

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON MARCH 21, 2024 AT 7:30 PM**

Board Members Present: Anne Harrigan, Vice Chair; Adam Grippo, Secretary; Anne Marie Cullinan; Mark Ecke; Anthony Perugini; Timothy White

Board Members Absent: Samantha Rosenberg, Chair

Administrators Present: Jeffrey F. Solan, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools; Vincent Masciana, Chief Operating Officer; Mary Jocelyn-Gadd, Principal, Cheshire High School; Diana Burns, Principal, Chapman Elementary 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.
In Ms. Rosenberg’s absence, Dr. Harrigan led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
- C. Student Representatives. Andrew Elliot, student representative for the 2023/2024 school year, reported on recent events at Cheshire High School including clubs, sports, upcoming proms, SAT’s and scholarships.

2. PRESENTATIONS

A. School Partnership Award – Doolittle School

Mr. Grippo, the Board of Education representative to Doolittle School, introduced Doolittle’s School’s recipient, Matt Colehour, who was nominated by Amy O’Brien, Doolittle School Principal and the Principal’s Advisory Committee. Matt Colehour has served as the Doolittle PTA treasurer for the last four years. Along with the PTA, he helped to create the “Doolittle Mini-Grants Program”. This grant program allows Doolittle teachers to request funds for special projects in their classrooms or in the school. Matt has also worked with school staff and parents to organize the Parent Back to School Supplies ordering. This undertaking involves collaborating and coordinating with parents and school office personnel in the spring and several hours of work over the summer sorting and delivering the supplies to the classrooms. The Doolittle Mascot is a Tiger and this year, along with the PTA, a Tiger costume was purchased, and a school voting contest was held to name the tiger. Matt Colehour has been instrumental in bringing the Doolittle Tiger “Stripes” to life. Stripes has visited their Town Meetings and has become an important part of life at Doolittle School. Doolittle thanks Matt for leading many initiatives at Doolittle School through his work on the PTA and as a parent and community member. The Board of Education thanks Matt Colehour for going above and beyond for Cheshire Public Schools. Mr. Colehour was given a small gift and certificate and thanked by the Board.

B. CAS 2024 Distinguished Friend of Education Award

On behalf of the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS), Diana Burns said it is truly a pleasure to be here this evening to share in the presentation of the

Distinguished Friend of Education Award given to a very special member of our community, Mr. Mike Federico. Ms. Burns presented Mr. Federico with a plaque and explained that CAS established the Distinguished Friend of Education Awards in 1983 to honor individuals who have dedicated themselves to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for students at the local, state, or regional level. This is the highest award given by our association to persons not directly employed in public education. This is also our most popular and competitive award. The fact that Mr. Federico was chosen as the winner from among the dozens and dozens of deserving volunteers across the state who were nominated speaks to the depth and duration of his commitment and the scope and scale of his impact.

Mary Gadd, Cheshire High School Principal, who nominated Mr. Federico for the award said Mike is the definition of someone who has made an extraordinary contribution to the students of Cheshire High School and Cheshire Public Schools. Over an extended period of time, long after his children graduated, Mike continues to bring his boundless energy to not only raise money for our athletic teams, fund scholarships, but also, cook the best concession food in the state!

Mike has a special certification that allows us to run our concession stand, and he logs countless volunteer hours as the head chef during athletic and other events. Before Mike took control of concessions, it would gross around \$7,500 - \$8,000 a year. Under Mike's watch, the concession stand grosses between \$6,000 - \$8,000 on a Friday night alone. Simply put, without Mike Federico, our students would not have the many opportunities his hard work makes possible. All of the money that is raised in the concession stand goes to the Cheshire High School Booster Club for which Mike serves as the Treasurer. Mike does all of this as a volunteer, including contributing his accounting services to our field hockey, ice hockey, and lacrosse programs and the Southern Connecticut Conference - all as a volunteer. Cheshire High School sincerely thanks Mike Federico for his extraordinary contributions to Cheshire High School, Cheshire Public schools and the many students we serve. We are a much better community having Mike as our friend and partner. The Board of Education congratulated and thanked Mr. Federico.

3. **AUDIENCE**

None.

4. **REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES**

A. **FINANCE**

I. **Finance Report**

Mr. Masciana gave an update on finances. They have expended and/or encumbered \$75,106,221 of the \$84,993,429 budget through the first 8 months of the fiscal year which includes the encumbrances for the largest budget categories, namely payroll and transportation. He highlighted increasing variances in the outplaced tuition account and a negative budget

variance related to unpaid lunch balances from our food services program. The encumbrance for special education outplacement tuition has continued to increase over the last several months. This is due to the increased number of students who are being outplaced because their specialized needs cannot be provided by our district staff and/or within our district programs. In February, the negative variance increased to \$374,169 from the \$286,338 reported in January and the \$109,904 reported in December. He said they will continue to monitor this and all other accounts as the year continues and make reductions to our expenditures in other line items in order to ensure that we meet our budget for the year.

Regarding Food Service program and unpaid meal balances, all breakfast and lunch meals were provided at no cost during the pandemic, this year only breakfast is provided at no cost for all families due to a special program being funded by the State. In accordance with the National School Lunch program, we are providing free and reduced lunch meals for approximately 15% of the student families in Cheshire who qualify. The remaining 85% of parents are responsible to pay for their student's lunch meals this year. He said the threshold for a family of 4 to receive reduced lunches is an annual income of just over \$55,000, which is extremely low.

Since the start of this school year, the unpaid meal balance has been growing at an unprecedented rate this year and stood at approximately \$19,000 at February month-end. This problem is occurring in school districts throughout the State, not only Cheshire. Their efforts to collect the balances include emails, parent square messages, and telephone calls to parents. If the trend continues, we could potentially end the year with a \$30,000 unpaid meal balance. He said they recognize that families who may not qualify for free and reduced meals doesn't mean that they are able to afford the lunches. They have asked legislators to consider increasing the threshold to a more realistic amount. There was further discussion with Board members and Food Services Director, Erica Biagetti gave more detail of collection efforts.

II. Medical Benefits Update

Mr. Masciana reviewed the February Medical Benefits report. Claims for the month of February were \$1,070,059, leaving a balance in the trust fund of \$1,798,084, 1.63 months of claims.

III. 2022-2023 Audit Report Results

Mr. Masciana explained that the Town Council Audit Committee met with the auditors, Clifton, Larson, Allen (CLA) as part of the annual audit. The auditors review both the Town and Board of Education books and records. He said there were no negative findings.

B. PERSONNEL

Dr. Solan reported that as they go through the budget process, there is always the potential of the budget not being resolved. The following actions are necessary because of the risk that there may not be adequate funding.

I. Non-Renewal of Interim Contract Teachers

Dr. Solan Pursuant to Section 10-151 of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Board of Education may, prior to May 1st, authorize the Superintendent not to renew the contracts of Interim Contract and Non-Tenured Teachers. The following motions are necessary to protect ourselves in the unlikely event that there are reductions that need to be made.

MOTION by Ms. Cullinan and seconded by Mr. Perugini.

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 2023-2024 school year.*

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

II. Non-Renewal of Non-Tenured Teachers

Pursuant to Section 10-151 of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Board of Education may, prior to May 1st, authorize the Superintendent not to renew the contracts of certain non-tenured teachers. Historically in Cheshire, this had been done in the case of long-term substitutes, teachers on interim contract and an occasional teacher for cause. This year, because of budgetary concerns, it has reluctantly been recommended that the Board of Education authorize the Superintendent not to renew the contracts of all first-year non-tenured, certified, professional employees subject to the Teacher Fair Dismissal Act. While it still may be necessary to reduce staffing levels for 2024/25 based on the final outcome of the budget, the Board has the right to do so regardless of action regarding non-tenured staff.

MOTION by Ms. Cullinan and seconded by Mr. White.

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 2023-2024 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.

C. PLANNING

I. Report on Meeting Held March 21, 2024.

Mr. Ecke reported on the meeting held this evening to discuss portable classrooms at Highland School. He said they are waiting for final numbers, but the Committee is in agreement that it would be better to purchase the trailers rather than lease. There will be an update once we receive the final numbers.

Also at the meeting, Mr. Masciana shared a presentation provided by Energia which reported that their initial review identified approximately \$335,000 in energy savings on school buildings and town buildings that could potentially fund an energy performance contract of approximately \$6M. Based on their recommendation, the initiative is proceeding to the next step in the process in which the Town and Schools will issue an RFP seeking an Energy Performance Contract with qualified companies.

Lastly, Mr. Masciana and Mr. Clavet provided updates and responded to questions on the HVAC Grants that are in process with the State, as well as the following key projects that are underway for completion in the Summer of 2024 - Dodd Boiler Replacement, West Gym Locker Renovations, Dodd Fire Alarm Replacement, Preliminary Site Work at Norton related to the new school construction.

D. POLICY

I. Policy Report

Mr. Ecke, Chair of the Policy Committee reported on the meeting held March 4, 2024, where they reviewed several policies. Dr. Solan shared Equity and Diversity policies from CAFE, Canton and Newtown as well as the Cheshire Public Schools draft shared at the previous meeting. He reviewed the pros and cons of each policy. After some discussion, Dr. Solan agreed to draft a new Equity and Diversity policy, using language from different policies and forward it to the Board for comments. They also looked at the draft Civility policy which is still under review.

II. Second Reading of Policies

Mr. Ecke gave a second reading to Policy #6145.21 Instruction – Status Level Sports Program.

III. Third Reading and Approval of Policies

Policy Committee Chair, Mr. Ecke brought forward 3 Policies and a Bylaw for a third reading and approval.

MOTION by Mr. Ecke and seconded by Mr. Grippo.

***MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education give a third and final reading to Policies: #2132 Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services, #5111 Admission/Placement, #5112 Ages of Attendance, and Bylaw #9230 New Board Member Orientation and direct the Superintendent to put said policies into immediate effect.*

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

E. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES

None.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION by Mr. Grippo and seconded by Mr. Ecke.

***MOVED** that the Board of Education approve the Minutes from the meeting held on February 15, 2024.*

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

MOTION by Mr. Grippo and seconded by Mr. White.

***MOVED** that the Board of Education approve the Minutes from the meeting held on March 7, 2024.*

VOTE: The Motion passed 5-0-1 (Mr. Perugini abstained).

6. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence.

7. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Solan reported on a number of items including The Chamber of Commerce Dinner, where our Teacher of the Year, Katherine Zukis was recognized. On March 14 there was a districtwide Professional Development program on Making your Thinking Visible. He recognized Kevin Hanlon and Marlene Silano who did a tremendous job putting the program together. Regarding School Modernization, he said there will be a brief joint meeting between the Board and NextGen committee to approve plans for sitework at both locations on April 11. Dr. Solan announced that Principal Scott Jeffery is a finalist for the Connecticut Elementary Principal of the Year. Lastly, Dr. Solan thanked the Board of Education for their dedication and commitment during Board Member Appreciation Month.

Mr. White asked for an update on the Right to Read legislature. Dr. Solan said they are still working and tirelessly advocating the CSDE. He said he stands steadfast in his belief that our curriculum, that we created, closely aligns to the science of reading. We do not have to have a program in place until July 2025 and he is hopeful that we will be able to work in a collaborative fashion with the CSDE and reach a middle ground on the situation.

Mr. White said he had heard from parents that they feel we need a greater emphasis on phonics. He said he spoke with Ms. Silano about this, and she said we have had a greater emphasis on phonics over the last few years. In Ms. Silano's absence, Dr. Solan said when we began following the research of the Science of Reading, there was a greater emphasis on phonics, and we did begin placing a greater emphasis on that. He encouraged parents with any questions or concerns with our curriculum or anything, to speak with their principal. Mr. Hanlon said they have had an emphasis on phonics for a very long time but for some students, who were not being successful, phonics was a gap area. They have elevated this part of our practices, so all classrooms get the same experience. He explained some ways in which they have increased working on phonics.

8. OLD BUSINESS

None.

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Healthy Food Certification

Mr. Masciana said they are recommending that Cheshire Public Schools continue with the Healthy Food Certification program. 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.

Motion #1 (For Healthy Food Option)

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

***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, 2024, through June 30, 2025. 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 by those present.

Motion #2 (For Food Exemptions)**MOTION** by Ms. Cullinan and seconded by Mr. Perugini.

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 by those present.

Motion #3 (For Beverage Exemptions)**MOTION** by Ms. Cullinan and seconded by Mr. Perugini.

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 by those present.

B. Chapman Composting Pilot Update

Mr. Masciana noted that last August the Town Council appropriated \$11,100 from the funds that they received from the state “nips” program for a composting pilot at Chapman School. Erica Biagetti, Food Services Director provided an update about the program at that kicked off on January 5. Students at Chapman wrote letters about what composting meant to them. Certain students were selected to be “Composting Champions” to help and initiate and work with all the other students to teach and train on the new way to throw out items. She shared handouts that explained the process, the cost estimates, and actual expenses. She said to date,

Chapman has composted 8,195 pounds of waste. Mr. Perugini recognized Town Councilor, Fiona Pearson for coming to us with this program and the Board members thanked Ms. Biagetti for her efforts with this program. Ms. Harrigan asked if this program will continue. Ms. Biagetti said they are monitoring it for this year, utilizing the funds from the Town. Mr. Masciana said part of doing this pilot was to get a handle on the logistics. Mr. Masciana said there is no doubt that this is a costly program. They will come back to the board at the end of the pilot and give a final report.

C. Chairperson's Update

In Ms. Rosenberg's absence there was no Chairperson's report.

10. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Mr. Perugini, and seconded by Mr. Ecke, the meeting was adjourned at 9:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anne Harrigan, Board Vice Chair

Attest:

Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

Filed at the Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, Cheshire: 4/15/2024.