

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON SEPTEMBER 21, 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 Pelz, Assistant Principal-Cheshire High School; Maureen Reed, Ed.D., Assistant Principal-Cheshire High School; Daniel Tartarelli, Assistant Principal-Cheshire High School; Ryan Murphy, Assistant Principal-Dodd Middle School; Katharine Carlucci-Assistant Principal-Chapman & Norton Elementary Schools; Jodie Roden, Principal-Norton School; Kevin Hanlon, K-8 Curriculum 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.
- C. Student Representatives.

Student representatives are selected each year to represent Cheshire High School at Board of Education meetings. The students are selected by their level of involvement at the high school in student activities or sport and their academic excellence. Cheshire High School Principal Mary Gadd introduced Andrew Elliott and Ella Paul, Cheshire High School's student representatives to the Board of Education for 2023-2024.

Andrew Elliot is an outstanding individual who possesses not only academic prowess but also leadership qualities, commitment to community, and dedication to making a positive impact on the world around him. Beyond his academic accomplishments, Andrew is a natural leader - serving as the President of his class for two consecutive years where he demonstrates exceptional leadership skills, sound judgment, and the ability to inspire his peers. Andrew's leadership extends beyond the classroom, as he has been an integral part of our school's athletic teams, including baseball and football. His determination, teamwork, and sportsmanship have contributed significantly to our school's athletic success. Andrew is not only a leader within the school but also a dedicated member of the National Honor Society, Safe School Climate Committee, Best Buddies, and the Prom Committee. In addition, he dedicates countless hours to community service. His involvement in these organizations speaks to his commitment to fostering inclusivity, positive school culture, and community building. Andrew's

contributions to these groups have been invaluable, and his passion for making a positive impact on his school community is truly commendable.

Ella Paul has made countless contributions to Cheshire High School, as well as the Cheshire community. Examples of her leadership include being President of the Best Buddies chapter, Co-President of the Student Senate, Editor-in-Chief of the school newspaper and President of the Mock Trial Club. Ella is also a contributing member of the Cheshire Education Foundation, the Safe School Climate Committee, CHS Link Crew, and the Advisory and Scheduling Committee. In addition to these committees, she actively performs in the school's drama productions and is a varsity athlete on the field hockey team. She has participated in countless volunteer opportunities, many of which directly work with younger children in and around Cheshire such as the Therapeutic Recreation Program, Youth Field Hockey coaching, the Challengers Baseball team and the Lights of Hope. Ella has participated in numerous leadership experiences and training including the HOBY Youth Leadership program. In her spare time, Ella

After their introduction, Andrew and Ella reported on recent events at Cheshire High School. Andrew began by reporting on the athletic teams. He noted all varsity teams are undefeated at this point. He reported that Girls Volleyball coach, Sue Bavone is approaching her 600th win. Head Football coach, Don Drust was named the New York Jets High School Football Coach of the Week, and he will be honored on December 10 at the New York Jets versus the Texas Houston Texans game. The marching band will be participating in Music in Motion. Lastly, Andrew reported that Cheshire High School is being honored with a 2022-23 Michel's Achievement Cup. This is the sixth award in seven years.

Ella reported they have had a very successful start to the new school year. She reported on freshman orientation with Link Crew. The fall play finished auditions and are beginning rehearsals. National Honor Society induction is coming up next week. Clubs have started. The PSAT will be held on October 18.

Board members welcomed the new student reps!

2. **PRESENTATIONS**

A. **Teacher of the Year**

Dr. Solan announced that Cheshire Public Schools is excited to announce the selection of Katherine Zukis as the 2023-2024 Cheshire Public Schools Teacher of the Year! Katherine is a First-Grade teacher at Norton School. Katherine began her teaching career in New Britain as a long-term substitute and joined the Cheshire team in 2009 working first at Highland and then at Norton School where she has spent the past thirteen years.

Colleagues who have had the pleasure of encountering Ms. Zukis' teaching know the warmth that she exudes and the way she makes every child feel special. Her colleagues and supervisors recognize how talented she is in growing her students. Her first graders are able to consistently meet their academic goals because of the caring, accepting environment she creates that enables all students to take academic risks.

Katherine personifies calm, grace and poise. She welcomes every child to her classroom in the same way that she would want her own children to be received; appreciated for who they are as individuals and called upon to reach their very best potential. Ms. Zukis' teaching exemplifies the interconnectedness of social emotional learning and complex thinking.

Katherine serves on a number of committees including the new schools working group. She is an intervention team leader, district grade level representative and has been a presenter on Responsive Classroom practices within our district sharing her talents with other educators. She also serves as a mentor teacher working with college student interns who are studying to become teachers.

In addition to her work as a teacher, Katherine is a wife and mother to her two children Harper and Ford. In her spare time, Katherine volunteers at her children's school serving as co-chair of the fundraising committee, coordinator of family-school events and maintains the garden in front of their school.

Katherine stated in her acceptance speech during convocation that how we make children feel matters. She shared that it is her truest belief that the only way forward in our society is through education. She spoke about the impact an excellent teacher can have. Katherine Zukis is a gifted educator who is not only talented but also humble and articulate. Katherine will represent Cheshire's education community with a grace that will shine a positive light on the profession and make us all proud to be a part of this calling.

Ms. Zukis thanked the Board and Administration for all their support. Katherine was presented with a plaque and the Board members congratulated her.

B. Paraeducator of the Year

Robin Anne Carey, Director of Pupil Personnel Services presented Kristina Veilleux, Paraeducator from Doolittle School, as the Paraeducator of the Year. Ms. Carey said, The Ann Marie Murphy Paraeducator of the Year Award was established by the State of Connecticut Department of Education and the School of Paraprofessional Advisory Council to recognize the important role of the Paraeducator in supporting student achievement. This award is named in honor of Anne Marie Murphy, a Paraeducator who lost her life at Sandy Hook. It recognizes a Paraeducator who demonstrates exceptional skill and dedication in the performance of his or her job. Ms. Carey stated that she is delighted to be able

to honor Cheshire's Paraeducator of the Year. With over 100 Paraeducators in our district, the decision and choosing one person to honor and represent this group is a difficult one. As a paraeducator, she demonstrates many attributes that make her exceptional. Her knowledge of instructional strategies and ability to think on her feet, making adjustments based on student's needs are skills valued and appreciated by every educator. She understands and develops strong relationships with all students, addressing them by name in the classroom and in the hallways. When working with students, she demonstrates patience, a positive attitude, a calm demeanor, and genuine interest. She has worked with students who are challenging both instructionally, and behaviorally. There have been times when she has been called on to train others and to take some additional summer hours even though she may have been planning on taking a summer vacation and enjoying her time off. She agrees to take on these positions, because she wants the students to have a positive summer experience. Her day working with students is not done at the bell. She is very active in the PTA at Doolittle School, bringing many activities to the school. Did you know that Doolittle has a drama club? She has helped produce plays and musicals. Ms. Carey stated that she was so pleased to introduce Cheshire's Paraeducator of the Year, Kristina Veilleux.

Kristina said she grew up in Cheshire and attended Cheshire schools. She said the commitment to education in this town is amazing. Kristina also said she is excited that they are about to start a Best Buddies Chapter at Doolittle. She is starting this chapter with a parent volunteer, and it will be the first elementary school in town to have a Best Buddies chapter.

Board members congratulated Kristina Veilleux and presented her with a plaque.

3. **AUDIENCE**

None.

4. **CONSENT CALENDAR**

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

MOVED that *the Cheshire Board of Education approves the Consent Calendar as presented.*

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

CONSENT ITEMS:

Approval of Statement on Class Size Policy

In accordance with the *Agreement between the Cheshire Board of Education and the Education Association of Cheshire*, Article XXIII, the Board of Education hereby publishes and provides to the Association its policy relating to class size:

“That the Board shall endeavor to maintain class sizes consistent with proven educational practices which require that various learning situations may alter the number of students per class. The Board, through its committees, shall study and make recommendations concerning personnel and space requirements based on all factors affecting class size.”

Approval of ACES Annual Membership Agreement

Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) is a Regional Educational Service Center, pursuant to Section 10-66a of the Connecticut General Statutes, which acts as a voluntary association of member Boards of Education establishing a cooperative arrangement to provide services, programs, and activities for the education of children. Each year participating Boards of Education must renew their participation in ACES by (a) carrying out its responsibilities as described in the Membership Agreement, (b) paying an assessment fee of \$250, and (c) appointing Board of Education Members to serve as Representative and Alternate to the ACES Governing Board.

“That the Cheshire Board of Education agrees to participate for the 2023-24 school year in Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) as set forth in the ACES Annual Membership Agreement and appoints a Representative and Alternate to the ACES Governing Board.”

Appointment of Hearing Officer

Cheshire Board of Education Policy #5114 permits the Board of Education to appoint a hearing officer to preside over matters pertaining to student discipline and school accommodations. This individual does not preside over a matter unless the Board of Education opts to permit such a hearing to take place.

For example, should a student discipline matter require an expulsion hearing, the Board would be notified and given the option to hold the hearing as provided in Connecticut statutes or it could allow the matter to be heard by the appointed hearing officer. The hearing officer is used more often than not because in most student discipline cases that raise to the level of expulsion the matters are spelled out in state law and the action required is not discretionary, but rather mandated. Further, in many cases involving expulsion, a stipulated agreement is developed prior to the hearing, which renders any need for an evidentiary hearing unnecessary.

Dr. Solan recommends that the Board appoint Attorney Stephen M. Sedor as hearing officer. Attorney Sedor is the chair of Pullman & Comley’s School Law Practice Group. He has a wealth of knowledge in all areas of education law and is the hearing officer for expulsions, residency, and transportation hearings in several districts in Connecticut.

“Move that the Cheshire Board of Education reappoint Attorney Stephen Sedor of Pullman & Comley as hearing officer for the 2023-2024 school year.”

5. REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

A. CURRICULUM

I. Report on Meeting Held September 11, 2023

Ms. Ham reported that at the meeting the Committee discussed Flexibilities for Implementing the Guidelines for Educator Evaluation for 2023-24. In addition, Ms. Silano reviewed the third annual Curriculum Writing Institute that took place over the summer where over 80 teachers attended. The committee was informed on multilingual learner enrollment. She said there are now 477 students who fit into this category, and they represent almost 50 languages. The Committee received the state testing results, also included in tonight’s board packet. The report highlighted that state assessment results are continuing an overall trend toward pre-COVID achievement levels. This year, Cheshire has the eighth highest achievement in Connecticut for ELA and Math Grades 3-8. There is a continued focus on engaging high school students in classrooms that feature active learning that emphasizes application and complex thinking. The ELA improvement plans made through the curriculum review process this year give the district a roadmap to success. Ms. Ham reviewed some of the scores. She said there is a lot to be pleased with and some areas that need attention.

Discussion:

Chairman Perugini stated we are climbing back to pre COVID levels with the SAT, which is a good trend. However, the opposing perspective, the top scoring district on ELA, the average score is 586 and Cheshire was 544. In math, the top scoring district was 586 and Cheshire is 538. He said he is sure we can close that gap. He said it is not all about test scores. He said if folks have been following the Curriculum Committee meetings over the last year or so, there were quite a few meetings where Ms. Silano spoke about strategies for learning awareness in the classrooms, and there are some new materials for the middle school. He said if the progress continues, we will see some better scores next year. He thanked the district staff for all the work they put into Bounce Forward trying to get back on a positive trajectory.

Ms. Rosenberg said she appreciates the native language report, it's showing us that the town is becoming more diverse. She asked what we are doing to meet the needs of these learners. She asked if the Board could receive a breakdown of the high needs percentage. She would like to see how those populations are doing. She said that maybe we need to

reevaluate our Bounce Forward plan, because it looks like our increases, based on what Mr. Perugini is saying, the growth is not as substantial as it should be. She asked that they look at it again because our pre pandemic numbers were in the 80's and it is moving slowly, only a few percentage points since 2018-19.

Ms. Silano responded, regarding the multilingual learners, that we have 477 students in our school, whose primary language is not English, and they are learning English as a second, sometimes third, even fourth language. She said she shared this information as a backdrop for us pursuing a Seal of Biliteracy for our students who have mastered more than one language. One of the things that we do to make sure teachers have the support that they need is to collaborate with a coach at ACES. The coach came last week and spent a full day with our teachers at our high school where we have 224 students who speak more than one language. In the coming weeks we have this scheduled for our teachers at Dodd and our teachers at the elementary schools, and the consultant is also going to provide in classroom coaching. In addition, we have our literacy or learning support tutors at the elementary schools, who support students in learning another language. At the middle school our reading teacher, as well as her paraeducator, work to do the same thing. At the high school, we have a lovely woman; her name is Amy Russell, who supports those students as well. We have multi tiers of support at each level through elementary, middle, and high school. Regarding high needs students in Cheshire, we have some of the top scores for our high needs students. Ms. Silano said she would share that information with the Board.

Mr. White said he is no fan of standardized tests, but that is how we review Cheshire Public Schools, so he has to agree with Ms. Rosenberg. He asked how it is determined what the first language is. Ms. Silano responded that when a student is registered, on the registration paperwork they tell us the primary language spoken at home.

Mr. Grippo noted when we came out of COVID she used the term "acceleration" and asked if it is still happening. Ms. Silano responded that the district has embraced it to such an extent that it is our definition of high-quality instruction. It is happening at all grade levels. When the teachers and our teacher leaders came together, and we were talking about the concept of acceleration, everyone agreed that this is the right thing to do, not just to help post COVID or during COVID, but because this is good teaching. Therefore, the answer to that is yes, we are meeting all our students where they are but making sure they have access to grade level instruction.

Mr. Grippo said in 2018-19 we were really succeeding, then COVID hit, we use acceleration and now the recovery does not seem to be as quick. It because the damage from COVID was so substantial that it is not recoverable. Ms. Silano said these scores are the only apples to apples comparison we have. When we look at other districts, they are also striving to get back to pre COVID levels. We had a great year pre COVID. We could feel things gelling and knew we were headed in the right direction. I am confident that we will get back there; we are not back there yet.

Dr. Solan added that when you look at growth, in terms of our percentage of students who achieved the growth target or met the growth target. From 2022 to 2023, ELA and math combined, we had the highest growth in DRG B. We were 16th in the State of Connecticut, in 2016, our achievement for math and ELA in 3 - 8 was 35th in Connecticut. You're correct and that we were fifth of the K-12 districts in 2018-19 before the pandemic, we are now 8th. The school districts that are outperforming us are New Canaan, Darien, Weston, Westport, Madison, Wilton, and Richfield, and not by a great measure. Of course, we want to be top five again, but we are not 35th, either. We're achieving at an incredibly high level, outperforming almost every other school system in our DRG, and many who spend dramatically more money than we do in that process. He said there are certainly places where we want to continue to improve.

II. Educator Evaluation and Support Plan – Flexibilities for Implementing the Guidelines for Educator Evaluation for 2023-24.

Ms. Silano shared the recommendations of the Cheshire Educator Evaluation Committee to continue to implement flexibilities for the CT Guidelines for Educator Evaluation (2017) for the 2023-24 School Year as offered/allowed by the state. The flexibilities include the option to conduct more frequent informal observations as opposed to less frequent formal observations. The recommendation from the committee requires the approval of the Board of Education, and Ms. Silano requested a motion to move the committee's recommendation forward to the full Board of Education for approval.

MOTION by Ms. Ham and seconded by Ms. Harrigan

MOVED *that the Cheshire Board of Education adopt the Flexibilities to the Fundamental Requirements of the Connecticut Guidelines for Educator Evaluator 2017 for the 2023-24 School Year."*

Discussion

Ms. Rosenberg asked Ms. Silano to highlight the fact that there is no summative writing anymore and it is more based on feedback. Ms. Silano responded that she has not had a chance to review those flexibilities that she just received last week. They will be reviewing those in Curriculum once the staff committee has reviewed them, most likely in the spring.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

B. FINANCE

I. Finance Report

Mr. Masciana reported the budget for the 2023-24 fiscal year is \$84,993,429. While we have expended and encumbered \$20,426,628 during the first two months of the new fiscal year, they have not yet entered the bulk of our encumbrances for our largest accounts, namely payroll and transportation or grants. We expect our September and October reports to be more reflective of our full-year financial picture as it will include the encumbrances for our major expenditure categories. At this time, there are no variance concerns to report, but do note the following items related to our 23-24 budget.

- On January 1, 2024, Connecticut's minimum wage will increase from the current rate of \$15.00 per hour to \$15.69 per hour as a result of the state's first-ever economic indicator adjustment. In line with this announcement, effective on January 1, 2024, we will need to adjust the salary of approximately 40 employees who are in positions that pay at or above the current minimum wage of \$15 but are below the new \$15.69 minimum. The impact of this increase will be minimal to our salary budget.
- Energy Price Locks – Energy markets continue to be volatile, and we have been monitoring prices and working with our consultant on the best course of action. We were able to lock the prices on the below energy commodities, ensuring that we will meet our budget for the respective line items in 2023-24:
 - Heating – Oil at \$2.583/gallon, Propane at \$2.29/gallon
 - Transportation - Diesel Fuel at \$2.698/gallon, Gasoline at \$2.524/gallon
 - Electricity - \$.1170/kWh (Supply)For the time being, we will purchase natural gas from Eversource at market pricing because the locked pricing options are not attractive.

II. Medical Benefits Update

The report is through July 31. As of July 31, claims were about \$1.07 million. We are expecting them to be about \$1.1 million per month. We

ended the month at \$2,099,000, a little below the two-month reserve balance that is desired.

Ms. Rosenberg asked if we budgeted for the wage increase. Mr. Masciana replied that this is a surprise. He expects the impact to be minimal because it only affects 40 employees. He said he needs to do more research, but the law says that beginning in 2024, hourly minimum wages in Connecticut will change yearly in response to a national measure of inflation in the labor market, called the unemployed holding employment cost index.

C. PERSONNEL

I. Report on Meeting Held September 18, 2023.

Mr. White, Chair of the Personnel Committee, reported that at the meeting the Committee discussed the Superintendent's goals for the year. The meeting was held in Executive Session. He will be scheduling another Personnel Committee meeting to continue discussion on the goals.

II. Approval of Bargaining Unit Agreement between the Cheshire Board of Education and the Cheshire Administrative Personnel

MOTION by Mr. White, seconded by Mr. Perugini. (8:47 pm)

MOVED to go into Executive Session to discuss the Agreement between the Cheshire Board of Education and the Cheshire Administrative Personnel including Dr. Solan, Ms. Silano and Mr. Masciana.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

The meeting reconvenes at 9:10 p.m.

MOTION by Mr. White, seconded by Ms. Ham.

MOVED that *the Cheshire Board of Education approves the collective bargaining agreement with the Cheshire Administrative Personnel for the period of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2028.*

Discussion:

Mr. White thanked the administrators for negotiating in good faith. He said he thinks it is a reasonable contract for everyone involved.

Ms. Ham said she sat in on the negotiations and agrees with Mr. White's comments.

Chairman Perugini said it is a four-year contract. There will be a 3% increase in years one and two, 2.75% in year 3 and 2.5% in year four. There will also be changes to insurance deductibles and vacation time for new employees.

Mr. Grippo said he feels the contract is fair and he appreciates the stability it gives to our budget for the next four years.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

D. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES

None.

6. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION by Mr. Perugini and seconded Ms. Harrigan.

MOVED that *the Board of Education approve the Amended Minutes from meetings held on June 1, June 30, and September 7, 2023.*

Modifications:

- In the minutes of the June 1 meeting, Mr. Martelli is listed as present but was not in attendance.
- Ms. Rosenberg's name was misspelled on page 6 of the minutes.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously to approve the minutes as amended by those present.

7. CORRESPONDENCE

Ms. Ham said an email was received from Mr. Michael Sheehan regarding Grade 7 reading curriculum. A copy of the email is included in the minutes. Ms. Harrigan asked if someone is addressing the Board that they include all Board members.

8. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Solan noted Cheshire High School will be holding a special breakfast in recognition of our firefighters, police and EMTs. Along with our community partners, like social services and public works. The Science Department at the high school has been doing some exciting things. They just received a grant for the Planet Mars Challenge through the Connecticut Space Consortium. Additionally, they have been working with ACES who will be facilitating a science collaborative between the Department of Education in South Korea and high schools in America where students are given various challenges. Our Cheshire High students will work collaboratively with students from high school in South Korea to solve these challenges. In the spring, there's a symposium in where our students will be invited to present, so that may be a field trip request coming forward, because we had really strong interest. We had 22 students express interest in participating

in the Science Challenge. In addition, to just give a quick update on the high needs student population performance for 3 – 8 in Connecticut, we ranked 9th in K - 12 districts and 10th in Math in K - 12. Districts. Overall, we were 9th there as well, for our high needs student population.

Regarding School Modernization, we are hosting two special events. On Tuesday night at Chapman school, we will be hosting community members for the North End program. There will be a presentation from Tecton. On Wednesday night we have the Norton addition of that, at Norton school and again, at seven o'clock Tecton will be presenting the schematic design for that building and soliciting feedback from the community. This was mailed to every address in Cheshire several weeks ago to give people ample time to be there. In subsequent weeks, we will have some virtual sessions.

9. **OLD BUSINESS**

None.

10. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **Chairperson's Update**

Mr. Perugini said CABA had a Director's meeting last week and were graced by having that Commissioner Russell Tucker, in attendance. With the key Board Directors in a room, he said he wanted to thank her for her hour and a half of answering every question posed to her. She spoke quite a bit on teacher shortages in Connecticut. She had mentioned that now there are six to eight states with reciprocity. They will be able to teach in Connecticut, using that certification. She mentioned about the possibility of adjunct faculty being able to teach in public schools as another pathway to help with a shortage.

Mr. Perugini reported on upcoming board meetings. The next board meeting is October 5, and it is an Open Forum meeting held in Town Council Chambers in the open forum setting where they break out into our respective committee groups and we invite members of the public to sit down with us.

11. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mr. Martelli, and seconded by Ms. Ham, the meeting was adjourned at 9:30 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: 10/17/2023.