

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING  
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON JANUARY 22, 2026 AT 7:30 PM**

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Board Members Present: Samantha Rosenberg, Chair; Anne Harrigan, Vice Chair; Tim White, Secretary; Matthew Colehour; Anne Marie Cullinan; Mark Ecke

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; Kevin Hanlon, Principal, Cheshire High School; Kelly Grillo, Principal, Dodd Middle School; Ryan Murphy, Assistant Principal, Dodd Middle School; Azra Redzic, PK-8 Curriculum Coordinator

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**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. Matalyn Tabor and Connor Rayball, student representatives for the 2025/2026 school year, reported on recent events at Cheshire High School. In addition, this month, Dodd Middle School students, Whitney Rayball and Silas Newell reported on recent events at the middle school. Board members thanked students for their informative reports.

**2. PRESENTATIONS**

A. School Partnership Award – Cheshire High School

Mr. Ecke, the Board of Education representative to Cheshire High School, will introduce the school's recipient, Christine Pittsley. Christine Pittsley is a graduate of Cheshire High School, and her family has deep roots in the Cheshire community, having lived here for generations. A historian and librarian with the Connecticut State Library, Ms. Pittsley first presented "The History of Slavery in Cheshire" to students in the Black and Latino Studies class five years ago. What began as a personal inquiry has grown into a thoroughly researched and thoughtfully developed presentation, drawing on her extensive research skills and professional expertise. Each year since, Christine has generously returned to share this presentation with our students, continually expanding and enriching the content as her research deepens and new perspectives emerge. She offers her time and knowledge entirely on her own, driven by a genuine commitment to educating and engaging our students. The Board presented Ms. Pittsley with a small gift and thanked her for going above and beyond for the students of Cheshire.

**B. Eagle Scout Recognitions**

The Board recognized three Cheshire High students who received the rank of Eagle Scout. Principal Hanlon introduced the students and shared their Eagle Scout projects. Matthew Rinaldi restored a wooden gazebo at Gaylord Hospital in Wallingford; Toyba Barasz restored a section of the Pollinator Pathway Garden and stepping stone; walkway along the Farmington Canal Linear Trail in Cheshire, and Wyatt Jalowiec renovated the bleachers at the CHS baseball field. The scouts were presented with a Certificate of Achievement.

**3. AUDIENCE**

Jane Presnick-Lyon, 479 Sandstone Circle. Ms. Presnick-Lyon was a long-time parent volunteer at Chapman proposes naming the library inside Barnum School the "Eli Woodbury Library" after Cheshire's second Medal of Honor recipient (the first being the person Barnum School is named after). In addition, as Chapman may be repurposed or demolished, she asks that several items be saved:

- A laminated magazine article (from PTO Today, circa 2002) about a classroom program where students adopted service members and sent care packages. This plaque hung in Chapman's lobby for years.
- A black and white photo of a young boy killed on Route 10 in a bus-related accident, which alumni have inquired about.
- A rock climbing/traversing wall in the gym (6-8 feet high) that was funded half by 10,000 Box Tops for Education and half by a grant.

**4. REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES****A. CURRICULUM****I. Report on Meetings Held December 8 and January 12.**

Ms. Cullinan asked Ms. Silano to report on the meetings. Ms. Silano reported that at the December 8 meeting, the Committee discussed changes to the program of studies at Cheshire High School, specifically the removal of two classes—one in science and one in math. These were lower-level classes created to fulfill needs that existed before recent schedule changes. The district is now working with science and math teachers to provide support to ensure students are grouped with peers and accessing appropriate grade-level material.

Mr. Hanlon presented on the new schedule, which features an 8-period day with approximately 68-minute classes, reduced from the previous 80+ minutes. This new structure allows for more frequent student-teacher contact, particularly benefiting math and World Language classes for better material retention.

Discussion then turned to the district's participation in the Science of Reading Master Class, which includes the Dr. Solan, Azra Redzic, Robin

Carey, Christina Sherwood, all elementary coaches, and reading specialists. The District Literacy Plan is being fully implemented this year. She said it is a wonderful opportunity hearing from national experts in reading across the across the country, and as part of this, we put together our district Literacy Plan, which is being completely implemented this year.

Ms. Redzic and Ms. Wintenberg delivered nine professional development sessions on science of reading components to K-3 teachers during the two weeks before winter break, receiving positive feedback from teachers.

Finally, the committee reviewed recent family communications, including a letter sent by District Literacy Specialist Anne Marie Wintenberg to elementary families in grades 1-3. The letter included a video and reading list for winter break activities with suggestions by grade level and digital opportunities. Parents also received notification about opt-out options for an upcoming survey administration.

During the January meeting, the committee discussed a new mandate under the Right to Read Act requiring school districts to administer a family Reading Survey. While school districts are legally obligated to provide the survey to every registering family, parental participation remains voluntary. The survey is designed to identify potential reading struggles or links to dyslexia by gathering historical data on whether parents experienced similar challenges as children. To meet state requirements, the district plans to roll out the survey during winter benchmarks or March parent-teacher conferences for current elementary families. Looking ahead to the next school year, the mandate will expand to include all new registrants across all grade levels.

The committee reviewed the results of the Pupil Attitudes Self and School (PASS) survey, a K-12 tool now focused on grades 3-12. Administered twice yearly, the PASS survey tracks nine non-academic factors, including student motivation and connection to school. Results from the October administration were largely positive, indicating that students across the district feel high levels of confidence in their learning capabilities and maintain positive attitudes toward their teachers. This data is analyzed alongside attendance and disciplinary records to provide a holistic view of the district's climate.

The results of the Safe School Climate Survey were presented, highlighting perspectives from students, families, and staff:

Students: Generally reported a strong sense of belonging, inclusion, and safety during their commutes. However, concerns were raised regarding

physical conflict and the use of hurtful language among peers, signaling a need for continued focus on social-emotional supports.

Families: Reported high satisfaction with school communication and behavioral expectations. A key area for growth involves increasing family engagement in climate-specific work to align with new state standards.

Staff: Employees overwhelmingly described a culture of respect and manageable workloads. However, more than half of teachers identified "challenging student behavior" as a frequent issue. The committee noted a need to establish a shared definition of what constitutes "challenging behavior" to ensure consistent intervention.

The discussion concluded with a focus on moving from punitive disciplinary measures toward restorative practices. There is a recognized need to educate both staff and families on these restorative approaches to ensure fairness and consistency across the district. Additionally, the committee identified the inappropriate use of technology as a significant concern at the secondary level, which will require targeted strategies and further investigation by school climate committees.

Finally, the committee briefly touched upon the role of the Secondary Curriculum Supervisor before adjourning.

#### Discussion:

Board members asked about the response rate to which Ms. Silano replied, approximately 532 families responded. The district re-administered the survey this fall to improve upon low participation from the previous spring. Outreach included newsletters and QR codes prominently displayed during parent-teacher conferences to ensure the survey was as accessible as possible.

Ms. Fitzgerald said she is concerned about challenging behavior and noted it places stress not just on teachers but also on support staff like bus drivers and lunch aides. Ms. Silano responded that the administration is focused on triangulating data. They compare survey results with physical disciplinary logs in PowerSchool. If the survey results and the hard data don't align, it triggers further investigation. Ms. Cullinan added that a major role of the Climate Committee is creating a common language so that we're talking about the same thing. When we are looking at data from actual disruptions, it coincides with what we're hearing from our teachers, what we're seeing, and if it doesn't, then there's some intervention is needed.

**B. FINANCE****I. Finance Report**

Dr. Harrigan asked Ms. Taylor for the finance report. Ms. Taylor reported that as of December 31, the district has expended 83.9% of the total budget. While the administration is currently analyzing specific variances, these are restricted to anticipated accounts including outplaced tuition, pupil transportation, textbooks, and software. These variances may be offset by other budget lines, as previously discussed in recent budget sessions. Regarding the Capital Expenditures Plan, preparations will begin in February with the Director of Facilities. The Planning Committee aims to present this separate plan to the Board of Education in April for subsequent Town Council approval. Additionally, the district is releasing an RFP for district-wide cleaning services due to increased square footage for the new schools; the cost is expected to rise above the current \$859,000 contract value.

**II. Medical Benefits Update**

Ms. Taylor reported that November saw a favorable claims month at \$1.1 million (a 6% year-over-year decrease), maintaining a healthy 2.02-month reserve. However, preliminary December data indicates a less favorable trend, with claims rising to \$1.7 million. This has temporarily reduced the claim reserves to 1.7 months. The district expects this reserve fund to be replenished in the coming month as anticipated stop-loss reimbursements are processed.

**Discussion:**

Board members asked how they budgeted for items, such as the cleaning contract when they don't have a firm number. Ms. Taylor responded that they budgeted the amount that they believe the RFP will be.

Mr. Colehour inquired about the anticipated stop-loss reimbursements for December and January. Ms. Taylor explained that reimbursements are triggered whenever claim values exceed a \$175,000 threshold, noting that the town typically performs the initial analysis before providing the data. Last year they received \$252,000 in December, though she notes they are currently running about a month behind schedule.

Mr. Colehour asked if reimbursements are on a biannual or semiannual schedule, Ms. Taylor said the process is actually a monthly reconciliation and the reimbursements are not fixed-schedule payments in the traditional sense, but rather occur dynamically throughout the year whenever claims surpass the established limit.

### III. **Discussion/Possible Action Regarding the 2026/27 Board of Education Budget**

Dr. Harrigan explained that the superintendent presented his budget recommendation for \$101,350,750, an 8.83% increase over the current year's budget on January 8. At their Finance Committee of the Whole Meeting on January 20, 2026, the Finance Committee moved forward to the full Board of Education a proposed budget for fiscal year 2026/27 of \$99,922,388, an increase of \$6,798,074 (7.3%) over the current year's budget. The Committee felt that although they were asking for a reduced budget, they felt strongly that the Superintendent add a half team in Grade 8 at Dodd Middle School.

Dr. Harrigan said for tonight's meeting, Dr. Solan took their directive and prepared possible reductions to his recommended budget bringing the increase down to 7.54%. She shared Dr. Solan's comments regarding the reduction. "While the reduction aims to lighten the burden on the Town, it necessitates significant trade-offs that the Superintendent described as "trimming the limbs" rather than just "low-hanging fruit." They are very aggressive, yet retain classroom level growth and services to the greatest extent possible. Further reductions would need to come from existing staff and or increased revenue. To accommodate the Board's priority of adding a half-team (2 teachers) at Dodd Middle School, the revised budget eliminates 2 proposed administrative positions and reduces the number of new elementary classroom teachers from 6 down to 4. Beyond the administrative cuts, the 7.54% version reduces proposed specialists by 1.5 positions and cuts a 0.5 multilingual learner teacher and a special educator."

#### Discussion:

Ms. Rosenberg said the Board is responsible for ensuring an appropriate learning environment, adequate staffing, instruction materials, technology, safe facilities and an equitable allocation of resources. She said supporting staff alone is not sufficient. Students must also have the resources they need to learn and staff members have the materials and tools necessary to teach effectively. She said as we review potential reductions, it's clear that some represent reasonable efficiencies, while others directly affect instructional student supports, leadership, classroom staffing, special education services that could go on. Reductions that preserve staffing but erode instructional materials, technology or classroom resources still place the district at risk, and these reductions carry significant higher educational and legal implications and must be approached with particular caution by this board. She said she also wants to be explicit about the broader context this board's action tonight may not be the final action. Additional reductions may be considered by the Town Council. It is critical that what we advance reflects our strongest professional judgment

about what is necessary to meet our legal obligations and educational responsibilities to students. She encouraged her fellow Board members to clearly and confidently support the elements of this budget that are most essential to sustaining both effective staffing and the resources required to support student learning and instruction.

Dr Solan thanked Ms. Taylor and Ms. Silano and said he appreciated the time and energy and all the consternation and consideration that went into these reductions. He said there was a typo that should have said 4 out of 5 (not 6) proposed teachers. He said the Board said the reductions were to be fiscally responsible. He said the proposed cuts are "aggressive," leaving very little margin for error. Further reductions were cautioned against, as they would move the district's financial standing from a "risky" position to a "reckless" one.

The Board discussed projected enrollment increases and the necessity of adding elementary classroom teachers. It was noted that total enrollment has increased by 225 students since June of the previous year, a period during which no new teaching positions were added. This growth has pushed average elementary class sizes to over 19 students. The administration clarified that while the initial proposal sought to bring class sizes down to 18.7 with 5 additional teachers, the current plan—which adds four teachers—will result in an average of approximately 18.8 students per class.

Mr. White expressed support for maintaining manageable class sizes and noted that from a community perspective, a slight increase in class size might be acceptable if it helps balance the tax burden.

Ms. Cullinan said the current figures, the fiscal challenges being faced are consistent with trends seen across the state and country. She said she appreciates the administration's efforts to preserve critical staffing, specifically noting that the inclusion of 4 out of 5 requested positions and additional teachers at the middle school level would keep class sizes at a manageable average of roughly 18.7 to 19 students.

Further discussion highlighted the importance of balancing fiscal reductions with instructional needs. While there were noted cuts to curriculum supplies, speakers emphasized that these materials are vital for "hands-on" learning. Ultimately, despite the imperfections in the proposal, there was a consensus in favor of moving the budget forward this evening, with the understanding that additional refinements will likely be necessary as the process continues.

Mr. Ecke noted that every year it is very frustrating because we value our schools but have to make the reductions. The Board has to walk a fine line between being fiscally responsible and doing what we think is best for our students. He said the recurring need for reductions is frustrating. While, the district has managed to perform well on a very tight budget year after year, there is growing concern regarding how long such austerity can be sustained before it negatively impacts classroom performance. He said he will support the 7.54% budget.

Ms. Fitzgerald said she agrees with what her fellow Board members have said. She has appreciation for the administration's ability to maintain operations under significant financial constraints. She voiced concern over the long-term consequences of deferred needs and she is disappointed in the inability to fund a 0.5 STEM Coordinator for the high school, a position viewed as vital for elevating the math and science curriculum. She said she would love to have more public attendance at the meetings so the community might better understand the complexities of the process and advocate to the Town Council.

Mr. Colehour said he moved to Cheshire for the school system. He thanked the administration for their transparency and the comprehensive budget book that is available to the public. He acknowledged the effort of reaching the 7.5% target. He feels there can be further refinement. He said he identified 127 line items increasing by more than 20%, some make sense. These items account for over \$4.4 million of the total increase. He suggested the Board cap the increases. He also noted the Town has lost nearly \$4 million over four years on the current stop-loss policy. He proposed a self-insured model for excess medical claims by budgeting \$1.5 million annual to build a nest egg, the Board could potentially reduce the current \$2 million line item by \$500,000 while still covering claims over the \$175,000 threshold. He urged the Board to implement transportation efficiencies before the next school year. Mr. Colehour voiced support for the proposed instructional additions and expressed a desire to reach the Finance Committee's target number while restoring certain cuts, specifically the 5th elementary teacher position and essential instructional supplies.

Dr. Solan and Ms. Taylor provided an update on the Town's Medical Benefits Task Force. Interviews for the four community candidates were recently completed, though the group has not yet been finalized. Ms. Rosenberg made a proposal to have Mr. Colehour on the Task Force for Board representation.

**MOTION** by Dr. Harrigan and seconded by Ms. Fitzgerald.

**MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education submit to the Town Manager, a budget for the 2026/2027 fiscal year totaling \$99,922,388, which represents an increase of \$6,798,071 (7.3%) over the 2025/2026 budget.

**VOTE:** The Motion Failed 1-6. (All members except Mr. White opposed.)

**MOTION** by Dr. Harrigan and seconded by Mr. Ecke.

**MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education submit to the Town Manager, a budget for the 2026/2027 fiscal year totaling \$100,149,080, which represents an increase of \$7,024,766 (7.54%) over the 2025/2026 budget.

**VOTE:** The Motion Passed 6-1. (Mr. Colehour opposed.)

**C. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES**

**I. Formation of the Calendar Committee.**

Dr. Harrigan explained that in accordance with Policy 6111, the school calendar shall be drawn up by a committee composed of the Superintendent of Schools or his designee, the Chairman of the Board of Education, a member of the Board of Education chosen by the Chairman, a teacher who may be chosen by the president of the Education Association of Cheshire, an administrator who may be chosen by the president of the Cheshire Administrative Personnel, and a parent who represents the PTA. Ms. Rosenberg has appointed Dr. Harrigan as the Board of Education member to serve on the Calendar Committee. The Superintendent has the various groups referenced above, PTA and the bargaining units of the Cheshire Administrative Personnel and the Cheshire Education Association, who are represented on the Calendar Committee, asking for representatives to be selected to serve on this year's committee. A first meeting of the committee will be held on Wednesday, February 4, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in the Humiston Board Room. At this meeting the 2026-27 proposed calendar will be discussed and formally recommended for adoption and the 2027-2028 proposed calendar will be formulated.

Ms. Rosenberg said there has been interest from parents in the community to have input into the calendars from each of the building levels. Dr. Solan agreed.

**II. Legislative Committee.**

Ms. Cullinan reported on the meeting held this evening prior to the Board meeting. She said the Committee of the Whole was joined by Senator Rob Sampson, Representative Lezlye Zupkus and a staff member from

Representative Linehan's office. The Committee engaged in a productive dialogue with legislative representatives regarding the specific fiscal and operational challenges facing the Cheshire School District. These topics included Educational Cost Sharing, Special Education Excess Cost Grant, elevating the profession of education and National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs - Free and Reduced Meal Thresholds.

Ms. Fitzgerald asked to be the official liaison for the Park and Recreation Commission. She was Commissioner for just under a year and feels it is important to stay connected in regard to fields at the schools and the town fields and working together to make sure there is sufficient capacity.

Ms. Cullinan, ACES Liaison reported that they are in the process of a search for a new Executive Director as Tom Danehy is retiring. She said they are doing a lot of work at ACES at Chase and refurbishing buildings in New Haven and North Haven.

Dr. Solan noted that there will be a concert to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CEF on January 27 at 6:30 pm. In addition, he noted that CEF will be holding their annual Trivia contest in March at Cheshire Academy – more details to follow.

Ms. Fitzgerald added that she will also be the liaison to CEF, an organization that does tremendous work and offers scholarships to students. She said she wants to make sure that teachers are aware of the mini grant opportunities that exist. The grants can help with a gap in funding for student enrichment opportunities.

## 5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

**MOTION** by Mr. Colehour and seconded by Ms. Fitzgerald.

**MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education approve the Minutes from meetings held on December 4, 2025, December 18, 2025 and January 8, 2026.

**VOTE:** The Motion passed 7-0.

## 6. CORRESPONDENCE

Dr. Solan noted that an email was received today regarding the waiver process. He said the process is ongoing. The first survey to go out was the priority legacy waivers, there were 165 Chapman to Highland legacy waiver surveys administered with 119 completed. Highland to Barnum, the Moss Farms group we had 27 surveys administered and 16 completed. Last week the second phase of waivers, 534 requests for completion and we had 205 completed. He said they are attempting to follow up with those people who did not complete the surveys. He said he needs to get accurate numbers because this is the precursor to staffing.

7. **SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT**

Dr. Solan noted our PPS Director, Robin Carey has submitted her notice to retire. That position has been posted internally.

Open Choice Enrollment projections are due to ACES. Unfortunately, in K-8 we are reviewing class sizes and he doesn’t feel like we are in a position to add students to those grades. He will recommend adding 6 students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. He added there are currently 3 8<sup>th</sup> grade Open Choice students so that would bring the total to 9.

Dr. Solan noted that we were recently notified by the State that we needed a new Wellness Policy by March 1. He said he wanted to notify the Board because we will need to “fast-track” the revised Policy, meaning it will be approved with one reading instead of 3. He said the changes in the policy are things that we are currently complying with, they just weren’t part of our current policy. This will be reviewed at the next Policy Committee meeting.

The Superintendent reported that the administrative team was able to tour our new buildings today. Ms. Cullinan asked is the new schools will be used for community use. Dr. Solan said yes.

Ms. Rosenberg asked how many Open Choice students we currently have, to which Dr. Solan answered 40 currently.

8. **OLD BUSINESS**

None.

9. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **Chairperson’s Update**

Ms. Rosenberg announced the upcoming Polar Plunge with more information forthcoming. She thanked the Board and Administrators for all the work put in the budget. She announced the upcoming meetings.

10. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mr. Ecke, and seconded by Ms. Fitzgerald, the meeting was adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Samantha Rosenberg, Board Chair

Attest:

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Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

Filed at the Town Clerk’s Office, Town Hall, Cheshire: 2/11/2026.