it could take away from the learning loss component. The ESSER funds that we have total about \$1.2 million and are good through September of 2024. He said there are no glaring concerns within the Operating Budget.

II. Medical Benefits Update.

The December claims were \$1,545,000, a significant jump from the prior months where we have been averaging \$1 million per month. There are two factors that are affecting this year's claims. One is the high-dollar claims that we are seeing continue to persist. Mr. Masciana said based on the December report, he did a review and we had two very large claims in the month of December that have taken the total claims for several individuals above the \$175,000 threshold. The impact of that creates Stop-Loss Reimbursement whenever an individual claim exceeds 175,000. So, although we ended the month of December with a reserve balance of \$1,049,000, we have about \$370,000 in Stop-Loss that will be funded back to the reserve fund. Looking at the trend in a few of these claims, they will be ongoing so the Stop Loss amount may increase. These are for individuals who have severe disease. The second component received from Cigna is a comparison of our COVID costs within our claims last July through December, compared to this July through December for the Town and Board of Education combined. From January through December of 2020, our total COVID expenditures were about \$133,000. And of that amount, \$115,000 was for testing and about \$18,000 was for treatment. In 2021, the amount increased to \$439,000. Testing went from \$115,000 to \$370,000. Treatment for COVID is \$25,000. We are not seeing a lot of people with very severe COVID symptoms. What is new in this year is the cost of vaccinations, which is \$43,000 compared to zero dollars last year. Mr. Masciana said he has requested a report that compares our claims for the 2018/19 plan year, which was pre pandemic, compared to 2021, which was during the pandemic.

Ms. Ham asked if we are looking for ways to extend contracts for greater savings. Mr. Masciana answered that the largest contract is the transportation contract with DATTCO for about \$3 million per year and runs through 2024. Increases are set at 2% per year. The next largest contract is the cleaning contract for about \$740,000 per year.

Discussions continued regarding the Medical Benefits account, the high claims and the low reserve balance.

C. LEGISLATIVE**I. Report on Meeting Held January 12, 2022.**

Mr. White, Chair of the Legislative Committee, reported the Committee met and discussed a number of topics. Mr. White noted that Superintendent Solan shared a draft document (on file) regarding legislative priorities. He said he would like to review some of the items and then possibly take a vote to forward it to our legislators. Some items on the Superintendent's list include:

Prevailing Wage – This legislation requires government projects to use union rates, which increases the cost of construction. This could cost us a significant amount with school modernization. We would like to modify the law to increase the level in which the prevailing wage applies.

Transfer of the School Bus Depot property from the State to the Town of Cheshire – Mr. White said it does not cost anything to use the depot, but any time we need to make a change, we need to seek approval from the State.

Existing/Potential Mandates Impacting Education and K-8 Model Curriculum – They do not want any more mandates and would like flexibility.

Youth Mental Health Access/Support for Social-Emotional Learning Resources – Mr. White noted this has been especially important in the last two years.

Remote Learning Access – Mr. White said this was on the Superintendent's list. The Committee did not discuss this topic, but he will support it.

II.

Discussion/Possible Action regarding Legislative Priorities.

Mr. Perugini said, procedurally, there is no vote necessary tonight. He said this is a great start and he encourages our Board members to digest this information and give feedback to the Legislative Committee. He recommended holding another meeting for further discussion and then suggested reaching out to our legislators. Mr. White said he would like to reach out to our legislators regarding the bus depot. Mr. Masciana said he believes the Town Council has already reached out to the legislators on this matter.

Mr. Perugini added that in regard to remote learning, as part of legislature, there is a study underway to look at how remote learning and hybrid learning performed during the pandemic, not just in Connecticut, but across the Nation. He said he thinks Cheshire should be part of that study. Mr. Grippo added that he would like to add synchronous learning to that study should Cheshire be a part of it.

Dr. Solan clarified that his recommendation for remote learning is only for snow days. This would only be for any additional snow days after the initial two.

There was continued discussion on the priorities and the need for further discussion at a future meeting.

D. PLANNING**I. Report on Meetings Held December 16, 2021 & January 11, 2022.**

Mr. Martelli reported that at the December meeting, the Committee discussed the Capital Budget and Mr. Masciana gave a presentation of the five-years forward expenditures across the district. The five-year total plan was \$26,497,500. The first year's request is \$5.4 million. Mr. Martelli reminded the Board that last year, the Planning Committee put forth a very lean proposal as we were going through School Modernization efforts to try to determine which projects or which buildings were going to be renovated first to avoid undoing any of the good work and dollars that were being spent on various projects across the district. He noted this was the Committee's first look at the Five-Year Capital Budget. They will continue their review, then the full Board will review it, and finally it will be forwarded to the Town Council.

The second half of the meeting was dedicated to Colliers, who is the Town's Consultant on the school modernization effort. Over the past several months, Colliers has been doing several test fits as well as geotechnical analysis of the two chosen school sites. Due diligence has indicated no real surprises. At the meeting, they talked about items the Town Council would have to approve for funding as we move forward with School Modernization. One of the major items they are looking at is school enrollment and engaging SLAM to take a look at the enrollment trends and projecting out over the next eight years or so for growth within a district. Mr. White discussed NetZero buildings at length, which the Committee agreed to look at throughout the School Modernization effort and to make sure that it is included in the discussions.

At the meeting on January 11, 2022, Mr. Martelli said he gave a presentation on School Modernization, where we were, where we are, and where we may be going, depending on action taken by this Board. He reviewed that School Modernization was a multiyear effort with the School Modernization Committee being established by the Town Council. The plan that came out in April 2021, which was forwarded to the Town Council, recommended the following: Phase I is two new K-Grade 6 elementary schools, one located at the north end of town, and one located the south end of town. Existing Darcey and Chapman buildings are taken offline and/or demolished. Costs for Phase I district-share after State reimbursement is \$73.3 million low, and \$88.2 million high. Before State reimbursement, you would look at a low budget of \$109 with a high budget of \$131 million. Cheshire Public Schools Next Generation Phase I summary is as follows: Construction of a new North Elementary School to include the Birth to 3 Preschool program from Darcey School, and the construction of a new Norton Elementary School on the existing site. Chapman Elementary School and Darcey School are taken offline when

the new schools are constructed. Elementary redistricting will occur when the new schools are built to accommodate the new buildings brought into the fold of the district.

Mr. Masciana reviewed a Gantt chart (on file) outlining tasks to be completed and their deadlines. Mr. Masciana said one key milestone to focus on is the Grant Application. The State requires that the School Construction Grant Application is submitted by June 30, 2022. He reviewed additional tasks that need to be completed by April 1, including updated enrollment projections, and finalizing of the budgets. After that, the development of the Educational Specs and the development of not only the project budget, but also the schedule for the construction. By May 27, 2022 all Grant Application documents and forms need to be completed. Various individuals will need to sign off on the documents, including the Board Chair, Superintendent of Schools, and Town Manager. After that, the Town Council has to pass State required resolutions, including the formation of a building committee, notice of a referendum to be held by a set date, no later than November 15.

II. Approval of School Modernization Plan

MOTION by Mr. Martelli and seconded by Mr. Grippo.

MOVED *that the Cheshire Board of Education forward Cheshire Public Schools Next Generation Phase I Plan to the Town Council for Approval.”*

Discussion:

Ms. Rosenberg asked what happens if the plan doesn't pass referendum. Mr. Masciana said would not need to start over as a lot of work has already been done. The Board and the Town Council would need to reassess to determine if they want to keep the same plan and go forward with a referendum on another date, or adjust the plan and then go back to referendum with the revised plan. Mr. Masciana said that if the Plan fails the referendum in November, the next cycle means that we basically lose a full year.

Mr. Perugini added that there is also a blackout period where neither the Board nor the Town Council can promote the referendum, once the Town Council sets a referendum date. We can talk about the project details, but we cannot tell people to go out and vote for this plan. He said there is still a communications aspect to this that has to be vetted out. If this plan fails, they need to determine why.

Mr. White said he will be supporting the motion. There was continued discussion regarding different aspects of the plan including the decision

for building new versus renovating Norton. Mr. Grippo said he also will be supporting the motion and thinks this is the best plan for Cheshire. Ms. Harrigan said she will not be supporting this project. She feels strongly that we should have a Grade 6-8 Middle School. She agrees with the new elementary school but thinks the second school should be a Grade 6-8 Middle School. Ms. Ham said she will support this project, it is a viable Plan. Mr. Martelli said he thinks we can get this project through referendum and the time is right. Ms. Rosenberg said she will support this plan because she feels more confident that this will not be “one and done” and there will be a Phase II.

Mr. Perugini thanked all of the School Modernization Committee members. There was a lot of great work put into this project. He explained the history of the Committee and said it is a collaborative process between the Board, Town Council and the community. He said this is only Phase I and the other buildings will need to be addressed in Phase II.

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

E. POLICY

I. **Report on Meeting Held December 21, 2021.**

Mr. Grippo reported they reviewed Policy 5131.911 for a third reading. The Committee had a great conversation regarding school safety and security. Mr. Grippo said he wanted to discuss this due to the recent school shooting in Michigan. He said they received assurances that our procedures and policies are a lot tighter, and there are many checks and balances along the way. He encouraged the public to watch the video of the meeting.

II. **Third Reading and Approval of Policies.**

MOTION by Mr. Grippo, seconded by Mr. White.

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education give a third and final reading to Policy #5131.911 Student/Hazing/Bullying, and direct the Superintendent to put said policy into immediate effect.

Discussion:

Ms. Ham said she has a serious problem with the way the law is written and the terms “single act” and “significant”. Her fear is that children will be labeled a bully after one mistake.

Dr. Solan said they look at each issue individually. They look at things such as the time frame, previous acts, and intervention. Our philosophy is not punitive in nature, we come from a constructive perspective.

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

F. SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE

There was no report.

G. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES

None.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

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

MOVED that the Board of Education approve the Minutes from meetings held on December 9, 2021 and January 13, 2022.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

6. CORRESPONDENCE

Ms. Harrigan reported that there was no correspondence.

7. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Solan applauded the approval of the School Modernization Plan. He said it is the right plan for Cheshire.

The Superintendent announced that the Cheshire Education Foundation Annual Trivia contest will be held on the campus of Cheshire Academy on Saturday, March 26, 2022. Teams of four compete in a fun trivia contest for a great cause. The event begins at 7:00 pm and is BYOB. The cost is \$50 per team.

He reported there is a precipitous decline in COVID-19 cases since we returned to school on January 3, 2022. We averaged more than 130 positive students for the week of January 3rd with an overall absentee rate over 10%. This week, we have seen positive cases at about 60 with the absentee rate below 5%. We are offering a booster clinic in partnership with Chesprocott for students aged 5-18 at Cheshire High School on Thursday, January 27th. Please see the Chesprocott website for more information or to book an appointment.

Dr. Solan explained that we must inform ACES (Area Cooperative Educational Services) of seats available in Cheshire to be offered to New Haven children through the State's Open Choice program. Open Choice is a program that was instituted to reduce racial and economic isolation for students from urban communities as part of the response to the Sheff vs. O'Neill lawsuit. The benefit for the community is great in providing a diverse school enrollment for our community, and the funds received from the State have helped provide additional supports and programming. This year, we have 37 Open Choice students enrolled in our schools. We plan on offering 11 additional seats for 2022/23

with six in Grades K-3 and five new seats in grade 9. Last year we offered 14 new seats and only 8 were ultimately filled.

He reported there were no COVID19 emails this evening.

Ms. Harrigan said that she has heard from teachers about how appreciative they are to have the added early dismissals for professional development.

8. OLD BUSINESS

None.

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Chairperson's Update.

Mr. Perugini noted there is a CABE Legislative Breakfast coming up and encouraged Board members to attend. He also reported he is going the Polar Plunge for the YMCA. It is a big fundraiser for the YMCA.

The Chair announced upcoming Budget and Committee meetings.

10. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Mr. Grippo, and seconded by Ms. Ham, the meeting was adjourned at 10:15 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: February 4, 2022.