

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING  
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON MARCH 16, 2023 AT 7:30 PM**

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Board Members Present: Adam Grippo-Vice Chair; Anne Harrigan-Secretary; Faith Ham, Samantha Rosenberg,

Board Members Absent: Anthony Perugini-Chair; Andrew Martelli, Timothy White

Administrators Present: Jeffrey F. Solan, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools; Vincent Masciana, Chief Operating Officer, Marlene Silano, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Amy O'Brien, Principal-Doolittle School; Kevin Hanlon, K-8 Curriculum 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.

In Mr. Perugini's absence, Mr. Grippo led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Student Representatives. Michael DeJoseph, student representative for the 2022/2023 school year, reported on recent events at Cheshire High School. He reported that the World Language Department hosted a global awareness week where international foods and customs were presented in the CHS commons. The mock trial team made it to the state semifinals this past weekend. The Peer Health Educators hosted a unified basketball tournament. In athletics, indoor track and field athletes qualified for the National Indoor Track and Field Championship in Boston, Massachusetts. Winter Sports wrapped up and spring sports begin this Saturday, March 18. The spring musical, The Addams Family, will be premiering on March 22 in the Cheshire High School auditorium at 7:30pm. Monica is not here tonight because she is at rehearsal. The Future Business Leaders of America club will participate in the state competition tomorrow. Juniors put together a leukemia and lymphoma fundraiser last Friday. Students from Cheshire High School and Dodd Middle School got together for a night of Bowling and over \$500 was raised for cancer research. Michael also reported that the Boys Bathroom Improvement Squad has received a lot of positive feedback from students. It is a slow process, but it is improving.

**2. PRESENTATIONS**

A. School Partnership Award – Doolittle School

Ms. Ham, the Board of Education representative to Doolittle School, introduced the school's recipient, Tracy Hershman, nominated by Amy O'Brien, Doolittle School Principal.

Ms. O'Brien said they have many wonderful parents who help at Doolittle School, however, this school year Tracy Hershman has stood out. Tracy has been very

involved in the PTA for the last four years. She is a very generous supporter of school fundraisers and volunteers whenever she can. She has even stepped in to help as a lunch aide when needed. This year she has been instrumental in getting the Doolittle School Store up and running again. The school store was open before the pandemic and parent volunteers would come in at lunchtime to sell school supplies to students during the lunch waves. Tracy opened the school store during recess waves one or two times a month. It has been so successful. Not only have the children loved it but also it has become a very lucrative fundraiser bringing in about four hundred dollars a month to the PTA. She stocks the store with quality items and gives her time to Doolittle twice a month to open this store in addition to the time she spends purchasing and organizing the items. This year she has even instituted a Kindness Award Certificate. She has asked teachers to present certificates to students who demonstrate kindness and caring in the classroom. Students are awarded a gift certificate to the school store to receive anything they would like free.

Ms. O'Brien said they are very grateful to have Tracy Hershman at Doolittle. The Board of Education thanked Tracy for going above and beyond for the students of Cheshire Public Schools and presented her with a certificate and small gift.

### 3. AUDIENCE

Stephanie Calo. 699 Country Wood Court. A mother of a second grader at Chapman Elementary School, she said she has concern about the Safe School Climate Survey that the children had to fill out. There is a section on the survey that says I am a, and the responses are boy, girl, non-binary, gender fluid and prefer not to say. She said she would like to know why these responses were added to the survey. She said she strongly feels like the parents should be notified when something like this has to be filled out. She also asked about an opt-out form. She said she wants to know if a child accidentally clicks, the wrong response, like non-binary, is there further conversation with that student. Lastly, she asked what happens if the child does have questions? She asked who is explaining what non-binary and gender fluid means to these young children, and how are they explaining it?

Olympia Brucato. 1146 Wolf Hill Road. Mrs. Brucato said that sometimes her daughter feels uncomfortable with these types of questions on the surveys and would like the focus kept on core subjects. These conversations regarding gender identity should be between the student and their parents. She is in favor of an opt-out option.

Susan (last name inaudible). Said she was asked to attend today by some parents. She said the statute for this particular survey states that it contain uniform grade level appropriate questions that collect information about student's perspectives and opinions about the school climate and the school, and to allow students to complete and submit such assessment and survey anonymously. She said she is not sure how it is being done anonymously in kindergarten through third grade. She said asking questions to a first

second or third grader about their gender is very confusing. She said this survey should just be targeted at bullying in general.

Amy Bourdon. 35 Pehr Lane. Ms. Boudon said she is at the meeting because of the questions on the survey regarding gender. She said the choices on the survey are subjective and above the maturity level of these children. It is up to the parents to discuss these terms with the children, not the schools.

Karen Schnitzer. 18 Currier Place. Ms. Schnitzler said she lives in Currier Woods and is Co-chair of the Coalition for Sustainable Cheshire and Chair of the Environmental Commission. She came to the meeting as a neighbor of the new north end school. She had the suggestion of a butterfly and pollinator garden, a perennial garden and shrubs to promote and support our local native butterflies, bees and other insects with food and shelter. She also proposed other ideas that would help the environment and be a learning experience for the students. She said the site of this new school is currently home to abundant wildlife. Turkeys use the fields as do deer, hawks and, other animals. The low lands nearby are home to turtles, frogs, and salamanders. She suggested some outdoor seating as an area where the kids could sit and enjoy nature listen to the birds.

Dr. Solan thanked Ms. Schnitzer for her comments and responded that the Next Generation School Building Committee meets every Thursday. The architects who were hired spoke to many of the items Ms. Schnitzer recommended. In the future, the architects will solicit feedback from the community. There will be meetings with community members and stakeholders about design considerations.

Regarding the survey, Dr. Solan responded that it was mandated beginning in 2012. The gender question was modified in 2018 to include additional choices, it was not just added. The question about whether it is necessary for grades K-3 is something that we will explore before the next administration of the survey in 2025. He said he regrets more information was not sent out prior to the survey and he apologizes for that. He said he wanted to clear up a few more questions that were received. There is no blanket opt-out. Changes will be reviewed with the Policy Committee that would include an opt-out provision. He said the questions are all anonymous. They do ask about gender, for example, if multiple females responded that they felt unsafe, or if boys felt bullied. If students have questions, we do not necessarily answer those questions. In our experience, it is extremely rare that a student would ask a question about gender, most students readily identify with one of the choices and just select that. If there were persistence, and I am not familiar with a situation where that has occurred, we would direct the students to speak with their family.

Mr. Grippo thanked everyone who came out to speak this evening. He noted that the Policy Committee met with our school attorney regarding parental rights and transgender issues. The meeting minutes are posted on our website. He encouraged the public to view the meeting minutes to learn about the laws around this issue.

Ms. Ham added that the whole idea of these surveys is to get to the essence of bullying and the climate of the school. The law does identify over a dozen different characteristics of bullying or targets of bullying, and if we identify one, we should be asking about all of them.

*[There were inaudible comments from the audience.]*

## **REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES**

### **A. CURRICULUM**

#### **I. Report on Meeting Held March 13, 2023.**

Ms. Ham reported on the meeting held March 13, 2023. The Committee heard about the Signs of Suicide (SOS) Program at Dodd Middle School. Dodd Principal, Michael Woods and Ms. Jessica Tresselt gave an overview of the program including information on the need for training, managing reactions, what to do if a child sees signs of suicide, building protective factors, building coping skills, and tips for getting adolescence to talk. Dodd mental health staff will present the SOS lessons to Core Classes (Social Studies) of 23-26 students. All materials and videos will be made available to parents and opt out resources made available upon request.

Ms. Silano provided an update of the work of this year's Educator Evaluation Committee. This committee is meeting in anticipation of the state revising guidelines for Educator Evaluation. The committee met last week to hear an overview of a possible plan provided by its author, Kim Marshall.

CHS Principal, Mary Gadd reviewed the recommendations of the CHS Scheduling Committee. The committee recommended keeping the current schedule for the 2023-24 school year and pilot small shifts in the frequency/times of classes for a short duration next year. Based on the results and feedback from the pilot, the committee will revisit recommendations for the schedule design

Lastly, Ms. Silano and Mr. Hanlon shared the submitted documentation requesting a waiver of the Connecticut Approved K-3 Reading Curriculum Model.

#### **II. Approval of Textbooks**

Dr. Harrigan reported that based upon its review and following the public viewing period, the Curriculum Committee **recommends** to the Board approval of the purchase of these new textbooks.

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

**MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education approve the purchase of the following textbooks: *Calculus: Early Transcendentals 8th Edition* and *Comparative Government: Stories of the World*, as recommended by the Curriculum Committee.

Ms. Rosenberg asked if the texts were digital. Ms. Silano responded that there would be hardcover books available in the classroom and digital subscriptions for the texts.

**VOTE:** The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

**III. Approval of Out of Country Field Trips**

Ms. Ham reported that the Committee reviewed four out-of-country field trips and agreed to forward them to the full Board for approval.

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

**MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education approve the participation of Cheshire High School students in the following educational field trips with the understanding that there is no cost to the Cheshire Board of Education:

- *Germany, August 6-19, 2023*
- *Costa Rica, April 5-13, 2024*
- *Iceland, from April 6 - 12, 2024, and*
- *Puerto Rico, April 6-12, 2024*

Ms. Rosenberg noted that the return date in the Motion was incorrect for the Iceland trip.

**AMENDED MOTION** by Ms. Ham, seconded by Dr. Harrigan

**MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education approve the participation of Cheshire High School students in the following educational field trips with the understanding that there is no cost to the Cheshire Board of Education:

- *Germany, August 6-19, 2023*
- *Costa Rica, April 5-13, 2024*
- *Iceland, from April 6 - 13, 2024, and*
- *Puerto Rico, April 6-12, 2024*

**VOTE:** The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

**B. FINANCE****I. Finance Report**

Mr. Masciana reported that the budget is in good shape despite the fact that we did have increases in electricity rates and cost of fuel and heating oil. Fortunately, the warm winter and the lack of snow has really helped our budget. They will be increasing the non-expenditure or the cap on our non-payroll expenditures from 50% to 70%. As we get into March and April, we start finalizing our accounts and start encumbering for the purchases that we have held off with the 50% cap

**II. Medical Benefits Update**

Claims for the month of February were \$769, 472. We had a million dollars per month budgeted as the expected claims average over the year. We expected claims to start dropping when we hit January, as the new HSA plan year began, and it did. Therefore, for the month of February, the reserve balance actually increased by \$239,836. That marks three months in a row that we have increased the reserve fund instead of depleting it. Therefore, on a year to date basis, the net change from our starting reserve balances is down about \$73,975. This is in line with what we expected. As of February 28, 2023, the reserve balance is \$1,261,033, 1.26 months of claims reserve.

Mr. Grippo asked about the free lunches for all programs that continued as of March 1, if there is any impact on our operating budget. Mr. Masciana responded Food Services is completely detached from the Board's operating budget and manages its revenues and its expenses within its own budget. The only responsibility the Board has at the end of every fiscal year is if there are unpaid, uncollected balances from parents. By state law, these have to be reimbursed back to the Food Service Program. When we stopped the free meals for that short period from January 17 to March 1, there were unpaid balances that had accrued quickly, and they will work to get those balances back down by the end of the year. By June 30, whatever is not paid to the Food Service Program must be reimbursed by the Board of Education.

Ms. Ham asked how much the unpaid balance is. Mr. Masciana replied about \$11,000, which is higher than we have ever had before.

**C. PERSONNEL****I. Non-Renewal of Interim Contract Teachers**

Superintendent Solan reported that pursuant to Section 10-151 of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Board of Education might, prior to May 1; authorize the Superintendent not to renew the contracts of certain non-

tenured teachers. Because our budget is not yet settled, on an annual basis we non-renew some of the non-tenured teaching staff. This allows flexibility should our budget be catastrophic and we cannot fill positions. It would still be based on seniority if we had to reduce positions. He explained there are two motions, one for teachers on a one-year interim contract and the other for teacher contracts of non-tenured, certified, professional employees.

**MOTION** by Dr. Harrigan seconded by Ms. Ham

***MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education, pursuant to C.G.S. 10-151, authorizes the Superintendent to non-renew the teacher contracts of all certified, professional employees, serving under an interim contract subject to C.G.S. 10-151 at the end of the 2021-2022 school year.*

**VOTE:** The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

## **II. Non-Renewal of Non-Tenured Teachers**

**MOTION** by Dr. Harrigan seconded by Ms. Rosenberg

***MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education, pursuant to C.G.S. 10-151, authorize the Superintendent to non-renew the teacher contracts of non-tenured, certified, professional employees under contract for the Cheshire Public Schools, as recommended by the Superintendent, subject to C.G.S. 10-151, at the end of the 2022-2023 school year, and further to authorize the Superintendent to communicate written notice of such non-renewal to the affected teachers.*

**VOTE:** The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

## **D. PLANNING**

### **I. Report on Meeting Held March 7, 2023.**

In Mr. Martelli's absence, Mr. Masciana gave the Planning report. He said there were three topics that discussed. The first was the Capital Budget that the Board passed last month. The five-year request was \$52,825,500, to do the maintenance and long-term improvements that are needed at the schools that will remain after the new two new elementary schools are built. They discussed alternative ways to finance the infrastructure projects. He said in 2015, the Town and Board of Education worked together and generated an energy performance contract that

enabled the schools to do \$8 million worth of infrastructure improvements. He said they replaced the electric heat at Highland, and at the high school did a number of other improvements such as swapping out fluorescent for LED lighting. The energy savings paid for the cost of those improvements over a 15-year period, a financing structure that was paid for by energy improvements. The Committee is exploring if we can do something similar by bundling some of the capital projects, adding energy improvements, and if not paying for the full cost of the project, at least defray some of the cost energy improvements, plus some of the more traditional financing that is done through issuing bonds. A guest from Johnson Controls, a company that does energy performance contracts, gave a presentation to the Planning Committee members, and talked about various funding options. The Committee expressed interest in moving forward to explore alternative ways in which to fund our capital projects and discussed the options for procurement to hire a firm to provide assistance. They asked Mr. Masciana to contact representatives from ECG Engineering, who served as the Owner's Representative for the first energy performance contract with Ameresco, and report back to the Committee at the next meeting to be scheduled sometime in April.

The Committee discussed Doolittle and Highland solar carports and also discussed phase two of the next generation school modernization plan. In addition, to summarize, the discussion was really about whether it was too early begin talking about phase two. The Committee's decision was it is not too early to start having the conversations. Therefore, at the next Planning Committee meeting, members will start by looking at what the original school modernization recommendations were for phase two.

**E. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES**

None.

**4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**MOTION** by Ms. Ham, seconded by Dr. Harrigan.

**MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education approve the minutes of the February 16, 2023 meeting.

**VOTE:** 2-0-2 (Ms. Ham and Ms. Rosenberg abstained. The Motion was not approved. The February 16, 2023 meeting minutes will be tabled until the April meeting.

**5. CORRESPONDENCE**

Dr. Solan noted that some emails were received and answered regarding the survey discussed earlier, as well as, an email supporting SEL activities. Dr. Harrigan asked that



Dr. Solan make those emails available to Board members. Dr. Solan said they will be part of the record and filed with the minutes.

6. **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

Dr. Solan reported that the long-standing School Business Partnership Committee has been revamped. In the past format, the administrators shared information with business members. The new approach is more of a workshop format designed to have exchange of ideas and support the growth of both the schools and the business community. The first workshop in early April, and will center around the trades-mechanics, construction, and manufacturing. A brief overview will be provided to some of our business partners about real opportunities our students already have, but then solicit from them strategies to support student interest in those fields. Things like, over the summer, students could do a one day or couple of days shadow. In May they hope to meet with local realtors, as we have in the past.

Dr. Solan reviewed that enrollment has grown a great deal in our elementary schools. Because we have new developments in town, he, Mr. Masciana, our Transportation Coordinator, Luther Miller, and our Town Planner met to review all the new sites. One of the streets, in the Dickerman Road project, was districted for Highland but because of the high enrollment numbers there, those students will be attending Chapman School.

The Superintendent Our Niche.com rating has improved. He said in 2021, Cheshire was ranked number 516, in of all school systems in America, which is very good. This year, we are 330 up from 345 last year. We continue to climb the rankings and we are proud of that success.

He also reported on professional development that is scheduled for the next day, where all 400 teachers from across the district will meet at the high school. He acknowledged Ms. Silano and Mr. Hanlon for their work putting this all together. Dr. Solan reported on the YMCA Awards Dinner where Steve Trifone was their first Person of the Year.

Lastly, Dr. Solan reported that March is Board Member Appreciation month. He thanked the Board members for the incredible amount of time and energy that the members, who are all volunteers, put in. Board members were presented with a small gift.

7. **OLD BUSINESS**

None.

8. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **Healthy Food Certification**

Mr. Masciana explained that Connecticut General Statutes requires that all Connecticut public school districts that are eligible to participate in the 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

the Administration that the Board vote that they will meet Connecticut Nutrition Standards for the 2023/24 school year. The three motions enable us to continue to comply with the healthy food options that are required if we are to maintain healthy food certification. This applies to not only the reimbursable meals, but also anything that we sell to the students during the day, including snacks and ala carte items. The first motion states that we will comply when we are selling food to students during the school day, including ala carte items. The next two motions allow exemption, food in the second motion and beverages in the third motion. Those exemptions allow us to sell items at the concession stand at other events that occur after the school day. By participating in healthy food certification, we receive another 10 cents per meal added to the reimbursement for reimbursable breakfast and lunch meals. Ninety-six percent of districts in Connecticut are taking advantage of the healthy food certification.

**MOVED** by Mr. Grippo and seconded by Dr. 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, 2023, through June 30, 2024. 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 unanimously 4-0

**MOVED** by Mr. Grippo and seconded by Dr. 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 unanimously 4-0

**MOVED** by Mr. Grippo and seconded by Dr. 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 unanimously 4-0

9. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mr. Grippo, and seconded by Ms. Rosenberg, the meeting was adjourned into Executive Session including Dr. Solan and Mr. Masciana, to discuss union negotiations at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Adam Grippo, Board Vice Chair

Attest:

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Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

Filed at the Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, Cheshire: 4/6/2023.