

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION
MIDDLE SCHOOL SHOWCASE MEETING
HELD AT DODD MIDDLE SCHOOL ON NOVEMBER 6, 2025 AT 7:30 PM**

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; Marlene Silano, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Emily Taylor, Chief Operating Officer; Robin-Anne Carey, Director, Pupil Personnel Services; Vincent Masciana, Chief Project Officer; Kevin Hanlon, 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 Grillo, Principal, Dodd Middle School; Ryan Murphy, Assistant Principal, Dodd Middle School; Diana Burns, Ed.D., Principal, Chapman Elementary School; Katharine Carlucci, Assistant Principal, Chapman & Norton Elementary Schools; Kimberly Dessert, Principal, Darcey School; Kristin Lopa, Principal, Doolittle School; Jillian Romann, Assistant Principal, Doolittle School; Jodie Roden, Principal, Norton School; Scott Jeffrey, Principal, Highland Elementary School; Azra Redzic, Pre-K-8 Curriculum Coordinator; Christina Sherwood, Supervisor of Elementary Special Education; Marie Broadway, Supervisor of Secondary Special Education

1. CALL TO ORDER – 8:06 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. AUDIENCE

None.

3. PRESENTATIONS

A. Paraeducator of the Year

At tonight's meeting, the Board recognized Geraldine Perno, the 2025 Paraeducator of the Year. Christina Sherwood introduced Gerry Perno. Ms. Perno currently serves as an ABA PTI paraeducator at Norton school. She said Gerry exemplifies all that it means to be a positive role model by consistently

demonstrating optimism, flexibility, initiative and an unwavering commitment to her students and colleagues. In her previous role as a special education paraeducator at Highland, she built respectful, genuine and lasting relationships with both students and staff. Her patience is incredible, and students feel safe and supported with her. Beginning in 2024 Gerry embraced a new challenge, joining our intensive ed program, transferring to a different elementary school and helping to open a brand-new classroom at Norton. From day one, she greeted students with a smile, and on the second day of school, she turned to me and said, we got this. That simple phrase perfectly captures who Gerry is, positive, steady and ready to do whatever it takes to support both students and her team. Jerry also demonstrates her deep commitment to the profession by taking on an additional role in our district as a paraeducator mentor, supporting new paraeducators transitioning into our district. Her current supervising Special Ed teacher, Kathy Erdman, describes Gerry as a common force in their classroom with a gentle voice, steady demeanor and professional expertise, she knows exactly how to help her students feel safe, refocus and succeed. Board members congratulated Ms. Perno.

B. School Partnership Award – Dodd Middle School

Dr. Harrigan, the Board of Education representative to Dodd Middle School, introduced the school's recipient, Denise Roncari. She reported that Denise Roncari is far more than a parent volunteer or former PTA President. She is a true partner in shaping the heart and spirit of the Dodd community. Her exceptional dedication has spanned years, extending well beyond her own children's time at Dodd. Denise first became involved through the PTA, where she quickly emerged as a natural leader. As President, she was the driving force behind countless successful events, fundraisers, and initiatives, bringing together families, staff, and community partners to strengthen the culture of our schools. She has dedicated countless hours to attending monthly PTA meetings, meeting with administrators - even during the summer - and organizing memorable school events such as Staff v. Student Volleyball and Basketball games, the 7th Grade Social, and Class Night. Most recently, she collaborated with Parks and Recreation to host a "Friday Night Old School" Dance for both 7th and 8th graders, creating a fun and safe opportunity for students to connect outside of school.

What truly sets Denise apart, and why she is so deserving of this recognition, is her continued commitment even after her children moved on to other schools. While many parents understandably shift their focus, Denise has not stopped giving. She continues to volunteer to support the programs that enrich the Dodd experience, all with warmth, humility, and an unwavering sense of reliability. Dodd Middle School is proud to honor Denise for her enduring dedication and the lasting impact she continues to make on our school. Her generosity of time, spirit, and heart truly embodies what it means to be part of the Dodd family. The

Cheshire Board of Education thanks Denise for going above and beyond for the students in Cheshire Public Schools.

4. **MIDDLE SCHOOL SHOWCASE**

Assistant Superintendent Marlene Silano introduced the Dodd Middle School Showcase. She said tonight they will be highlighting the collaborative efforts between the Office of Curriculum and Instruction, Special Education Department, school administration, teachers, and instructional coaches to improve math achievement and growth for students in grades 7 and 8. She said it began with the math coaches at elementary school, middle school, and high school, coming together with Kevin Hanlon, who was our curriculum coordinator, and herself, to study the data and to ask some hard questions. It included stories from our teachers, and, just as importantly, listening to the voices of students in their classrooms. This led to collaborative meetings with Robin Carey, PPS Director, Marie Broadway, Secondary Supervisor of Special Education, Kevin Hanlon, the Curriculum Coordinator and administrators at both the high school and the middle school, to better understand the full picture. Teams of teachers working with Kelly Grillo and with Kevin Hanlon. looked at a variety of curriculum materials. They examined instructional resources. They identified the best tools and strategies to meet the needs of our students. It also required incredible leadership from Principal Kelly Grillo and Assistant Principal Ryan Murphy, who balanced the culture and climate in their building while providing the support necessary for meaningful change. Ultimately, it involved everyone working together, including the Board of Ed, who listened to presentations on the curriculum that we wanted to select for the Math Department.

Assistant Superintendent Silano introduced Dodd Principal, Kelly Grillo, who along with staff members Marie Broadway, Andrea Cofrancesco and Tom Toscano, explained how they have improved middle school math performance. Ms. Cofrancesco, Special Education Teacher, explained that it began by hearing students who were not in the accelerated program saying that they were feeling inadequate, even dumb. They were working hard but not seeing results, so they explored how they could improve things. They decided to give every student the opportunity to take accelerated math with the iReady program. The teachers explained the shifts they made in instruction. The team discussed significant shifts made to instructional and service-delivery practices to better support students. Previously, classroom supports were overly scaffolded, with frequent modifications that unintentionally lowered expectations and limited student independence. Special education students were often clustered together, and teachers provided immediate answers during instruction and assessments, resulting in assessments that did not accurately reflect student ability.

After reassessing these practices, staff reduced unnecessary modifications and implemented only minor adjustments on early assessments. They changed how they responded to student questions, promoted productive struggle, and allowed students to

work through problems collaboratively. The results showed that students—including those with IEPs—performed far better than expected and reported increased confidence.

Currently, nearly all students in general education math classes take the same assessments, using a “mild, medium, spicy” problem-set structure to provide access and challenge. Teachers pre-teach concepts to build readiness, emphasize growth mindset, and maintain high expectations. As a result, students are more engaged, demonstrate stronger math skills, and are increasingly indistinguishable in performance, with special education students fully participating and experiencing success.

The team described major shifts in the purpose and structure of the I Block (resource room) period. Previously, I Block had become primarily a time for homework completion or catching up on missed classwork, which unintentionally limited students’ independence and reinforced low expectations. The team eliminated homework support from I Block and refocused the block on targeted skill development and previewing upcoming content. This redesigned model—now called Math Academy—provides pre-teaching, reinforcement of prerequisite skills, and exposure to grade-level concepts, resulting in fewer skill gaps and stronger access to the general education curriculum.

Teachers reported significant gains in student performance, including large growth on i-Ready midyear assessments, which generated high excitement among staff and students. The shift also prompted a reevaluation of IEP goals, moving away from narrow, content-specific targets and toward goals that address true barriers to learning, such as executive functioning, reading comprehension, and other foundational skills. This has allowed students to build the skills needed to more fully participate in grade-level instruction.

Staff emphasized that these changes were driven by student needs and a recognition that some students felt stigmatized by being in a “dumb class.” This prompted a decisive shift to higher expectations and more inclusive practices.

Sustaining these changes required extensive professional learning. Teachers engaged in ongoing training through faculty meetings, grade-level meetings, coaching sessions, and work with an outside consultant who modeled instruction and supported implementation of new curriculum and assessment practices. Central to this work was a shared mindset that all students can achieve at high levels, supported by strong collaboration across the department.

Preliminary data show the impact of these shifts. Overall math proficiency increased nearly 11 points, with Special Education proficiency nearly doubling. Growth target data were particularly strong: students overall exceeded prior-year growth by 25%, and Special Education students by 11%. Eighth-grade Special Education growth ranked among the highest in the state. These results affirm that the instructional and structural changes are working and will continue to guide ongoing improvement.

Board members congratulated and thanked the Dodd staff for their presentation.

5. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mr. Grippo, and seconded by Mr. Perugini, the meeting was adjourned at 8:42 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: 12/3/2025.