

**MINUTES OF THE CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET PRESENTATION  
MEETING HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
ON JANUARY 12, 2023 AT 7:30 PM**

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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; Robin-Anne Carey, Director, Pupil Personnel Services; Mary Jocelyn-Gadd, Principal-Cheshire High School; Kristin Pelz, Assistant Principal-Cheshire High School; Daniel Tartarelli, Assistant Principal-Cheshire High School; Mike Woods, Principal-Dodd Middle School; John Perosino, Assistant Principal-Dodd Middle School; Diana Burns, Principal-Chapman Elementary School; Katharine Carlucci-Assistant Principal-Chapman & Norton Elementary Schools; Kimberly Dessert, Principal-Darcey School; Amy O'Brien, Principal-Doolittle School; Kristin Lopa, Assistant Principal-Doolittle School; Kelly Grillo, Principal-Norton School; Scott Jeffrey, Principal-Highland Elementary School; Erica Bordonaro, Assistant Principa-Highland Elementary; Kevin Hanlon, K-8 Curriculum Coordinator; Christina Sherwood, Supervisor of Elementary Special Education; Marie Broadway, Supervisor of Secondary Special Education; Ryan Murphy, Community Engagement Coordinator.

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**1. CALL TO ORDER – 7:44 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.

**2. AUDIENCE**

None.

**3. PRESENTATIONS**

**A. Superintendent's Proposed 2023/2024 Budget**

Superintendent Solan thanked all for attending this evening. He explained this meeting is an overview of his budget proposal and there will be subsequent meetings to delve further into the budget recommendation. He thanked Mr. Masciana, Chief Operating Office and his Assistant, Heather Santi, along with central office staff and all administrators who put a great deal of time and effort into this budget. He reviewed the Board's responsibility, as well as his own, in this budget process. Dr.

Solan explained that when developing the budget, two key paths are considered – social emotional learning and complex thinking.

The marquee budget drivers this year include enrollment, medical benefits, global energy price increases and mill rate offsets. Regarding Per Pupil Expenditure, the difference between what we spend per student and the state average is \$2,629 per student. Our budget would be \$10.8 million higher if we spent the state average per student.

Regarding enrollment, we are at the end of a 10-year trend of declining enrollment and beginning a 10-year trend of climbing enrollment. Our enrollment this year is 4,160 and expected to be 4,201 next year, an increase of 41 students. It is projected that there will be an additional 73 students in PK-6, 19 students in 7-8 and a decline in 9-12 of 51 students.

Dr. Solan shared that their initial internal budget request was an increase of 9.22%. He said that his responsibility is to design a fiscally responsible budget that ensures equitable and developmentally appropriate educational experiences between schools, a safe and clean learning environment, fulfills statutory obligations, and allows for the advancement of Board of Education goals. He said a 9.22% increase is not fiscally responsible. Fortunately, most of the items in that initial 9.22% budget are currently being paid for through grant funding so they will not need to be included in this budget.

His final Superintendent’s 2023-2024 Budget request is **\$85,872,591, representing an increase of \$5,208,171, 6.46%**. He said this is the largest budget request that he has presented. This is a maintenance budget where we seek to maintain class size ratios, fund medical benefits at the actuarial level, maintain the same level of special education services and keep discretionary accounts largely unchanged.

Dr. Solan reviewed the line items changes of \$150,000 or more:

Budget Increase	2023-2024 Requested Increase	% of Overall Budget Increase
Teachers	\$2,188,671	42%
Medical Benefits	\$1,509,762	29%
<b>Teacher/Benefit Impact</b>	<b>\$3,698,433</b>	<b>71%</b>
Paraeducators	\$301,575	6%
Support	\$205,937	4%
Maintenance/Building Repair	\$204,055	4%
Public Utilities	\$155,855	3%
<b>Total of these items:</b>	<b>\$4,565,855</b>	<b>88%</b>

Next, Dr. Solan reviewed the net staffing changes:

School/Dept.	Position	2023-24 Requested change	Change
Chapman	Teacher	Increase 20 to 21 teachers	1.0
Doolittle	Teacher	Increase 26 to 28 teachers	2.0
Highland	Teacher	Increase 44 to 46 teachers	2.0
Norton	Teacher	Decrease 24 to 23 teachers	-1.0
Highland	Sped Teacher	Support increase in sped students	1.0
Districtwide	BCBA	Growth in # of students needing services	1.4
Districtwide	School Nurse	Based at Doolittle but will cover absences	.7
Highland	Speech/Lang.	Growth in # of students needing services	.5
		<b>Total Net Increase</b>	<b>7.6</b>

He noted the elementary staffing increase will maintain class sizes given the increase in enrollment. Special education service demand has increased with the enrollment increase. Currently, we have an average of 18.8 students per teacher in elementary grades. In this budget recommendation, with the additional staff, that average stays the same. In grade 7, this year we had a historical high of 26.4 students per class and it is projected to be the same for next year. In grade 8, this year, we have an average of 21.8 students per class and next year it is projected to be 23.1 students per class. High School falls right in the middle of students per teacher in DRG B.

Dr. Solan reviewed \$10,565,257 in projected revenue for 2023-2024. Regarding the Bounce Forward Grant reimbursed positions, they are covered through ARP ESSER funding. The positions include Increased Elementary Assistant Principal support at Doolittle (from .3 to 1), at Norton (from .3 to .6) and Chapman (from 0 to .4). A full time elementary Reading and Math Specialist (Highland/Darcey) and High School and Middle School Math Support teachers.

Dr. Solan commented on the tremendous growth Cheshire is experiencing in residential, commercial and professional development. There is a great deal of grand list growth that will help to offset the increased budget.

He said this year, Cheshire ranked #345 Best District in America by Niche.com Ranked and #11 of 166 Connecticut districts in Smarter Balanced Overall Performance. He said the investment in our schools is investing in Cheshire.

Dr. Solan reviewed the key takeaways for this budget:

- Climbing enrollment and medical benefits increases are significant drivers in this year's budget request.
- We continue to recommend funding benefits at the actuarially projected rate as a strategy employed in concert with the Town.

- This budget is grounded in preserving current service levels including maintaining reasonable class sizes and special education services.
- Cheshire Public Schools is an outstanding value for our community providing exceptional results while spending \$4,145,324 less per year than the DRG B average on a per pupil basis.
- Increasing enrollment will likely translate into the adoption of some of the Bounce Forward positions in the future.

Dr. Solan reviewed the timeline of upcoming Budget meetings. He encouraged Board members to forward questions to Mr. Grippo, Mr. Masciana, or him.

Discussion:

Dr. Solan reviewed the staff additions per Mr. White's request. Mr. White noted that with the new schools, redistricting is going to happen so it may make sense to start the process now for those students who will be affected.

Mr. Martelli asked if there will be discussions regarding cost implications to the district with the new schools such as new staff, etc. Dr. Solan said this is a short-term problem and things will change in 2026. He said they will try to project out the costs after 2026 and he would like to keep those costs as low as possible. He said he really feels the grand list growth will mitigate the impact of the increase.

Mr. Grippo noted that the medical benefit request is significantly higher this year and asked if we are going to have to cover any deficit this year? Dr. Solan said we should have new numbers next Thursday and they will review them. Mr. Grippo noted in response to Mr. Martelli's question, the Finance Committee has been talking about what future staffing needs will be at the new schools.

Regarding Medical Benefits, Mr. Masciana added that the request for this year is lower than it was last year. It is a \$1.5 million request and last year we needed \$2.2 million to catch up because we were underfunding the run rate. Mr. Masciana said he thinks we will make it through to the end of the year without having to request more money. With next year's request, unless claims are lower than projected, we will not be building on the reserve.

Mr. White asked about portable classrooms and if we will need them this year. Mr. Masciana responded that he believes we are looking at those in two years, but we should have proposals from the engineers in April.

Mr. Perugini asked if we did spend the state average, which would be an additional \$10,000 per student, what might be some of those advancements. He said we are maintaining the quality that we have, but not advancing, and asked if Dr. Solan could share what advancing would look like. Dr. Solan said the entire Bounce Forward plan is

an advancement in our organization, but he will show some other areas we could advance further.

4. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Ms. Ham, and seconded by Mr. White, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 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: 1/20/2023.