

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL BUSINESS MEETING
HELD AT DODD MIDDLE SCHOOL ON JANUARY 30, 2023 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; Vincent Masciana, Chief Operating Officer, Marlene Silano, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Robin-Anne Carey, Director, Pupil Personnel Services; Mary Jocelyn-Gadd, Principal-Cheshire High School; Mike Woods, Principal-Dodd Middle School; John Perosino, Assistant Principal-Dodd Middle School; Amy O'Brien, Principal-Doolittle School; Kelly Grillo, Principal-Norton School; Scott Jeffrey, Principal-Highland Elementary School; Kevin Hanlon, K-8 Curriculum Coordinator; Ryan Murphy, Community Engagement Coordinator.

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.

2. AUDIENCE

None.

A. FINANCE

I. DISCUSSION/ACTION REGARDING THE 2023/24 BOARD OF EDUCATION RECOMMENDED BUDGET

Mr. Perugini noted this is the fifth meeting on the budget. The Finance Committee has brought forward a budget recommendation, which is the Superintendent's Budget Recommendation, for approval by the full Board of Education. He turned the meeting over to Mr. Grippo, Finance Committee Chair.

Mr. Grippo reported that the Committee met earlier this evening and passed a motion to bring forward a budget to the full Board for consideration in the amount of \$85,872,591 which is an increase of \$5,208,171 (6.46%) increase over the current budget.

MOTION by Mr. Grippo, seconded by Dr. Harrigan.

MOVED that the Board of Education approve a budget of \$85,872,591, an increase of \$5,208,171 (6.46%) over the current budget.

Discussion:

Ms. Ham said she appreciates the work put into this budget but has major reservations about the size of the increase. She said she understands that 96% of the budget is for fixed costs leaving little room for maneuvering. The mandates are killing us and this increase is going to hurt many people. She said she hopes our legislators start to listen about the growing impact of mandates as it is beginning to hurt our children. She said she could not support this large of a budget increase.

AMENDED MOTION by Mr. Grippo, seconded by Ms. Ham.

MOVED to reduce the budget increase by \$619,401.

Discussion:

Mr. Grippo explained with the reduction, it would be an increase to the current budget by \$4,588,770, which is still an incredibly large number, but the majority of this budget is contractual increases. He said we do not know what the grand list growth will be and we must keep the taxpayers in mind as well. He said we are facing increases to salaries, energy prices and our medical benefit trust fund but we must also consider the taxpayer. The reduced increase preserves the positions that the Superintendent has asked for and also preserves the cushion for fuel, electricity and our energy contract but cuts everything else from Instructional Expense and Support Services.

Dr. Harrigan asked Mr. Grippo to clarify where the reductions would come from. Mr. Grippo responded that the majority of the decrease to the increase would come from Support Services, where any increase asked for would be flat-lined with the exception of the energy contract, also in Maintenance and Operations, reducing any increase asked for with the exceptions of fuel and electricity increases that were budgeted. There would still be \$4.6 million in Maintenance and Operations, \$7.3 million in Support Services, and \$4.5 million in Instructional Expense. Dr. Harrigan said this seems very irresponsible to her to make such a large cut.

MOTION TO AMEND by Mr. Grippo, seconded by Mr. Martelli.

MOVED to increase the fiscal 2023/2024 Board of Education Operating budget by \$4,693,701, for a total budget of \$85,358,121, which represents a 5.82 percent increase.

Discussion:

Mr. Grippo explained that he is decreasing his reduction. His rationale with the original motion was to preserve contractual increases and preserve the positions in the budget request to keep our class size and special education integrity. He said he originally missed the contractual obligation to Dattco and that is included with this amended motion.

Ms. Rosenberg asked Dr. Solan to speak to this reduction. Dr. Solan said this would not be his recommendation as he presented his recommended budget to the Board. He said if he had to make reductions, what Mr. Grippo is suggesting is in line with what he might recommend. He said he appreciates the focus to retain the requested staff to maintain class sizes. He said if we have to make reductions, it would be in places that do not affect the classroom and that is what Mr. Grippo has proposed.

Dr. Harrigan said she is not comfortable with a large cut where she does not know exactly what is affected. Mr. Grippo said we still do not know what our budget will be when it comes back from the Town Council. He said that the reduction he has recommended still gives the district the resources it needs to be successful.

Mr. White asked if this reduction will result in layoffs. Dr. Solan said he could not give a definitive answer because he does not know what the final reduction will be. Mr. White said that although we will have grand list growth, we do not know what it is yet. He asked if we have any energy rates locked in for the 2023-2024 year. Mr. Masciana answered no, we will go out to bid on some prices, but not until next fall. Mr. White suggested a conversation with the Council regarding fuel prices.

Ms. Rosenberg said she could support this amended motion if we can assure that the recommended positions will not be cut.

Ms. Ham said she supports Mr. Grippo's amended motion. She said we reconcile the accounts at the end of June and there are areas, such as snow plowing, where funds remain and can be moved around. She said she thinks this is a big ask for our town, even with the reduction.

Mr. Martelli asked if there is any other funding that the district may be obtaining. Dr. Solan answered that they try to use any grant funding to supplement the budget, not supplant. He said there are other grants that are being applied for. Mr. Masciana answered there are no operational budget grants other than what we have in the state and federal grant programs. The HVAC or security grants will affect our capital budget.

The positions that are funded by the ARP ESSR grant are okay for this budget, but we will need to look at that for the 2024-2025 budget.

Dr. Harrigan said our budget is increasing because of the increasing enrollment, but the Town is also growing.

Mr. White noted with the increasing enrollment, we might need to add three teachers a year for the next 5 years. Ms. Rosenberg added that we also do not know the diversity of the students who will be coming into our district and how many may require special education services.

Mr. Perugini thanked everyone for his or her input into this budget that started well before January. There has been a lot of work to get it to where it is. He said we are in growth mode, something we have not seen recently. We are going to need to plan for the next few years where we may need to have additional offerings, not just maintain what we have today. He said he thinks we will be making continued investments of this size or maybe greater over the next few years as we continue to offer quality education and a quality experience. He noted that he takes everyone's input about the budget, including retirees and adults with no children. Our focus is on education but our town is all-inclusive. He said he would support Mr. Grippo's motion. We still have to wait until we get the final budget from the Town Council.

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

Mr. Perugini thanked the Administrators, the Board and Dr. Solan and his team.

3. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Mr. Grippo, and seconded by Mr. White, the meeting was adjourned at 8:35 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: _____.