

**CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION
MINUTES OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE
HELD VIRTUALLY ON FEBRUARY 2, 2026**

Committee Members Present: Mark Ecke, Chair; Dr. Anne Harrigan, Matthew Colehour
Administrators Present: Dr. Jeffrey F. Solan, Superintendent of Schools
Other Staff Present: Luther Miller, Transportation Coordinator; Erica Biagetti, Food Services Director

1. CALL TO ORDER – 7:00 P.M.

Mr. Ecke called the meeting to order and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

2. Audience.

None.

3. Discussion regarding Transportation Policy

Dr. Solan explained that Mr. Colehour had raised questions regarding the Transportation Policy at a recent budget meeting. He invited Luther Miller, Transportation Coordinator to answer his questions.

Mr. Colehour noted that his questions were not criticisms but an effort to explore whether improved communication with parents about transportation policies could potentially lead to cost savings. He said as a parent of three students who has driven his children to school since COVID, he explained that he typically receives the annual August “Opt-Out” email but had not considered its broader impact. It wasn’t until walkers were unable to initially secure available bus seats that he realized opting out could positively affect other families and possibly reduce costs or route times. He questioned whether sending opt-out communications earlier or framing them differently might encourage more participation and create flexibility to reduce the number of buses, noting that August may be too late to realize meaningful budget savings.

Mr. Miller responded by clarifying that walkers were never denied seats but were told assignments would be finalized around mid-September due to uncertainties caused by new developments and late registrations. Many registrations, particularly at the high school level, come in close to the start of school, making routing a challenge. Ultimately, all walkers who requested transportation were accommodated, though sometimes at different locations than in prior years. Regarding opt-outs, Luther explained that forms are sent once PowerSchool becomes active in mid-July, since communication relies on that system. The department has used opt-out forms for at least five years, marking students ineligible for routing when forms are submitted. While most opt-outs arrive before school starts, some continue through September. Mr. Miller indicated that sending opt-out forms earlier, such as before PowerSchool shuts down at the end of the school year, could be considered.

Mark Ecke followed up by asking how the district would handle situations where a parent opts out, seats are reassigned to walkers, and then circumstances change—such as a family

losing a car and needing transportation again. Mr. Miller explained that walkers or otherwise ineligible students who are granted available seats receive them as accommodations, and those accommodations can be rescinded at any time, though this has rarely happened in his 15 years. If a previously opted-out but eligible student later needs transportation, the district must provide it. They can either reassign the student within 72 hours or direct the family to the nearest stop within a mile. No student is turned away.

Mr. Miller explained it is a challenge at the high school level. Because students can obtain parking passes, many who are initially assigned to buses stop riding once they begin driving. Bus ridership drops significantly, especially in the spring, yet the district is still legally required to provide transportation. While it may appear inefficient to run buses with only a handful of riders, each bus typically serves multiple tiers—such as high school, middle school, and elementary routes. Even if high school ridership drops, consolidating routes would not eliminate buses entirely; it would simply create layovers for drivers before their next tier, as buses and drivers are paid whether they run one or multiple tiers.

Mr. Colehour reiterated his broader concern about achieving a “critical mass” of opt-outs earlier in the year to create meaningful savings. He cited observations at Doolittle and Norton, where large numbers of parents drop off students daily despite likely being assigned bus seats. Mr. Miller acknowledged that daily parent transportation reduces actual ridership but does not reduce assigned seats, since the district has no way of knowing who will ride on a given day. While technology exists to track student ridership, implementing automatic removal for non-riders would require a board policy. Luther noted he had previously suggested a policy that would remove students after three consecutive weeks of non-use, with reinstatement available within 72 hours.

Ms. Taylor noted that the district has a unique opportunity this year because opt-outs are embedded in the waiver process related to redistricting. As routes are finalized, the district will soon know which students have opted out, which could help with planning. She also questioned whether families might be more or less likely to opt out this year given the added uncertainty of redistricting but agreed the earlier data could be helpful.

Mr. Miller cautioned that while opt-outs may free seats for walkers, they do not automatically reduce the number of buses, or “trips.” Route reductions require a significant cluster of students living near one another to opt out across all tiers—high school, middle, and elementary.

Mr. Colehour acknowledged the operational complexity but emphasized that many parents lack awareness of the potential community benefit of opting out. He suggested that clearer communication about how opt-outs might improve route efficiency or reduce delays could motivate broader participation. Luther agreed it was worth trying earlier and more frequent notifications.

Committee members thanked Mr. Miller for attending the meeting.

4. **Review Policies for a First Reading**

6142.101 Student Wellness

Ms. Biagetti, Food Services Director presented a revised Wellness Policy to comply with the required triennial wellness assessment. The update reflects a merger of the district's prior policy, the updated CAFE model policy, and federal guidance from the Connecticut State Department of Education in partnership with the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Health, along with standards from the WellSAT tool. Much of the revised language formalizes practices already in place—such as providing free potable water in cafeterias and meeting all required USDA trainings—but had not previously been spelled out in policy. The updated document is significantly longer, expanding from three to fifteen pages, largely due to added regulatory detail.

Dr. Solan emphasized that while the policy is comprehensive, it largely reiterates existing regulations. The district must adhere to strict nutrition standards during the school day, with slightly more flexibility for after-school events occurring more than 30 minutes after dismissal. Because the state required these updated policy elements to be in place by March 1, the Superintendent is asking to fast-track the review.

Mr. Colehour asked for clarification about the frequency of evaluations. Ms. Biagetti explained that the Wellness Committee—composed of approximately eight members, including students—meets three times per year. Separately, the formal triennial assessment using WellSAT is conducted every three years. The revised policy now clearly documents both processes, adding description rather than replacing any requirement.

Questions were raised about food brought in by parents. Erica explained that any food served to students during the school day must meet federal nutrition standards, and families can consult with Food and Nutrition Services or school nurses for guidance. Many products sold in schools, such as certain snack brands, are specially manufactured to meet school nutrition standards and are not identical to retail versions.

Ms. Rosenberg asked about revised language in the physical activity section. Dr. Solan clarified that earlier wording referencing 60 minutes per day created practical and contractual conflicts. The updated language is more flexible, reflecting what can realistically be scheduled while still promoting increased opportunities for movement.

Mr. Colehour asked about anticipated impacts from evolving national dietary guidelines. Ms. Biagetti indicated that while minor adjustments may occur as federal or state standards evolve, the broader Wellness Policy likely will not require major changes; instead, operational practices would adapt to remain compliant. Overall, the revision formalizes existing practices, aligns the district with updated state and federal requirements, and documents the assessment and oversight structure already in place.

5111.3 Protection of Undocumented Students

The Superintendent noted that this policy was first reviewed by the Policy Committee last spring. Guidance from our attorneys was to not add policies to our policy manual that weren't legally obligated and this is one of those that is not required. Dr. Solan said he has had communication with families and our administration about how to manage ICE, that may arise during the school day. He said he sent our protocols to the Chief of Police to review and he has not offered any changes. Mr. Ecke asked if other districts were adopting a policy. Dr. Solan said he would poll his Superintendent group.

The Committee discussed whether the proposed policy should be formally adopted or left unwritten. Mr. Ecke questioned the value of codifying procedures that staff are already trained to follow, while Dr. Solan explained that the language largely reflects existing legal requirements and has been reviewed by counsel. Mr. Colehour expressed concern that adopting a policy heavily based on extensive state statutes and case law could create unnecessary liability and limit administrative flexibility, arguing that if a policy is not required, it may be better not to formalize it. In contrast, Ms. Rosenberg supported adopting the policy, noting that aligning it with legal guidance, including McKinney-Vento provisions, could provide clarity and reassurance to the community. The committee also discussed specific language related to providing resources and training to families, with concerns raised about assuming additional obligations that could expose the district to liability. Suggested revisions included softening the language to indicate resources "may" be made available upon request. Dr. Solan noted that many firms now recommend limiting policy manuals to legally required content to avoid creating potential legal risks.

5. Review Policies for a Second Reading

1312.4/ 6161.13 Library Collection Development & Maintenance

This policy which is mandated by law. The policy reflects the importance of inquiry, dissemination of ideas, and free expression, emphasizing the role of professionally trained library media specialists. The policy requires that library materials be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain relevant, in good physical condition, and appropriate for students' age and grade levels. The review process also considers whether duplicate copies are necessary, whether more current materials are available, and whether there is continued demand for specific items. This is a practice the district already follows consistently. Dr. Solan explained the established protocol for challenging materials—beginning at the staff level and progressing through administration to a committee if needed—remains unchanged.

1312.5/6161.14 Library Display and Program Policy

This mandated policy outlines criteria for selecting materials and the process for challenging displays. The policy emphasizes collaboration and a clear protocol for addressing concerns about library materials. Mr. Colehour suggested adding some of the language in this policy into Policy #1312.4/6161.13.

5141.5 Suicide Prevention and Intervention

This updated suicide prevention and intervention policy was presented by our attorneys at Berchem Moses and Robin Carey to replace a version last revised in 1996. The policy reflects current practice, emphasizes staff responsibility to refer students for support, requires communication with families, and outlines procedures for assessing risk and connecting students with appropriate community and emergency resources.

9040 Board Related Responsibilities

The revisions to Board Bylaws address Board responsibilities. The bylaw clarifies the Board's role, emphasizes collaboration and impact, establish a biennial self-evaluation strongly recommended to be facilitated by an external organization, and incorporate use of CABA recognition guidance as part of ongoing Board reflection. Ms. Rosenberg noted that Board orientation is required now by state statute and recommended referencing the statute.

9400 Monitoring Products and Processes

Revisions to this Bylaw update the Board's Self-Evaluation process. The bylaw clarifies the Board's role, emphasizes collaboration and impact, establish a biennial self-evaluation strongly recommended to be facilitated by an external organization, and incorporate use of CABA Board Recognition guidance as part of ongoing Board reflection.

6. Review Policies for a Third Reading

Dr. Solan reviewed the policies being revised due to changes in legislation. There were no changes since the first reading.

5114 Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process

This policy has been revised to account for new requirements regarding expulsion and suspension hearings as well as out-of-district placements due to challenging behavior. The changes outline the age and consequences for students in PreK through Grade 2, which would be very limited for us. Behavior intervention meetings are required and protections for children who are homeless are put in place. We would have to ensure if a person is suspended or expelled it is not a function of their homelessness. PK to Grade 2 expulsion is limited to 5 days and only for violent or harmful behavior. The policy protects due process for providing supports for students in juvenile detention.

6171 Special Education

The significant change is around the evaluation of the special education program. On or after June first, but prior to September thirtieth annually, the superintendent shall provide, at a regularly scheduled meeting of the Board of Education, an annual report concerning the special education programs of the school district. The first is the number and names of all community-based organizations with whom the Board of Education has executed a formal memorandum of understanding, memorandum of agreement, or contract to provide support services to students in the school district, disaggregated by school and type of support service provided. The second is the workforce development programs offered by the board of education to students in which the board has partnered with an outside entity, including, but

not limited to, cooperatives, internships, in-school job training programs provided by businesses, and in-school workforce board presentations, and lastly, attrition data for certified and noncertified staff, disaggregated by school and subject, not including in-district transfers.

6159 Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Changes to this policy are not significantly different to what we currently practice. With an initial evaluation, the school district currently has a 45-day timeline that begins after the referral is received and it is now increased to 60 calendar days for completion. It states we have to provide parents with Connecticut State Department of Education information resources as soon as the child is identified as needing special education which we already do. For PPT meetings, we must offer a meeting with the parents prior to the initial PPT to review the process and the concerns. The policy outlines responsibilities for the District Transition Coordinator and there is emphasis that the districts provide support for students with more significant needs, up to the age of 22, starting in sixth grade.

5118.1 Educational Opportunities for Military Children

This policy outlines requirements that districts have to expediently enroll military children. We have to honor the placement of students in all courses from the sending school. If the student was in honors or the AP, we have to bring them into AP in our school too.

MOTION by Dr. Harrigan, seconded Mr. Ecke.

MOVED *that the Policy Committee bring forward policy # 6142.101 Student Wellness for a First Reading and recommend that the Board waive the second and third readings.*

VOTE: The Motion passed 3-0.

MOTION by Dr. Harrigan, seconded Mr. Colehour.

MOVED *that the Policy Committee bring forward policy # 5111.3 for a First Reading.*

VOTE: The Motion passed 3-0.

MOTION by Mr. Colehour, seconded by Dr. Harrigan.

MOVED *that the Policy Committee bring forward Policies 1312.4/6161.13 Library Collection Development & Maintenance; 1312.5/6161.14 Library Display and Program Policy; 5141.5 Suicide Prevention and Intervention; Bylaw 9040 Board Related Responsibilities; and 9400 Monitoring Products and Processes for a second reading.*

VOTE: The Motion passed 3-0.

MOTION by Dr. Harrigan, seconded Mr. Ecke.

MOVED *that the Policy Committee bring forward Policies 5114 Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process, 6171 Special Education, 6159 Individualized Education Program (IEP), and 5118.1 Educational Opportunities for Military Children to the full Board for a third reading.*

VOTE: The Motion passed 3-0.

7. **Adjournment.**

The Committee voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Ecke, Policy Committee Chair

Attest: _____
Carol Jesensky, Board Clerk

Filed with the Cheshire Town Clerk's Office on 2/20/2026.