

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING  
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON OCTOBER 19, 2023, AT 7:30 PM**

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Board Members Present: Anthony Perugini-Chair; Adam Grippo-Vice Chair; Anne Harrigan, PhD.-Secretary; Andrew Martelli, Samantha Rosenberg, Timothy White

Board Members Absent: Faith Ham

Administrators Present: Jeffrey F. Solan, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools; Marlene Silano, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Robin-Anne Carey, Director, Pupil Personnel Services; Kimberly Dessert, Principal-Darcey School; Scott Jeffrey, Principal, Highland Elementary; 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.  
Mr. Perugini led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
- C. Student Representatives. Andrew Elliot and Ella Paul, student representatives for the 2023/2024 school year, reported on recent events at Cheshire High School. The reps reported on extracurricular clubs, the spring musical, Music in Motion and Sports.

**2. PRESENTATIONS**

**A. School Partnership Award – Highland**

At this evening's meeting, Mr. Martelli, the Board of Education representative to Highland School, introduced the school's recipient, Cara Scotti Dargis and her dog Chloe. Ms. Dargis and her therapy dog Chloe joined the Highland community in September 2021 and completed their service in June 2023. Cara and Chloe are part of an organization called Pet Partners. Over the past three years, Cara and Chloe have been coming to Highland School to visit classrooms throughout the building. Students have had an opportunity to spend time with Chloe during regular classroom visits. On some occasions, Chloe has enjoyed independent reading where students have enjoyed reading their books to Chloe. There is an immediate response of joy when the students see Chloe enter their classroom. Chloe is a nine-year-old shepherd husky mix who loves to be around the students. Chloe and her handler, Cara, have dedicated their time to the students and staff of Highland School. Cara and Chloe retired this past spring. Highland School's principal, Scott Jeffrey said their service to the Highland community has left a lasting impression and positive impact on the overall climate of the school. Board Members presented Ms. Dargis and Chloe with a small gift and thanked them for going above and beyond for the students in Cheshire Public Schools.

3. **AUDIENCE**

Many members of the public spoke in support of making the Fencing Club a varsity sport.

Ben Palladino, 25 Leclerc Avenue. Mr. Palladino said he was surprised to discover that fencing, an Olympic sport, was only a club in Cheshire. The fencers put in just as much time as other athletes who are recognized at the varsity level. The fencing team participates in a league where most schools recognize their fencers as varsity athletes. He said it is embarrassing when I enter another school in our league, and I see an entire trophy case dedicated to the sport of fencing and we have none.

Heather Von Fischer, 428 Cook Hill Road. Ms. Von Fischer said she is here to propose that the fencing club be promoted to be a funded varsity sport. Her husband formed Cheshire fencing and they have been maintaining it since 2003. In 2003, the children advocated for themselves to be a recognized club at Cheshire High School. The greatest challenges come with the lack of recognition and access to benefits offered to other sports.

Cathy Palladino, 25 Leclerc Avenue. Ms. Palladino shared testimony from Samantha Bosque, a former Cheshire High School student who said fencing gave her structure and leadership opportunities, activity, strength training and joy. She said other schools never took them seriously because we were a club.

Kim O'Donnell, 20 Mount Sanford Road. Ms. O'Donnell said her two kids fenced for Cheshire High School. There is a population of kids who are never going to play ball sports on a field, but it means so much to them to be able to find a sport, an Olympic sport, where they can feel competent, feel successful and change how they think about themselves.

James Poling, 20 Mount Sanford Road. Mr. Poling, one of the founding members of Cheshire Fencing Club, said the students certainly are an underserved population within the High School. Fencing is accessible to a certain sort of student. There's something about fencing, that kind of physical chest that no other sport brings. And it is a sort of gateway and an introduction to a world of athletics that the students probably wouldn't have.

Phil Newton, 158 North Brooksvale Road. Mr. Newton read a letter from his daughter, Lauren Newton, 2018 graduate who said Cheshire fencing was part of her livelihood from fifth grade all the way through senior year of high school. When I was in high school, I was on a mission to support and grow the club as

Ben Palladino, 25 Leclerc Avenue. As a Cheshire High School Junior, he has been fencing since the second grade. Most of his peers do not respect the sport of fencing let alone athletes who fence. He said he always tried not to let it bother him, but at this point feels that the school community does not take them seriously. Beginning in his eighth-

grade year, he found himself not bringing up fencing at all and actually hiding his love for this amazing sport. The disrespectful comments continued through high school. It is sad that despite their accomplishments as a team, the school community still does not take them seriously.

John Pierson, 1341 Peck Lane. A student at Cheshire High School, said he has been fencing for about three years and has noticed that fencing has brought a lot of joy to a lot of different people. Being unrecognized from an official sport, he can see it weighing down other people. Taking longer to be ready for meets, sharing equipment, giving one another jackets because they can't afford more, it's embarrassing. He feels that better equipment and transportation will give us a better representation.

Victoria Nichols, 35 Currier Way. As a student at Cheshire High School, she said she has never been a fan of joining new groups until she became a fencer last year. There's a different kind of family I could be a part of at Cheshire. My friends say that's so cool you're in the Fencing Club, but why is it not a sport? I always tell them I don't know why.

Iman Neqvi, 7 Currier Way. As a Cheshire High School student, she said she is one of the captains this year. She started fencing her sophomore year of high school and remembers feeling nervous and scared since she had never been a part of a community like that before. Fencing gave her the confidence to join other clubs and try new things. It should be regarded as a sport. Where we have to drive ourselves to sometimes an hour away. If we were classified as a sport we would not have to worry about transportation to our competitions and tournaments.

James Labrecque, 1289 Deer Run Circle. Mr. Labrecque read a letter from his son and former fencer Barrett Labrecque). He started fencing in sixth grade and wanted to quit after two classes. Thank goodness his parents encouraged him to keep trying. If not for fencing, he never would have found his place. After becoming a competitive club, it meant the world to us and it meant we finally had a stable place to practice and compete. We, not the high school, chartered a yellow bus to bring us to the state championship. We won and it wasn't our last. Imagine a whole generation of fencers won't need luck to get started because they'll see and hear about it as a sport.

John Minardi, 244 Crescent Circle. Mr. Minardi read a letter from Scott Von Fischer. The club began humbly by a handful of young students requesting that I bring this sport to Cheshire. In a few short years, it was a completely different set of students that petitioned and gained club status at the high school. At that time the club was supported by amazing volunteers, athletes, Olympians, first responders, and educators. Now 20 years later, students come to you looking for a venue and the recognition to support this town and compete in the sport they love so dearly. As of now it is not sustainable to sustain a level of competitiveness in the state of which this town is known for.

Cadence LaFrance, 184 Towpath Lane. A student at Cheshire High School, speaking on behalf of a teammate and herself. With the restrictions that come with not being identified as a sport there are limitations for students to partake in the activity in the situation of no buses. Students may not be able to get rides from parents which may cause them to not be able to participate at all. By making Cheshire Fencing a sport and offering the amenities that come with it our fencing group can grow and get even better in the future.

Grace Bian, 264 Higgins Road. She said fencing is a place where everyone can feel they belong. She felt a part of the family and loved every aspect of the challenging and rewarding sport. She said she is more confident and developed leadership skills. In order to continue teaching new fencers and compete in tournaments they need coaches. In the past, they have been made up of CHS graduate volunteers.

Carol Wonderlich, 1257 Marion Road. She said she has been involved with the high school team for many years. Her daughter started when she was a sophomore and as with many people in this room several of us parents decided to take lessons once our children graduated. These skills, techniques and thought processes help shape who you are and how you navigate life after high school. It's a sport where an able bodied person can fence someone in a wheelchair. The only limits are the ones you impose on yourself.

Javen Zhang, 5 Bluefield Court. A junior at Cheshire High School said he feels obligated to support my team because they mean so much to him. Freshman year he almost quit. This quickly changed in tenth-grade where he went to his first game. He said this fencing community has truly been the highlight of my high school career.

Grant Lowzar (Reading a letter from former student, Eric Wurts) "Even though I am unable to attend tonight's meeting I hope that my input may still be able to aid in the decision to make Cheshire High School Fencing Club into an official varsity sport. I graduated in 2022 and returned to coach last year, but due to scheduling conflicts was unable to this year. I can certainly say that one of the best parts of my high school experience was fencing. Like many students, I came to Cheshire High hardly knowing anyone and it was through the amazing Fencing Club I was able to make lasting friendships and make meaningful connections with other students. One of the persistent challenges of Cheshire High School Fencing Club is transportation. Students have to rely on parents. Due to the nature of the sport, there is a certain number of fences needed to compete. Being just one member short can lead to immediate forfeit. If they are provided transportation in the form of a bus it will lead to better attendance as well as make it easier to know if the team is able to fully compete."

Blake Wetmore, 8 Pondsides Place. A former student, he fenced all throughout his schooling years. After college, realized the team was looking for coaches, so for the past six years he has been the head skills coach. The passion for sport is clearly there and the dedication is there. The hardest part has really been on our side, making the program continue whether from transportation or vitally coaches knowing the sport and doing it. If

we can get money to go out and hire a coach, we'd be able to consistently progress this club forward and really see amazing things happen.

Michael Milici, 1135 Sperry Road. A former student, he said he started fencing in 2008 alongside his sister at Norton Elementary School. He fell in love and never stopped. Through middle school and high school, he played football, track, fencing, and baseball and fencing is the one sport he wishes he could keep doing. Getting funding for this sport would greatly enhance the sport to come.

Aline Nichols, 35 Currier Way. Ms. Nichols said fencing has helped many high school students in Cheshire for the last twenty years. Last year her daughter was invited by a good friend to join in the fencing team and we're so happy she did. She blossomed, in almost every aspect. Each year this sport grows more and more and she hopes that this unique and elegant sport can receive the BOE and superintendent support.

Shuman Bian, 264 Higgins Road. She said her daughter Grace joined the Cheshire High School fencing team last year and she really likes it and participates diligently and asks her parents to purchase uniforms and she even won a medal in one of her matches. She said for her, the fencing team is very much a regular school sports team. Unlike other sports, they do not have budget support from the school, they don't have a paid coach, they don't have bus transportation to and from games out of town, and they are really a second-class sports team at Cheshire High School. It is painfully unfair to the many fencing students. They should be treated the same way as the other sports teams. Please support us with regular budgets, bus transportations and other benefits enjoyed by all the student sports.

Sandra Marchant, 54 Bronson Road, Prospect, CT. (CT Fencing Coach) Ms. Marchant said she is here because she know some of these student athletes and parents. She teaches and coaches fencing and teaches at Quinnipiac University. She said she had no idea Cheshire doesn't have fencing as a varsity sport. She said there's twenty-three other schools in Connecticut that have fencing and is a varsity sport. These kids deserve this, they deserve a place they fit in, they deserve a place that has opportunity for growth. Cheshire High is a fantastic school. You have everything here. They really do deserve it. They work so hard. They're looking beyond school competition with their leadership skills. This teaches them confidence.

Mr. Perugini thanked everyone for coming to the meeting this evening and speaking. Mr. Perugini explained the budget process begins in January. Each of the Board members acknowledged the speakers and said that they will take this request seriously during the budget process.

#### **4. REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES**

##### **A. CURRICULUM**

##### **I. Report on Meeting Held October 16, 2023.**

In Ms. Ham's absence, Ms. Harrigan gave the Curriculum report. She said the committee discussed the legislation changing the kindergarten starting age from five years old by January 1 to five years old by September 1. She asked Ms. Silano to report on this.

## **II. Discussion/Possible Action on Proposed Transition Program**

Ms. Silano reported on Public Act 23-159 that changes the starting age of kindergarten from turning 5 years old by December 31 of a school year to September 1 of a school year. The implementation date for the legislation is for the 2024-2025 school year. She explained that districts must have a process, which starts with a parent making a written request for early admission to kindergarten if the child is not 5 years of age by September 1. The principal and a team must then provide an assessment to determine if kindergarten is developmentally appropriate for the under-age child. Currently, the state has not recommended any specific assessment and the assessment process is currently left up to each district. Districts are awaiting further guidance from the State Department of Education and the Office of Early Childhood. She said that by looking at historical data, they determined this would affect approximately sixty families. She said they are considering starting a one-year transition program at Darcey School for only those children who fall within the birthdate range. A Kindergarten teacher and a paraeducator would be reallocated per enrollment. They are estimating that they would need to charge a tuition of \$5,500 to break even. This would cover the cost of a teacher and a paraeducator. Like our other preschool programs, parents would also provide transportation. Those students who would attend this program would then attend kindergarten the following year, they would not go to first grade. The curriculum is something that would be based on the Connecticut Early Learning and Developmental standards. Ms. Silano said that they feel this would be worthwhile because it addresses the immediate issue of these families. We are meeting them halfway as this would certainly be much cheaper than daycare, and commensurate with a pre-school program.

Dr. Solan added that the space will be available because these students are not enrolling in kindergarten because of the age change. He said research shows that it is beneficial for students to wait until they are five. He said if we have sixty students not attending, we will have to have a reduction in staff.

Ms. Rosenberg inquired about student-teacher ratios. Ms. Silano said there would be two adults, one teacher and one paraeducator per class. She said she thinks this is a great idea. She said she is fully in support of this option.

Mr. White asked about before and after care. Ms. Silano noted there is already a YMCA before and after care at Darcey School.

Mr. Grippo asked about certification and if kindergarten teachers are certified to teach pre-school. Ms. Silano indicated that they checked with the state who told them our current Kindergarten teachers could teach this transition program.

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

***MOVED** that the Board of Education approve a one-year transition program, to accommodate Public Act No. 23-159 raising the kindergarten starting age.*

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

***MOVED** that the Board of Education approve a one-year transition program, to accommodate Public Act No. 23-159 raising the kindergarten starting age for the 2024-2025 school year.*

**SECOND AMENDED MOTION** by Ms. Rosenberg, seconded by Mr. Grippo.

***MOVED** that the Board of Education approve a transition program, to accommodate Public Act No. 23-159 raising the kindergarten starting age for the 2024-2025 school year.*

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

Continuing with the Committee report, Ms. Silano provided follow-up information regarding the 2023 Smarter Balanced Assessment growth data. The report included a comparison of Cheshire growth data to all of District Reference Group (DRG) B. One indicator of growth data, as measured by the state, is the average percentage of target achieved (APTA) for individual students. In ELA, Cheshire ranked third in the DRG in ELA and ranked ninth in Math.

Mr. Grippo noted the drop in Grades 7 and 8 for math and ELA. Ms. Silano noted this is not only Cheshire but also across the state. She said the board approved a new textbook last year. The rigor and resource that was being used may not have been up to standard. Mr. Grippo asked if this would ripple up through high school. Ms. Silano said that the hope is that when the students are exposed to more rigorous content that they will rise to a higher level.

Ms. Rosenberg asked what we are doing to support our middle schoolers. Ms. Silano said we had a universal screener that we were using, and that universal screener has changed with our new resource. That is one way that we identify those students. She said they have been a little more targeted and teachers have received more support with identifying students who need support in math, and looking at the interventions that we are providing them with. They also have looked at the roles of some of the math teachers, and we have moved one of our teachers into a role where he has additional time to help with coaching. Dr. Solan added that in addition to intervention and curricular adjustments, they have made instructional adjustments.

## **B. FINANCE**

### **I. Finance Report**

In Mr. Masciana's absence, Mr. Grippo read the Finance Report. We have expended and/or encumbered \$60,718,879 during the first three months of the new fiscal year, which includes most of our payroll encumbrances for the year but not all our transportation encumbrances which should be entered in October. At this time, there are no variance concerns to report, but do note the following items related to our 23-24 budget:

- CT Minimum Wage Increase - Governor Ned Lamont announced on 9/18/23 that beginning on January 1, 2024, Connecticut's minimum wage will increase from the current rate of \$15.00 per hour to \$15.69 per hour because 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 on our salary budget.
- Energy Price Locks – Energy markets continue to be volatile, and we have been monitoring prices and collaborating 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)

### **II. Report on Meeting Held October 3, 2023.**

Mr. Grippo reported on the meeting held October 3, 2023 where the Committee discussed the approval of an increase in tuition for the pre-school program.



**III. Approval of Pre-K Tuition Rates**

Mr. Grippo noted the part-time Pre-School tuition rates have not been modified in at least 15 years.

**MOTION** by Mr. Grippo, seconded by Ms. Rosenberg.

**MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education approve a tuition increase for the part-time pre-school program as follows:

	<b>From Current Rate</b> (full year cost)	<b>To Proposed Rate</b> (full year cost)
3 Days per week	\$1,635	<b>\$1,735</b>
4 Days per week	\$2,190	<b>\$2,350</b>
5 Days per week	\$2,700	<b>\$2,900</b>

Discussion:

Ms. Harrigan asked what the percentage increase was. Dr. Solan responded it was not a straight percentage increase but based on a review of other integrated preschool programs. He said they intentionally kept these low to continue to entice families to participate, but they do reflect a slight increase.

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

**IV. Medical Benefits Report**

Mr. Grippo reported that claims were \$970,949. The Medical Benefits Reserve balance as of 9/30/2023 is \$1,957,081, about 1.78 months of reserves.

**C. POLICY**

**I. Report on Meeting Held October 11, 2023.**

Mr. Grippo reported that the Committee reviewed Administrative Regulation #2134 Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services. Revisions will update this title to Assistant Superintendent.

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

Mr. Grippo brought forward policy #6162.51 Surveys of Students (Student Privacy) for a third reading and approval.

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

***MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education give a third and final reading to Policy #6162.51 Surveys of Students (Student Privacy) and direct the Superintendent to put said policy into immediate effect.*

**VOTE:** The Motion passed 5-0-1 (Ms. Harrigan abstained.)

Mr. Grippo asked if there was a policy that defines the procedure of how the Board and/or administration consider how a club sport becomes varsity. Dr. Solan said we do not, but he did already pull a sample for the committee to review.

Mr. Perugini noted that there is a By-law regarding self-evaluations and he would like the Board to review it this year.

**D. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES**

None.

**5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**MOTION** by Mr. Perugini, seconded by Mr. Grippo.

**MOVED** that the Board of Education approve the minutes from meetings held on September 21, 2023, and October 25 2023.

Ms. Rosenberg noted that she would be abstaining from the October 5, 2023, minutes as she was not in attendance.

**AMENDED MOTION** by Mr. Grippo seconded by Mr. Perugini.

**MOVED** that the Board of Education approve the minutes from meetings held on September 21, 2023.

**VOTE:** The Motion passed 6-0 (Ms. Rosenberg abstained.)

**MOTION** by Mr. Perugini, seconded by Mr. White.

**MOVED** that the Board of Education approve the minutes from meetings held on October 25, 2023.

**VOTE:** The Motion passed 5-0-1 (Ms. Rosenberg abstained.)

**6. CORRESPONDENCE**

Ms. Harrigan read an email received from Marlena Soble, Co-chair of the Cheshire Food Drive thanking Cheshire Public Schools for their participation in the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Town wide Cheshire Food Drive.

**7. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

Regarding school modernization, Dr. Solan reported there have been exciting meetings over the course of the last several weeks, many with the community. In addition to the standard meetings, they hold Next Generation School Building Committee meetings. The Tecton architect team has worked diligently to get community feedback. There have been adjustments to some of the designs, with the North End design dramatically adjusted after community feedback. The Committee worked through consternation around the new Norton school design. Tecton is currently trying to update that design and considering community feedback.

Due to a recent request from the Board, we have solicited our local representatives in Hartford for dates to meet with the Board to collaborate with them and give each other the opportunity to hear concerns and end goals as we enter this next legislative session.

The Superintendent said he is excited that the survey reviewed and approved by the Board last year will kick-in starting late next week. The survey is designed to provide insight on how our school system is growing in respect to our social emotional goals. He said they look forward to sharing the results with the Curriculum Committee.

Mr. Grippo added that it is great to see all of the community participate in the school modernization meetings.

Ms. Rosenberg thanked the Superintendent for his immediate response to the crisis that is happening overseas in the Middle East.

**8. OLD BUSINESS**

None.

**9. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Chairperson's Update**

Mr. Perugini reported that he attended the Northeast School Board Association weekend conference. He said it was great to get insight from other school board members and he learned that we share many of the same challenges. Such as the shortage of teachers. Mr. Perugini also reported that CABA asked him to represent at the National School Board Election in Washington, DC in January.

Mr. Grippo mentioned that there was no Board of Education candidate forum and there is a great deal of misinformation in the public. Mr. Perugini noted the Townwide PTA did not organize one this year.

Chairman Perugini reminded Board members of the upcoming CABE conference.

**10. ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mr. Perugini, and seconded by Mr. Grippo, the meeting was adjourned at 10:15 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: \_\_\_\_\_.