

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON JUNE 5, 2025 AT 7:30 PM**

Board Members Present: Samantha Rosenberg, Chair; Dr. 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; Kevin Hanlon, Principal, Cheshire High School; Kelly Grillo, Principal, Dodd Middle School; Scott Jeffrey, Principal, Highland Elementary School; Kristen Lopa, Assistant Principal, Norton Elementary School

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.

C. Student Representatives' Report and Recognition

Each year, two student representatives are selected 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 sports, and on the basis of academic excellence. The Student Report is presented to the Board at its business meeting, the second meeting of the month, and includes information on academic, extracurricular, and social activities taking place at Cheshire High School. This year, Lydia Ghaly and Malakhi Beyah served as Student Representatives for the 2024/25 school year. Board Members thanked the students for their valued service to the Board of Education this year. They wished them good luck as they graduate from Cheshire High School and wish them much success in their future endeavors.

2. PRESENTATIONS

A. Recognition of Valedictorian and Salutatorian

Cheshire High School Principal, Kevin Hanlon presented the 2025 Valedictorian and Salutatorian to the Board of Education.

VALEDICTORIAN – DANIEL EIN ALSHAEBA

Daniel is an exceptional student whose academic excellence, intellectual curiosity, and dedication to service embody the Cheshire Performance Standards and set him apart. With a remarkable 4.89 GPA in the most rigorous coursework available, Daniel has consistently demonstrated a rare combination of analytical rigor and creative thinking. His involvement beyond his coursework is impressive: he has challenged himself by participating in prestigious competitions

such as the Chemistry Olympiad, UCONN Science Bowl, and NASA Planet Mars Challenge. Daniel co-founded Cheshire High School's Chemistry Club, competes in the Greater New Haven and New England Math Leagues, and contributes to the *Rampage*. His well-rounded involvement extends to tennis, indoor track, and music, where he performs as a violist in CHS and community orchestras. Additionally, his first-degree black belt in taekwondo speaks to his discipline and perseverance. Daniel is a driven researcher with a passion for medicine. His summer research at Yale, where he contributed to a study on cardiac calcification, reflects his commitment to advancing medical knowledge—a field he aspires to pursue as a future cardiac surgeon. This hands-on experience, combined with his shadowing in cardiology at the VA hospital and work as a patient aid at MidState Medical Center, underscores his dedication to healthcare and patient care. Daniel's commitment to service is equally impressive, with over 100 hours of tutoring at Kumon, volunteering as a patient transport aide, and assisting in community initiatives like Winterfest and leaf raking. Daniel is poised to make meaningful contributions well beyond the walls of CHS. Daniel will attend Yale University in the fall.

SALUTATORIAN – MALAKHI BEYAH

This year's Salutatorian is certainly familiar to the Board of Education, administrators, and staff who frequent these chambers. Behind an impressive 4.86 GPA, it's Malakhi Beyah's work ethic, thoughtfulness, positive approach, seemingly endless energy, and inclusive nature that shine through. Never far from his overfilled backpack, Malakhi is often one of the first to arrive at school and among the last to leave. He is president of our Student Senate, the National Honor Society, and he is co-editor and chief of the *Rampage*. His involvement continues to include Science National Honor Society, English Honor Society, the New Haven Math League, and the South Korean Science Research experience. He is an active member of the robotics and indoor and outdoor track teams. In contributing back to the school community, annual fundraisers, morning announcements, Blood Drive club, peer tutoring, work on the B1 Day Committee, and this year's spirit week all have Malakhi's fingerprints on them. In short, if there is something going on at CHS, there's a pretty good chance Malakhi is there; it doesn't seem that the phrase "there's not enough time in the day" applies to him. A review of Malakhi's transcript shows that he has been successful in a breadth of courses across many departments that could open the door to many post-high school pathways. From those many open doors, Malakhi will be choosing to hone in on his studies of aerospace engineering when he attends MIT beginning in the fall.

3. Recognition of National Merit Scholar

National Merit Scholars: Malakhi Beyah

Principal Hanlon introduced Malakhi Beyah as a 2025 Merit Scholar. The National Merit Scholarship Program is an annual academic competition among

high school students for recognition and college scholarships that began in 1955. The program is conducted by National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC®), a not-for-profit organization that operates without government assistance. United States high school students enter the National Merit Scholarship Program by taking the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®), which serves as an initial screen of over 1.3 million entrants each year, and by meeting published program entry and participation requirements.

4. Student Recognition (Postponed from February Meeting)

Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest Winner

Vaasvik Narayanam, of Norton Elementary School in Cheshire, was among the 15 elementary, middle, and high school students from across Connecticut selected as winners of U.S. Senator Chris Murphy's ninth annual "Martin Luther King Jr. Day Essay Contest."

A. Recognition of Retiring Personnel

Retirees were presented to the Board of Education for recognition.

Teacher Name	Dates	Years of Service	School
Theresa Baker	1994-2025	31	Dodd
Donna Goodwin	2005-2025	20	Dodd
Jack Hammer	2015-2025	10	CHS
Patricia Castle	2000-2025	25	Districtwide
Amy O'Brien	2019-2025	6	Doolittle

Dodd Middle School Principal, Kelly Grillo introduced Theresa Baker, a dedicated and compassionate educator who has served our school community for over 30 years. Theresa began her career in Cheshire in 1994 and joined the Dodd Middle School family full-time just one year later. Since then, she has left a profound mark on our school—always putting students first and advocating for their growth in every way. She is a master of meeting students where they are and helping them move forward with confidence and care. Theresa's students have not only learned skills—they've felt seen, safe, and supported. Theresa believes that relationships are the foundation of good teaching, and her gentle, kindhearted approach has made her a trusted adult for so many young people. She's also been an incredible teammate—collaborative, dependable, and insightful—and a steady support for families navigating the world of special education. Theresa, we thank you for your decades of service, your generous spirit, and the way you've shaped

the lives of so many in our community. I hope retirement brings you time for the things that bring you joy—your family, your traditions, your next chapter. You leave Dodd a better place than you found it, and we are all better for having worked beside you.

Ms. Grillo introduced Donna Lee who is retiring after nearly two decades of service to the students and families of Dodd Middle School. Since joining our school community in 2005, Donna has played an important role in supporting our students' learning, particularly in the areas of math and science. Throughout her time at Dodd, Donna brought structure and consistency to her classroom. She held her students to high expectations and encouraged them to engage with academic content thoughtfully. She also supported students' social-emotional growth and worked to foster positive relationships with her colleagues and families. Donna has been a dedicated member of her team and department, always willing to collaborate, share resources, and contribute to group efforts. Her reliability and attention to detail helped ensure that her team could work efficiently and cohesively to meet students' needs. As she steps into retirement, we know she's looking forward to spending more time with the people and things she loves most—her family, her dog, and her faith. We thank Donna for her service and dedication and wish her all the best in this next chapter.

Cheshire High School Principal, Kevin Hanlon recognized Cheshire High School Chemistry Teacher, Dr. Jack Hammer, who was not able to attend this evening. Dr. Hammer was hired in August 2015 to serve as Teacher of Chemistry at CHS. Before his role in Cheshire, he worked at Foran High School in Milford, CT, was a teaching assistant at Yale University, and worked 10 years as a research assistant at pharmaceutical companies. It is at Yale where he received a Ph.D. in physical chemistry. While it's clear he has a passion for science, he is also a musician, having received a Bachelor's in chemistry and a Bachelor's in Violin Performance. While Dr. Hammer is retiring from Cheshire Public Schools, we know that he will continue to keep close to science instruction through adjunct and similar work. We know it will be difficult to replace the type of expertise and background he brought to CHS, and we wish him all the best in his (partial) retirement.

Dr. Solan said it is an honor that tonight they are recognizing an extraordinary educator, leader and friend, Pat Castle, who is our beloved reading and language arts consultant, and is retiring after 25 years of dedicated service to the Cheshire Public Schools. Pat has been a constant force of knowledge, grace and unwavering commitment to students and teachers alike. She began her journey in education with distinction, earning a Bachelor of Arts summa cum laude and completing her elementary education certificate from her early days managing Whitney bookshops in New Canaan, to her field work at Lincoln Bassett school in New Haven, and then on to student teaching in North Haven. Pat was

hired 25 years ago to teach at Highland school. She was named Teacher of the Year in 2007 and went on to serve as Learning Initiatives Teacher and our Reading and Language Arts Consultant. To say we are indebted to Pat would be an understatement. She has been the go-to expert on all thing's literacy. Her deep knowledge of language, of pedagogy and of the reading brain is truly awe inspiring. She has touched the lives of countless young readers and empowered generations of educators with her wisdom, clarity and compassion. at we thank you. Pat, we admire you, and we will carry your work forward with the same belief that guided you every day, that every child can grow, can read and can flourish. Congratulations on your retirement. You have made a difference. You always Will.

Dr. Solan said next, he is proud to recognize Doolittle School Principal Amy O'Brien on her retirement this evening. Amy was formally educated at Southern Connecticut State University earning her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education, Master's Degree in Remedial Reading, and Sixth Year Diploma in Educational Leadership. I first met Amy in 2004 when we were both fresh-faced assistant principals with the Ansonia Public Schools. She earned her administrative appointment after serving as a teacher in Ansonia for more than a decade culminating with her recognition as Ansonia's Teacher of the Year in 2003. After serving in various administrative positions in Ansonia, we were fortunate to hire her as Doolittle Principal in 2019. There are so many things that I admire about her as a person and instructional leader. First and foremost is her genuine commitment to her students. She is incredibly hard-working. She is constantly seeking to improve both individually and as a school. She is deeply knowledgeable about teaching and learning and is able to convey that knowledge to support the development of others. That talent also helps her hire and mentor people who go on to do great things. Actually, you will be hearing about one of those people later on tonight. Amy may be retiring, but her legacy will live on for decades in the people that she has hired and mentored. She has done that at a level that rivals superpower status.

5. **AUDIENCE**

None.

6. **CONSENT CALENDAR**

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

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

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

Approval of 2025-26 Tuition Rates

Each year in accordance with Policy 3240 – Business – Tuition Fees, the Board of Education shall annually establish a tuition fee for non-resident students. The Business Office has calculated the elementary, kindergarten, middle and high school tuition rates using regular education per pupil expenditures. The per pupil elementary school regular education expenditures for the 2025-26 school year, with transportation expenditures removed, is **\$13,748**. The high school tuition rate is **\$17,918** with transportation expenditures removed. Below is a history of tuition rates for the last few years.

"That the Cheshire Board of Education establish the 2025-26 tuition fee for non-resident students at \$13,748 for elementary and middle school students and \$17,918 for high school students."

Approval of 2026 Board of Education Meeting Schedule

Board of Education policy and Town Charter provisions require that the meeting schedule of the Board of Education be set on a calendar year basis prior to the beginning of the new calendar year. Presently, the Board of Education schedule is set and has been approved through December 2025. However, for the purposes of planning for the Cheshire Public Schools' 2025-26 academic year, a schedule has been drafted for the period January 2026 through December 2026 for your approval.

"That the Cheshire Board of Education adopts the meeting schedule for the calendar year 2026, and further, directs the Superintendent to forward the meeting schedule to the Town Clerk and the Town Manager for public notice."

7. REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

A. CURRICULUM

I. Approval of Textbooks

Ms. Cullinan reported the Curriculum Committee thoroughly vetted the textbooks on the agenda tonight for approval. She noted the texts have been available for public viewing at the library and Central Office.

Textbook	Publisher	Grade
US History - Interactive	Savvas Learning	10
iReady Classroom Mathematics - Algebra I	Curriculum Assoc.	8-9

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

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education approve the purchase of the following textbooks: US History Interactive and iReady Classroom Mathematics-Algebra I, as recommended by the Curriculum Committee.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

B. FINANCE

I. Finance Report

Dr. Harrigan asked Mr. Masciana to give the Finance Report. Mr. Masciana said normally, we end our budget year with zero, so that we've expended all our funds, but never expend any more than our allotted funds. Otherwise, the Board Members are personally responsible, according to Connecticut law. He said we have to end this year with \$250,000 in surplus so that we can roll it into next year's operating budget in a carryover fund. We're currently reviewing and closing any open purchase orders that will not be expended by the end of the year. Our last official payroll for all staff is June 20. But many of our teachers, are on 26 pays, so they will continue to get paid through the end of the of the summer. Also, we are planning and placing orders for supplies, furniture, equipment, technology, as well as planning summer maintenance projects. We have about \$876,000 worth of requests that are pending from our principals or our Maintenance Department. We can't approve all of those, but we will probably be able to approve half of that and close out the year with the \$250,000 that we're committed to closing out the year. He said he expects that we will be able to close with exactly \$250,000 in surplus, because we could manage to that number with our final entries.

Mr. White asked for an update on the Energy Performance Contract. Mr. Masciana noted under the Inflation Reduction Act for the two new schools, we submitted applications for the geothermal heating and cooling. We had hired a consultant from CLA to help us with that process. He said he confirmed today that because we had applied for the funds last year, when we complete that work, that will not be threatened by any legislative changes. Johnson Controls has been engaged, and they're working through the detailed investment grade audit to determine what are the final parameters of a contract. He said they are obviously also interested in getting any tax credits as part of the project, so if we act quickly enough and make certain commitments, and we will follow up with Johnson Controls we can get ahead of the deadline to submit our application and not lose the credits. Now, the "Big, Beautiful Bill" hasn't passed yet, and what the final implications of that bill will be as it relates to the investment tax credits, we don't know, but we will rely on, the Johnson Controls team to give us that answer. He said they will follow up and continue to report back.

II. Medical Benefits Update

Mr. Masciana reviewed the April report and said the May report will be available by the Fiscal meeting. April claims were \$1.8 million, a very

high month but as he mentioned last meeting, that month was very low, so if you average the two, it is about \$1.2 million. The reserve balance is a little over \$2 million, 1.7 months of claims reserves. He said we will be getting additional stop loss reimbursements which will go to increase our reserve balance. Our year-to-date stop-loss reimbursements are currently \$389,000, with an additional \$100,000 expected soon due to recent large claims. Our goal has consistently been to end the year with the same reserve fund balance we started with. We began this year with \$2.3 million in the reserve fund and are currently just over \$2 million. We'll monitor the next two months, hoping to reach our starting balance before the new budgeting process begins in July.

Dr. Solan reported he received positive news concerning the recently adopted two-year state budget. Dr. Solan informed us that while the governor has not yet signed it into law, the legislature passed the budget yesterday. Crucially, the previously budgeted ECS reduction of \$254,717 for the 2025-26 and 2026-27 school years has been reinstated to the Town of Cheshire. This contributes to an overall favorable budget variance for the town of \$383,967, as we secured nearly \$400,000 more in state funding than originally projected during the budget adoption process.

C. **PERSONNEL**

I. **Report on Meeting Held June 5, 2025**

Dr. Solan reported that the Committee met prior to tonight's business meeting to discuss the candidates for two positions that they are presenting for Board approval.

II. **Appointment of K-8 Curriculum Coordinator**

Dr. Solan said they had more than 75 applicants. The individual being brought before you this evening is Azra Redzic. She's currently the K-5 Humanities Curriculum Coordinator for the Bristol Public Schools. Prior to her role there, she was an elementary school principal in Hartford, and brings a wealth of knowledge and really great interpersonal skills that are required to be a leader. Beyond just general knowledge, there's certainly a lot of experience with respect to leadership, but supporting our MLL (Multi Language Learner) population, a lot of background in reading and just general pedagogy as well.

Ms. Silano added we've really gotten to know Azra and heard a little bit about her philosophy, but she's been consistent in every way, talking about teaching and learning and instruction, and from everything that we've heard from folks that she's worked with in the past, she is the whole package, both of having the knowledge, but also in having the people in

interpersonal skills to be able to grow a team. We are really excited for her to join our team.

MOTION by Ms. Cullinan and seconded by Dr. Harrigan

MOVED *that the Cheshire Board of Education appoint Azra Redzic to the position of Pre K-8 Curriculum Coordinator, effective July 9, 2025. Further, that Ms. Redzic is compensated in accordance with the collective bargaining agreement between the Board and the Cheshire Administrative Personnel.*

VOTE: the Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

Ms. Redzic said she is honored and excited to join the dynamic team at Cheshire Public Schools. She thanked the Board for this opportunity and said she is eager to help support the mission and vision and the academic excellence that this district is known for.

III. Appointment of Elementary Principal

Dr. Solan said they are fortunate because they did not have to actively recruit for this position. When Ms. O'Brien announced her retirement, we felt it was important to solicit stakeholder feedback, including surveying parents and the Doolittle staff community. Kristen has a rich history within the Cheshire Public Schools, starting as a teacher at Doolittle, becoming a Reading and Math Specialist, working in several of our buildings, and then ultimately serving as an assistant principal, most recently exclusively at Doolittle. Over this time, she's earned the tremendous respect of parents, students, her administrative colleagues, who work with her at Doolittle School. He said he is proud to present Kristin is a candidate for the position of Doolittle School principal.

MOTION by Ms. Cullinan and seconded by Dr. Harrigan.

MOVED *that the Cheshire Board of Education appoints Kristin Lopa to the position of Principal of Doolittle Elementary School, effective July 1, 2025. Further, Ms. Lopa is compensated in accordance with the collective bargaining agreement between the Board and the Cheshire Administrative Personnel.*

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

Ms. Lopa thanked the Board and said that Doolittle is a special place to her and she is happy to have the support of her colleagues.

Board members congratulated and welcomed the two administrators on their appointments.

D. PLANNING

I. Report on Meeting Held May 28, 2025

Mr. White reported that through the Superintendent, they are starting a discussion with the town about options for transportation and school start times. Ms. Taylor reviewed five options at the meeting. The two main considerations are cost and start times. He said there are many factors to consider. He said parents need to be aware as changes may affect their home schedules and there will also be an impact on traffic. Mr. White encouraged the public to watch the video of the meeting for more information.

Dr. Solan noted that he will be gathering feedback from students, staff and parents. He said the start times are very important when we begin to think about staffing for the opening of the new buildings.

E. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES

None.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Board of Education Meeting Held May 15, 2025

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

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education approve the Minutes from the meeting held on May 15, 2025.

VOTE: The Motion passed 6-0-1 (Mr. Perugini abstained.)

9. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence.

10. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Solan acknowledged the nearly 200 people who showed up for the Barnum naming ceremony last Friday. It was an incredible community event, obviously highlighted by Colonel Barnum himself being there and talking about what it meant to him to grow up in this community and being recognized as one of only 61 living Medal of Honor recipients in America. The Norton topping off ceremony will be held next Thursday at 9:45am for Board Members and students. Next, Dr. Solan thanked Viron Rondo and his operations manager Mia Burns. They hosted 15 culinary students. Who got the behind the scenes tour. Dr. Solan noted that last summer, we spent a lot of time in the community with a book club for The Anxious Generation, by Jonathan Haidt. It opened a lot of people's

eyes, myself included, to realize the life that our kids are leading and just parenting in general. This year, they will be reading a book called “How to Break Up with Your Phone”. He invited the Board to join them at one of the book clubs available over the summer.

11. OLD BUSINESS

None.

12. NEW BUSINESS

A. Chairperson’s Update

Chairman Rosenberg thanked Dr. Solan for organizing the naming ceremony. She reviewed upcoming meetings, promotions and graduation dates.

B. Announcement of Upcoming Meetings

13. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Mr. White, and seconded by Mr. Perugini, the meeting was adjourned at 9:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Samantha Rosenberg, Board Chair

Attest:

Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

Filed at the Town Clerk’s Office, Town Hall, Cheshire: 7/18/25.