

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION FINANCE COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE CHESHIRE HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY ON NOVEMBER 10, 2025**

Board Members Present: Anne Harrigan, Chair, Adam Grippo, Mark Ecke, Samantha Rosenberg

Administrators Present: Jeffrey F. Solan, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools; Emily Taylor, Chief Operating Officer

I. CALL TO ORDER – 6:00 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.
Dr. Harrigan led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

II. AUDIENCE

None.

III. PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF THE 2026-2027 OPERATING BUDGET VARIABLES

Dr. Solan said this is an overview of the 2026/27 budget consideration. He shared the documents for review and discussion. The documents outlined last year's budget recommendation and a list of special budget considerations for 2026/2027. The considerations are as follows:

Redistricting will influence our budgeting process. Tonight, Mike Zuba from M&P Planning will present the different redistricting options to the community. He said as they reviewed the draft, they realized that although there are five total options, only two are truly viable. They are closely looking at enrollment in those scenarios—specifically the distribution by building and grade—to estimate how many sections they would need.

Currently, our elementary student-to-teacher ratio is 18.8, which is the highest it has been in about a decade. To put this in perspective: if redistricting and enrollment growth led us to target a ratio of 18 students per teacher, they would need to add approximately 10 staff members next year just to move from 18.8 down to 18. That is unlikely to be feasible. Instead, they are analyzing where they can be efficient and how to plan around the current ratio of 18.8, while still meeting projected enrollment growth.

Superintendent Solan said they are also reviewing transportation impacts. They anticipate a marginal increase in transportation costs because the Chapman neighborhood is densely populated with many walkers, while Barnum is not—meaning more students will require busing. A bus typically costs about \$80,000 per year, plus roughly \$10,000 for diesel fuel. They are assessing what this could mean for routes and overall transportation expenses. They are receiving some of this data later in the budget cycle than usual, so they are working quickly in November to prepare our best evaluations for January.

Regarding medical benefits: last year's market projection was 12–15%, and our actual budget came in at 10.9%. This year, projections range from 12–17% (up from 12–18% last

year). This is a significant increase, especially given that medical benefits represent a \$15 million portion of our budget. Every 10% increase adds approximately \$1.5 million—about 1.5% of the total budget—solely for medical benefits, even if they remain below market trend.

Dr. Solan said they are continuing to look closely at the new kindergarten start age. The Transitional Kindergarten (TK) program has been a real benefit for families who do not feel ready to send their four-year-olds to kindergarten. As a reminder, the eligibility date changed from “age five by January 1” to “age five by September 1.” Over the past two years, we’ve evaluated, in compliance with the law, the four-year-olds who turn five between September and January. Many families have chosen to participate in our tuition-based Transitional Kindergarten program, which allows us to offer the service in a budget-neutral way. As they review IEPs and plan ahead, it appears there may be a room available at Barnum where they could potentially offer a similar program. They are evaluating this carefully because they want to ensure that if they make that commitment, they won’t find ourselves three months into the year needing that room back. So, this analysis is ongoing, and you will hear more as they refine the plan.

Outplacement costs continue to rise, as they are for districts across the state. They have already seen a slight increase in outplacements during the first semester, and are reviewing those developments. These students typically exceed the excess-cost threshold—three and a half times our per-pupil expenditure. The Town receives the excess-cost revenue from the state, but because the state does not fully fund the account, the amount they receive is reduced and distributed as a block grant.

Last year, they explored adding high school-level curricular leadership—similar to the model they have at K–8. That proposal was part of the Board’s budget until the reductions in April. They are again evaluating it, but they need to get a clearer understanding of the enrollment projections before revisiting that option.

On the positive side, all of our contracts for next year have been settled, so they know the increase percentages for each bargaining unit. The bus contract will increase by 4% next year. It remains a very competitive contract, though transportation costs may rise further if redistricting results in additional buses. As of last week, they received preliminary drafts of the redistricting proposals, and Luther and the transportation team are now mapping out bus runs—route lengths, ride times, bus capacity, and related costs. Transportation will be a significant factor in determining a long-term redistricting solution, and they are incorporating that analysis into the planning process.

The maintenance contract will go out to bid due to the reconfiguration of schools. They are estimating roughly a 5% increase, though that is not final until bids are received. Minimum-wage increases will also impact this contract substantially.

Dr. Solan reminded the committee that last year they made significant reductions in operations, instructional supplies, and curricular materials in order to meet the budget target.

Even with those reductions, they were still unable to avoid a reduction in force, eliminating three positions: a science teacher and a math teacher at Cheshire High School, and an elementary world language (Spanish) teacher. Given that they have already reduced staffing, Dr. Solan said he is concerned about the impact of two consecutive years of substantial cuts.

Finally, the new buildings present unknowns in terms of energy consumption. There is no oil or gas in these buildings, but electricity use will increase. At the same time, they are exploring adding solar panels this summer, which could offset electricity costs. With the simultaneous construction and redistricting changes, they have more moving parts than ever in this year's budget, which makes it difficult to project certain costs with confidence.

The committee discussed these considerations as well as the budget as a whole. Dr. Solan thanked the committee for their input.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Mr. Grippo, and seconded by Mr. Ecke, the meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Samantha Rosenberg, Board Chair

Attest:

Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

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