

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING  
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON JANUARY 11, 2024 AT 7:30 PM**

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Board Members Present: Samantha Rosenberg-Chair; Anne Harrigan-Vice Chair; Adam Grippo-Secretary; Anne Marie Cullinan, Mark Ecke, Anthony Perugini, 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; Kristin Pelz, Assistant Principal, Cheshire High School; Maureen Reed, Ed.D., Assistant Principal, Cheshire High School; Daniel Tartarelli, Assistant Principal, Cheshire High School; John Perosino, Athletic Director, Cheshire High School; Kelly Grippo, Principal, Dodd Middle School; Ryan Murphy, Assistant Principal-Dodd Middle School; Katharine Carlucci, Assistant Principal, Chapman & Norton Elementary Schools; Kimberly Dessert, Principal, Darcey School; Amy O'Brien, Principal, Doolittle School; Kristin Lopa, Assistant Principal, Doolittle School; Jodie Roden, Principal, Norton School; Scott Jeffrey, Principal, Highland Elementary School; Erica Bordonaro, Assistant Principal, Highland Elementary School; Kevin Hanlon, K-8 Curriculum Coordinator; Christina Sherwood, Supervisor of Elementary Special Education; Marie Broadway, Supervisor of Secondary Special Education; Mike Woods, Community Engagement 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.*  
Ms. Rosenberg led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

**2. PRESENTATIONS**

**A. Superintendent's Proposed 2024/2025 Budget**

Ms. Rosenberg welcomed everyone and thanked Dr. Solan and his team for the extensive work preparing this budget. She said our community is growing and thriving and this comes with the challenges to maintain our world-class status. Maintaining and improving upon the excellence we as a community have come to expect and demand requires sustained investment and community support. She urged parents and families to join the Board by being a part of the process. She said the Board of Education encourages citizen participation in this critical decision-making process.

Superintendent Solan explained that this meeting is an overview of his budget proposal and said there will be subsequent meetings to delve further into his budget recommendation. He thanked Mr. Masciana, Chief Operating Officer, along with central office staff and all administrators who put a great deal of time and effort into this budget. He reviewed the Board’s responsibility, as well as his own, in this budget process. Dr. Solan explained that when developing the budget, two key paths are considered – social emotional learning and complex thinking. He reviewed the internal factors affecting the budget including student enrollment and medical benefits along with external factors such as Cheshire’s continued growth and development.

Superintendent Solan announced his 2024-2025 Budget Recommendation is 6.05% as follows:

2023-24 Budget	\$84,993,429
2024-2025 Recommendation	\$90,132,265
Medical Benefits Increase	\$ 1,059,418
All Other Increases	\$ 4,079,418
Total Increase	\$ 5,138,836
Total Increase %	6.05%
(Increase % without Benefits	4.80%)

Dr. Solan reviewed the driving factors in this budget are

- Increasing enrollment which is driving regular and special education staffing additions, higher special education outplacements and costs, and teacher and administrator positions that were previously funded through ARP ESSER funding since 2021;
- Higher wages exacerbated by Connecticut minimum wage increases;
- Medical benefit costs, and
- Facilities operating costs for utilities & maintenance.

This budget restores moderate increases in maintenance to address building and equipment issues, maintains class sizes, special education services, and medical benefit funding. This budget maintains assistant principal support at Norton (from .3 to .6) and Chapman (from 0 to .4), maintains a full-time elementary reading and math Specialist (Highland/Darcey) and maintains High School and Middle School math support teachers. In addition, the budget advances fencing from a club to a varsity sport. The net budget impact of advancing fencing is \$19,406.

Dr. Solan reviewed enrollment noting that as of January 10, 2024, we are within 22 students of next year's projections. We gained a net of 34 students since October 1, 2023. We are significantly outpacing birth rate projections.

Regarding Certified staffing, the increased elementary enrollment necessitates the addition of two positions (Doolittle and Highland) and the decrease of one position at Chapman. He said, moreover, with enrollment at 900 students at Highland, an additional Reading and Math Specialist is needed there. The K-6 enrollment has climbed by 320 students since 2018. With more intensive needs and special education programming. An elementary assistant principal is included in the budget.

In order to retain students with special education needs in district, the budget request includes one teacher for intensive education at Norton. Secondary math coaches have been providing intervention post-COVID and demonstrated positive impact on performance.

Regarding Non Certified staff, impacts include one Paraprofessional for Intensive Education program at Norton, 6.8 Paraprofessional positions that were added in 23-24 need to be retained for 2024-25, two Cafeteria Aides at Highland, one Cafeteria Aide at Dodd, one additional BOE bus driver, and a part-time special education consultative service at Highland.

Regarding Medical Benefits, the reserve is at 1.64 months of claims as of November 30, 2023 with a target of 2.0 months of claims or higher if possible. The medical benefits budget increase is intended to simply meet the expected claims rate for 24-25, increasing our monthly contribution rate from \$1,100,000 to \$1,188,000, an 8% increase. This does not enhance the reserve balance.

Superintendent Solan reviewed considerations that are not included in this budget. One item for consideration would be an elementary STEM program to provide students with pre-engineering skills and environmental science for grades 4 and 5. This would be two certified teachers at \$160,000 and \$200,000 for supplies.

He noted that Central Office support is very lean. In terms of number of students per Central Office administrators, we rank last at 167. Additional support would be very welcome.

Another consideration is regarding the Right to Read Act. If mandated, the implementation of the State's program would cost \$650,000. There has been no data shared showing any districts embracing these programs outperform Cheshire. He said he would continue to push for a waiver for Cheshire.

Dr. Solan briefly reviewed the budget increase by category explaining this will be reviewed in more detail at the budget review meetings. He also reviewed class size trends and student/teacher ratios. Projected revenue for 2024/2025 is \$10,705,508, noting these funds go directly to the Town of Cheshire, not to Cheshire Public Schools.

Lastly, the Superintendent reviewed the key takeaways.

- This budget, beyond some inflationary elements, reflects a thriving community where people want to live.
- Our achievement continues to climb as we maintain our focus on Complex Thinking and Social-Emotional growth.
- This budget is grounded in leveraging our resources to continue to achieve at exceptionally high levels.
- Cheshire Public Schools is an outstanding value for our community providing exceptional results while spending \$5,508,377 less than the DRG B average on a per pupil basis.

Mr. White asked how our enrollment growth compares with the state growth. Dr. Solan said he will get that data for the Board. Mr. White asked about the five new teachers. Dr. Solan explained that three of those teachers are already employed in our district but were previously paid for through a grant. There are only two teachers being added. Mr. White asked about the preschool/transition teachers. Dr. Solan said we currently have one full class and a waiting list for a second class. He will have a better idea at the end of the month if we will be net zero or have to make a reduction. Lastly, Mr. White encouraged parents to let their voices be heard regarding the Right to Read program. Our students are achieving at the top of the state and it will be detrimental to our students.

Mr. Perugini said he would personally like to have seen the STEM consideration included in the budget and not as a consideration. Dr. Solan said they would appreciate the Board giving this initiative consideration.

**3. ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mr. Perugini and seconded by Mr. White, the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Samantha Rosenberg, Board Chair

Attest:

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Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

Filed at the Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, Cheshire: \_\_\_\_\_.