

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON AUGUST 20, 2026 AT 7:30 PM**

Board Members Present: Samantha Rosenberg, Chair; Tim White, Secretary; Matthew Colehour, Anne Marie Cullinan, Heather Fitzgerald

Board Members Absent: Anne Harrigan, Vice Chair; Mark Ecke

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

1. CALL TO ORDER – 7:34 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.

2. AUDIENCE

None.

3. CONSENT CALENDAR

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

MOVED *that the Cheshire Board of Education approves the Consent Calendar as presented.*

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 5-0.

NOTE: Consent Calendar Items:

Approval of Statement on Class Size Policy

In accordance with the *Agreement between the Cheshire Board of Education and the Education Association of Cheshire*, Article XXIII, the Board of Education hereby publishes and provides to the Association its policy relating to class size:

"That the Board shall endeavor to maintain class sizes consistent with proven educational practices which require that various learning situations may alter the number of students per class. The Board, through its committees, shall study and make recommendations concerning personnel and space requirements based on all factors affecting class size."

Approval of ACES Annual Membership Agreement

Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) is a Regional Educational Service Center, pursuant to Section 10-66a of the Connecticut General Statutes, which acts as a voluntary association of member Boards of Education establishing a cooperative arrangement to provide services, programs and activities for the education of children. Each year participating Boards of Education must renew their participation in ACES by (a) carrying out its responsibilities as described in the Membership Agreement, (b) paying an assessment fee of \$250, and (c) appointing Board of Education Members to serve as Representative and Alternate to the ACES Governing Board.

“That the Cheshire Board of Education agrees to participate for the 2026-27 school year in Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) as set forth in the ACES Annual Membership Agreement and appoints a Representative and Alternate to the ACES Governing Board.”

4. REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

A. FINANCE

I. Finance Report

In the absence of Finance Committee Chair Dr. Harrigan, Chief Operating Officer Emily Taylor presented the first financial report of the 2026-27 fiscal year. The approved operating budget is \$99,849,080, a 7.22% increase over the prior year. As of July 31, 2026, \$17,782,266, or 17.8%, has been expended or encumbered. Ms. Taylor explained that several salary accounts were still being reconciled following staffing and location changes associated with redistricting, but the District remained on track in those accounts.

Ms. Taylor highlighted electricity and fuel costs as early areas to monitor. The District secured a one-year electricity supply rate with Direct Energy of approximately \$0.1295 per kWh beginning November 1, 2026, about 25% above the prior supply rate. The shorter lock was selected because solar generation associated with the energy performance contract is expected to come online next year. Transportation fuel costs have also increased substantially. Current State Contract pricing is approximately \$3.43 per gallon for diesel and \$3.08 per gallon for gasoline, while heating oil is approximately \$3.44 per gallon. The transportation supply account was already fully encumbered because anticipated annual fuel usage had been committed at current pricing. Ms. Taylor also noted that Connecticut's minimum wage will increase to \$17.41 per hour on January 1, 2027; negotiated contracts generally account for the increase, but the trend will remain relevant in future personnel budgeting.

Board discussion included the impact of higher utility and fuel costs, the mechanics of the one-year electricity lock in relation to future solar generation, and whether cooperative purchasing arrangements with other districts could be explored for fuel. Ms. Taylor agreed to look into that possibility. She also explained that the apparent over-encumbrance in the managers/supervisors salary line was temporary and related to the transition in transportation management staffing.

The Board also received an update on the Town's Capital expenditure planning process. The Board had recommended approximately \$7.3 million in projects, while the Town Manager's recommendation totaled approximately \$4.05 million and reduced the list from 27 projects to 12. The Cheshire High School loading dock project, estimated at \$875,000, remained the Board's referendum item. Discussion focused on the deteriorating condition of the loading dock, the importance of clearly communicating its safety and operational significance, and the limited period during which Board resources may be used to advocate for a referendum item. Dr. Solan emphasized that the District could continue to educate the public after the advocacy window closes. Board members requested clear supporting information, photographs, and, if available, outside professional assessment of the loading dock's condition.

Ms. Taylor further reported that the track and turf project would not require referendum approval because the net taxpayer cost, after anticipated reimbursement, is below the referendum threshold. Other projects advancing in the Town Manager's recommendation included Dodd stage renovations and Dodd athletic field improvements.

II. **Medical Benefits Update**

Ms. Taylor presented the June 2026 year-end medical benefits report and the July 2026 report for the new fiscal year. The Medical Benefits Reserve Fund ended June 2026 at approximately \$3.07 million, representing 2.41 claim months in reserve and exceeding the two-month target. June claims were approximately \$1.50 million, higher than the prior June, but increased contributions during 2025-26 helped maintain reserve stability.

For 2026-27, the medical benefits budget is approximately \$16.65 million, with monthly contributions to the reserve increased to approximately \$1.296 million. As of July 31, the reserve balance was approximately \$2.47 million. July claims totaled approximately \$1.86 million, and the reserve represented approximately 1.85 claim months. Ms. Taylor characterized the fund as being in a stable position at the beginning of the year.

III. **Approval of Bid Waiver for Bus Depot Expansion**

Ms. Taylor reviewed the proposed first phase of improvements to the Sandbank Road bus depot expansion property. The Town acquired an adjacent parcel that allows the existing depot to be expanded. Approximately \$100,000 remains in Capital Project 01349 from a \$125,000 capital appropriation established in 2020. The larger long-term plan includes paving, lighting, fencing, parking, and infrastructure capable of supporting future electric buses; however, the full build-out is substantially beyond the currently available funding.

DATTCO, the District's transportation provider, proposed an initial phase consisting of site preparation, clearing, grading, excavation, erosion control, and reclaimed asphalt millings to create additional employee parking and improve use of the property. The District's cost is estimated at approximately \$78,000, while DATTCO would contribute approximately \$100,000 in labor, trucking, equipment, and materials. Ms. Taylor explained that the arrangement is mutually beneficial and that comparable work obtained through a conventional bid process would likely cost considerably more. Board members discussed drainage, the use of reclaimed millings, future phases of the project, and the rationale for the bid waiver. Ms. Taylor confirmed that drainage and site considerations had been reviewed as part of the Planning and Zoning approval process.

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

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education request a bid waiver from the Cheshire Town Council to authorize DATTCO, Inc./Accelerated Property Management, LLC to complete the proposed initial phase of improvements to the Sandbank Road bus depot expansion property, utilizing available funds from Capital Project 01349, at a cost not to exceed the amount authorized for the project.

VOTE: The motion was approved unanimously 5-0.

B. **OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES**

Ms. Cullinan briefly reported on a recent CABE gathering attended by representatives from school districts and superintendents. Discussion included artificial intelligence and a review of the recent legislative session.

5. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

MOTION by Mr. White and seconded by Ms. Cullinan

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education approve the minutes of the Business Meeting held June 4, 2026; the Fiscal/Business Meeting held June 30, 2026; the Special Meeting held July 20, 2026; and the Retreat Meeting held August 17, 2026.

VOTE: motion was approved unanimously.

6. **CORRESPONDENCE**

No formal correspondence was reported. Chair Rosenberg noted an inquiry from a resident regarding landscaping behind Norton School near Sharon Drive. Dr. Solan stated that the matter was appropriately directed to the Next Generation School Building Committee and would be addressed as part of his new schools update.

7. **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

Dr. Solan reported that work at the new Norton and Barnum schools was progressing toward the September 8th opening. Certificates of occupancy had not yet been secured, with final communications-related components and, at Barnum, elevator clearance among the remaining items. He expressed confidence that both schools would open on time, while acknowledging that the timing was compressing the period available for staff to enter the buildings and complete classroom setup.

At Norton, front-site work on the Brooksville Road side will continue after school opens, and some landscaping will not be completed until after winter. Bus circulation had been tested successfully. Temporary staff parking arrangements were made across the street at the YMCA. Families at both new schools were receiving detailed communications about arrival, dismissal, transportation, and building access. Current students and a parent will have an opportunity for an orientation walk-through before school opens; Dr. Solan stressed that these visits are intended to familiarize students with the buildings and are not full tours or open houses.

Community ribbon-cutting/open-house events are planned for Norton on September 17 at 4:30 p.m. and Barnum on September 18th at 4:00 p.m. Members of the Norton family are expected to participate at Norton, and Colonel Barnum and his wife are expected at the Barnum event. Plans were also being developed to recognize the school namesakes in connection with the September 18th football game.

Dr. Solan reported that staffing was nearly complete. Based on updated enrollment, one kindergarten position at Barnum was shifted to a sixth-grade position at Highland, where class size had exceeded 25 students. The change was budget-neutral and maintained the same overall number of certified staff while better aligning staffing with actual enrollment and the Board's class size policy.

Board members discussed pedestrian safety and crossing guards near Barnum, ongoing site and landscaping matters, community use and rental of the new school facilities while punch-list work continues, and the continued role of the Next Generation School Building Committee during project closeout. Dr. Solan explained that the committee is expected to remain active for approximately another year while bills are finalized and remaining construction and warranty issues are addressed.

Mr. Colehour reflected on the significance of reaching the opening of the two new schools after years of community planning and advocacy and thanked the Board, Town Council, prior boards, staff, and community members who helped make the projects possible. Dr. Solan similarly reflected on the long effort leading to the referendum and the opening of the schools.

Additional discussion addressed school-choice waivers and transportation. Dr. Solan reported that the District had been able to accommodate approved waivers within available building space, while noting that families accepting a waiver waive transportation and that requests for space on adjacent-area buses cannot be determined until regular routes and capacity are established. Ms. Taylor reported that the District was completing routing through new transportation software and would communicate formal transportation assignments to families before school begins.

Chair Rosenberg asked about recently publicized special education grant funding. Dr. Solan explained that the District did not apply for the grant because it was intended primarily to establish new programming; Cheshire already maintains robust in-district special education programs, and accepting short-term funding for a new program could create a future fiscal cliff.

Dr. Solan also reported that he had met with parents requesting consideration of Eid al-Fitr as a school holiday. He explained that the request would be referred to the District's calendar committee, which generally meets in December or January. Discussion acknowledged both the importance of cultural and religious awareness and the Board's recent effort to increase the number of uninterrupted five-day instructional weeks. The calendar committee will consider the request as part of its normal process.

The Board also discussed school supply lists. Dr. Solan stated that the District is working to balance families' desire to personalize student supplies with the District's responsibility to provide materials necessary for instruction and to maintain equity.

Dr. Solan reminded Board members that Convocation will be held September 2 and that the first day of school is September 8. Board members were invited to attend Convocation and, as schedules permit, participate in the traditional first-day visits to schools.

8. OLD BUSINESS

There was no Old Business.

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Chairperson's Update

Chair Rosenberg expressed enthusiasm for the beginning of the new school year and thanked staff and Board members for their work leading into the opening of school. Ms. Rosenberg announced the upcoming meetings.

10. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Mr. White, and seconded by Ms. Cullinan, the meeting was adjourned at 9:07 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: _____.