

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON SEPTEMBER 18, 2025 AT 7:30 PM**

Board Members Present: Anne Harrigan, Vice Chair; Adam Grippo, Secretary; Anne Marie Cullinan; Mark Ecke; Anthony Perugini; Timothy White (7:36)

Board Members Absent: Samantha Rosenberg, Chair

Administrators Present: Jeffrey F. Solan, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools; Marlene Silano, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Emily Taylor, Chief Operating Officer; Vincent Masciana, Chief Project Officer; Kevin Hanlon, Principal, Cheshire High School; Scott Jeffrey, Principal, Highland 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.
In Ms. Rosenberg’s absence, Dr. Harrigan led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
- C. Student Representatives. Cheshire High School Principal, Kevin Hanlon, introduced the student representatives for the 2025/2026 school year.

Connor Rayball serves as President of the National Honor Society, Student Head of Winterfest, a Commissioner in Link Crew, and a member of the Boys Basketball Team, all while excelling in challenging honors and AP courses. In the school's transition to a new schedule, Connor helped create an FAQ flyer and video to assist both students and faculty in better understanding the changes. He also coordinated a districtwide PJ Day fundraiser for Hurricane Helene and Milton victims, raising over \$5,000 for the American Red Cross.

Matalyn Mae Tabor has performed in the musical each year, is a four-year member and leader in Unified Theater, and sings with the Honor’s Choir. She is also a three-year member of Link Crew, a leader of the College Campus Club, a member of the National English Honor Society, and an athlete on both the Girls’ Tennis and Cross-Country teams, serving as co-captain in her junior year. Beyond CHS, Mattie volunteers with the Highland Summer Enrichment Program, LiveWell Memory Center, and her church community.

After introductions, they reported on recent events at Cheshire High School. They reported that the year is off to a smooth start. Students have done a great job adjusting to the new schedule with the help of Link Crew and the teachers. They reported on the Club Fair and National Honor Society induction as well as upcoming events. Board members welcomed the reps.

2. PRESENTATIONS

- A. 2025-2026 Teacher of the Year
Superintendent Solan introduced the 2025/26 Teacher of the Year, Denise Scialabba. He said Denise is the embodiment of exemplary practice and character and has my

unequivocal endorsement for Connecticut's Teacher of the Year honor. The commitment she shows, and the grace and humility with which she performs, serve as models for educators in our community and would certainly resonate with her peers from around the state.

Denise has a unique perspective to the classroom. She began teaching in Cheshire in 1993 and stepped back to raise her children in 2002. We were blessed in 2016 when she returned to teach full-time in the district. Since 2018, Denise has been a beloved and steady presence in the kindergarten team at Highland Elementary School, where her warmth, professionalism, and quiet leadership have left an indelible mark.

The parent nominations we've received speak volumes about Denise's profound impact. One family, who had the unique privilege of having three children in her class, called it "the best gift ever." They describe her not just as a trusted teacher, but as a role model and lifelong mentor, someone who remembers birthdays, checks in during tough times, shows up for games and celebrations, and creates a classroom culture where children feel safe, seen, and valued. When their sixth-grade daughter received the Superintendent's Award, she chose Mrs. Scialabba to stand by her side, an honor that reflects the depth of their continued connection.

Another nominator, who has known Denise as both a parent and a colleague, highlighted her incredible ability to connect with families on a personal level. Denise's communication goes far beyond classroom updates; she sees the whole child, and her dedication to each student's academic and emotional well-being is both effortless and genuine.

Denise doesn't just teach, she inspires. She doesn't just build classrooms; she builds relationships that endure. And she doesn't just do the job; she elevates the profession through every thoughtful interaction and act of care.

Ms. Scialabba thanked Dr. Solan, Ms. Silano and the rest of the Board for the incredible opportunity and honor. She said having the opportunity to represent the amazing educators of the Cheshire Public Schools is something that she is very grateful for and also to recognize what all of the educators in Cheshire do every day for all of our students. Ms. Scialabba was presented flowers and greeted the Board members.

3. AUDIENCE

Madeline Novick, 125 East Mitchell Avenue, #6. Ms. Novick said she would respectfully like to inquire whether our religious freedoms are being protected in our public schools. She said under the Establishment Clause, schools must be places where both religious and non-religious convictions are treated with fairness.

Dr. Solan said they do not generally respond to questions at Board meetings and if she would like to contact his office, she would be welcome to meet with him to discuss her question.

4. **REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES**

A. **CURRICULUM**

I. **Report on Meeting September 15, 2025**

Ms. Cullinan reported that all members of the Committee were present at the meeting. She asked Ms. Silano to review the presentation on state testing results. Ms. Silano Assistant Superintendent Silano shared Cheshire's testing results, including the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA: grades 3-8), Next Generation Science Assessment (NGSS: grades 5, 8, and 11), and the Scholastic Aptitude Test - School Day (SAT: grade 11). The results indicate overall health in student performance across the district. Math performance was the strongest, outperforming the 2018–2019 school year. Both growth rates and the average percentage of targets achieved in ELA and Math show a healthy upward trend compared to the prior year. Notable improvements were seen in achievement and growth in grades 7–8 math and ELA. Grade 5 showed consistent achievement on NGSS, highlighted by 83.1% of students performing above goal. SAT results also showed continued improvement, with data indicating math gains over the previous year. A copy of the presentation is on file.

Ms. Silano went on to report that she shared highlights of this year's Curriculum Writing Institute. Azra Redzic shared highlights from the curriculum writing feedback loops, emphasizing the work on the combined opinion writing units in grades 3–4. In addition, members of the math department at CHS, including Principal Hanlon, the math department chair, and a special education teacher, participated in the Partners for Educational Leadership Network Improvement Council. The teams worked through standard work protocols to identify best practices for math instruction. Another team from CHS attended the PEL Student Voice Institute, which focused on how student voices can be elevated in decision-making related to systems and structures, curriculum, services, and other areas to improve the overall student experience. Lastly, the Committee discussed the Safe School Climate Surveys. They are discussing sending it out to parents in October due to the lack of responses last year.

B. **FINANCE**

I. **Finance Report**

Dr. Harrigan reported the approved budget for Fiscal Year 2025–2026 is \$93,124,314. As of today, \$23,279,985 (25%) has been encumbered and expended. The September and October Financial Reports are expected to provide a clearer view of our year-to-date financial picture once the encumbrances for our largest accounts, including payroll and transportation have been entered. At this time, no variances of concern have been identified. Ms. Taylor added we do have a 40% spending cap on our budget right now,

an adjustment from last year where there was a 50% expenditure cap through January.

The September and October Financial Reports are expected to provide a clearer view of our year-to-date financial picture once the encumbrances for our largest accounts, including payroll and transportation, have been entered. At this time, no variances of concern have been identified. Some items of note as we approach this fiscal year:

- Minimum Wage Increase-Connecticut's minimum wage will rise from \$16.35 to \$16.94/hour on January 1, 2026 (3.6% increase, tied to the state's employment cost index).
 - This will not affect current contracts: the 2025–2028 Paraeducator Agreement already sets a higher minimum (\$17.25/hour for 2025–26). With this change, Connecticut will have the second-highest minimum wage in the U.S.
- Employee Leave & Wage Replacement Changes as of October 1, 2025
 - Connecticut Paid Leave (CPL): Beginning October 10 paychecks, eligible employees will contribute 0.5% of eligible wages to the state fund. Certified staff are not eligible for this program and do not make contributions.
 - Connecticut FMLA: Expands job-protected, unpaid leave for qualifying reasons to Boards of Education. Unlike federal FMLA, eligibility requires only three months of employment.
 - While contracts are unaffected, these changes may indirectly affect Account 51140 – Substitutes/Interns (\$840,000 budgeted for FY25–26, up 5% from last year) due to potential increases in employee leave usage.

Mr. Grippo asked if we are participating in the Connecticut sick leave policy. Ms. Taylor said yes, we are required to as of January 1st of this year.

Mr. White asked Mr. Masciana for an update on the Energy Performance Contract.

Mr. Masciana reported that as part of the three tier incentives, the N res applications, the non residential energy savings program, were submitted by the deadline date of September 15. The other update is that today we received the financing proposals. An RFP was issued last week for the financing, which was about \$25 million. Mr. Masciana said he just learned that we did get five responses with actual proposals, and they ranged from about 4% to 4.63% and those proposals all beat the assumption that we had a 4.75% financing. So that means that creates additional cash flow that we can use for other projects that we want to do.

He said, the Town Council did pass all the resolutions that they needed to execute the contract and Town Manager Kimball executed the contract. They also passed resolutions at their last meeting that we can enter into financing arrangements, and they gave Sean Kimball, the authority to do that. So now that we have the financing proposals in hand, it'll take us about a week to review those proposals. Mr. Masciana said everything is lining up again. There are deadlines and timelines that we're working against. They will be applying for the school construction grants. The October filing window opens October 1, approximately, and we have 10 days to file those, so everything is ready to go. All the required certified resolutions were received to complete that process, and the only other incentive to apply for are the tax credits through the Inflation Reduction Act. He said they are on a tight timeline, but so far, they are meeting the timeline dates.

II. **Medical Benefits Update**

Our medical benefits reserve fund at the beginning of this fiscal year was \$2,822,465 which was about a half million dollar increase from the reserve fund at the beginning of fiscal year 2024. Our monthly contributions went up this year to \$1.2 million, a change from the \$1.1 we were contributing every month last year. We don't have stop loss reimbursements yet, and we haven't received our prescription rebates, so that's not reflected in the report. In our October report, there should be about \$180,000 in prescription rebates. In July, our claims were \$1.6 million, an increase from about \$1.5 million the prior fiscal year. And then in August, our claims were about \$1.2 million, consistent with our August claims the prior year. August ended with \$1,276,480 in the trust fund, approximately 1.93 months of claims.

C. **OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES**

None.

5. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A. **Board of Education Meetings Held August 14 and September 4, 2025**

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

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education approve the Minutes from meetings held on August 14, 2025 and September 4, 2025.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

6. **CORRESPONDENCE**

There was no correspondence.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

A. Approval of CABE Board Recognition Award Submission

Dr. Solan said, as we have done the last few years, we have compiled an application for the CABE Board Recognition Award. He credited Mr. Perugini, for his involvement which has contributed to the Board being eligible to receive the award. He said he would love to see the Board get to the next level and will review what needs to be done to accomplish this.

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

MOVED *that the Cheshire Board of Education approves the 2025 CABE Recognition Award Application.*

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

Mr. White said he would support having a legislative meeting with our delegation this year in November or December and possibly invite other towns to join. The Board discussed other ways to get to the next level, such as hosting a CABE Area breakfast.

Next Dr. Solan said they are planning a school field trip with middle schoolers to some of our local trades' businesses with our CTE Director, Tom Lewoc.

Ms. Taylor gave a brief updated on the Capital Budget noting September 30 is the Town Council's final approval for our Capital Budget. She noted they have three projects going to referendum, although they have not settled the Capital Budget yet. The three items for the referendum are, the turf for \$800,000 the loading dock for \$800,000 and the fire alarm system at Cheshire High School for \$1.1 million. Some of the other projects that they are hopefully going to talk about and get approved on the 30th include elementary school playground replacement equipment at Doolittle and Highland, fire sprinkler system repairs, and getting up to code compliance with some electrical service.

Mr. White said he wants to put a spotlight on Highland and Doolittle that are not being upgraded to new schools.

Dr. Solan reported they will be holding a reception for our Open Choice students on October 7.

He announced there is new drone footage of the new buildings on the website, courtesy of Mr. Solimine. Dr. Solan said he put out a lengthy video on September 5th about the redistricting process and the zoning maps that will be created.

Dr. Solan noted he has had some questions about the federal budget and the implications for us if there is a federal shut-down. He provided handouts for the

board members from a presentation CABA had done, providing information on the President's budget request the Senate's, and the house.

Mr. White inquired when the Calendar Committee will meet because he is still not comfortable on the Indigenous People/Italian American Day decision. Dr. Solan said last year the committee met in December.

7. **OLD BUSINESS**

None.

8. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **Approval of ED-099 Agreement for Child Nutritional Programs**

Ms. Taylor noted this is a housekeeping item to add her as a signatory on to our state the reimbursement site for our nutrition program as the Authorized signatory, along with Dr. Solan and removing Mr. Masciana's name.

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

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education approves the revision of authorized signers for the Ed 099 agreement for Child Nutrition Programs.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

B. **Chairperson's Update**

Dr. Harrigan announced upcoming meetings.

9. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mr. White, and seconded by Ms. Cullinan, the meeting was adjourned at 9:15 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: _____.