

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION SCHOOL OPENING MEETING
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON SEPTEMBER 10, 2026**

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

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; Christina Sherwood, Director, Pupil Personnel Services; 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; Kelly Grillo, Principal, Dodd Middle School; Ryan Murphy, Assistant Principal, Dodd Middle School; Diana Burns, Ed.D., Principal, Barnum Elementary School; Katharine Carlucci, Assistant Principal, Barnum Elementary Schools; Kristin Lopa, Principal, Doolittle School; Jillian Romann, Assistant Principal, Doolittle School; Jodie Roden, Principal, Norton School; Jessica Zanghi, Assistant Principal, Norton School; Scott Jeffrey, Principal, Highland Elementary School; Erica Labickas, Assistant Principal, Highland Elementary School; Azra Redzic, PK-8 Curriculum Coordinator; Beata Celejewski, Supervisor of Elementary Special Education; Marie Broadway, Supervisor of Secondary Special Education

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.

2. AUDIENCE

No members of the audience addressed the Board.

3. PRESENTATIONS

A. OPENING OF SCHOOLS REPORT

Dr. Solan opened the report by reflecting on the excitement of beginning the school year with two new elementary schools. He thanked the Board of Education, Town Council, Next Generation School Building Committee, School Modernization Committee, community advocates, administrators, staff, and families whose work and flexibility contributed to a successful opening. He

particularly recognized the elementary principals for navigating redistricting and welcoming students and families into newly organized school communities.

Chief Operating Officer Emily Taylor reviewed operational work completed throughout the district. Major projects included the \$250,000 Doolittle playground, the \$1.1 million Cheshire High School fire alarm control system project, and HVAC improvements to the CHS weight room in preparation for new equipment donated anonymously. Usable equipment and building components from the former Norton and Chapman schools were salvaged for use elsewhere in the district, including a freezer and combi oven relocated to Highland. Additional improvements included new cafeteria tables at Dodd Middle School, providing seating and improved circulation for approximately 200 students, and a Doolittle courtyard renovation completed in partnership with the Soulful Grandma Brigade and PTO.

Ms. Taylor reported that approximately 3,300 students were assigned to more than 35 bus routes in each direction. The district had received approximately 200 available-seat petitions and 130 transportation opt-outs. New systems included the My Ride K-12 application, online transportation forms, and routing software integrated with DATTCO. She announced that Richie Luper would become Transportation Manager effective September 14 following Luther Miller's retirement after 15 years of service to Cheshire Public Schools.

Technology work included deployment and configuration of more than 300 staff and student devices, establishment of network and radio connectivity at the new schools, new facial-recognition access technology, and replacement and realignment of the copier fleet. Ms. Taylor also reported a strong start for Food and Nutrition Services. During the first two days of school, the department served 672 breakfasts and 3,423 lunches. Breakfast is free to all students this year. She welcomed Maureen Nuzzo, Director of Food and Nutrition, who began on August 24, and reviewed the approximately \$125,000 CHS cafeteria renovation, including new combi ovens and structural changes intended to improve safety and efficiency.

Assistant Superintendent Marlene Silano summarized summer programming and preparation. More than 70 students and family members attended an aviation open house held at Meriden Markham Airport for students entering grades six through eight. Summer offerings also included enrichment programming, extended school year services for students receiving special education, and a grant-funded program for multilingual learners. Curriculum teams revised science, social studies, and English language arts curricula and planned for standards-based grading in grades seven and eight mathematics. The District's AI Learning Collaborative continued developing an approach to student AI literacy, while administrators and teachers

participated in hiring, safety planning, and professional learning extending from the science of reading through high school geometry.

Dr. Solan reviewed Convocation, whose theme was "Looking Back. Leaping Forward." as the district marked ten years of work centered on complex thinking and social-emotional learning. He recognized Paraeducator of the Year Lori DelCore and 2026-27 Teacher of the Year Ian Wildermann, English Department Chair at Cheshire High School. Dr. Solan said the rise of artificial intelligence reinforces the importance of the district's established performance standards. Teachers will use their knowledge of students, content, and pedagogy to leverage AI in designing rigorous learning experiences, while the district develops age-appropriate AI literacy instruction for students. He also highlighted expansion of the "You Belong Here" initiative, through which high school students work with younger peers to strengthen belonging, leadership, and respect across the school community.

In reviewing enrollment, Dr. Solan explained that comparisons were based on projected enrollment because redistricting and school closures made prior-year school-by-school comparisons less meaningful. Actual K-6 enrollment was 173 students below projection, and total District enrollment was 130 students below projection; however, K-6 enrollment was 18 students higher than the prior year. Thirty-two Open Choice students were enrolled at Cheshire High School.

Dr. Solan noted that enrollment historically continues to increase during the year and that planned residential developments may affect future enrollment. A teaching position had been reassigned from one school to another based on student need without changing the total number of certified staff.

Ms. Silano connected the District's complex-thinking and social-emotional learning standards to skills identified in the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs research. Planned work includes completing geometry curriculum revisions to support the accelerated mathematics pathway, expanding "You Belong Here" programming and student voice, developing career-pathway exploration, supporting teachers in the purposeful use of AI to design lessons, and bringing proposed AI literacy instruction through the Curriculum Committee before implementation.

Board discussion addressed enrollment projections, residential development, fifth-grade class sizes at Norton, breakfast procedures, technology deployment, screen time, school safety communications, cafeteria seating, and completion of the Norton fields. Ms. Silano explained that class-size decisions consider the number and needs of students, available building resources, and balance across the district. Administrators will continue monitoring enrollment as the official October 1st count approaches.

In response to questions about student technology use, Ms. Silano stated that the district has worked since the return from the pandemic to reduce unnecessary reliance on devices. Curriculum revisions and instructional approaches such as Building Thinking Classrooms emphasize visible student thinking, collaboration, and performance tasks. Chromebook use should have a valid instructional purpose, and the district plans to review usage data and develop walkthrough tools to assess practice. Delays in distributing some elementary Chromebooks had not impeded instruction; sixth grade and upcoming assessment needs were being prioritized. Administrators also confirmed that essential communication and safety systems at the new schools were operational before opening, while staff continued troubleshooting some Wi-Fi and connectivity issues.

Ms. Taylor explained that the Dodd cafeteria tables were funded through the year-end summer projects initiative. Students at Norton are using the completed rear playground areas and basketball court, while fields beside the building remained under construction and were anticipated to be available in spring 2027. Board members praised the new Doolittle playground and the successful opening of the school year. Ms. Cullinan thanked central office administrators, teachers, support staff, paraprofessionals, parents, and community members for their work. Chair Rosenberg said the welcoming message throughout the schools conveyed to students that they belonged and that their new school was home. She emphasized that technology integration should be thoughtful and tied to a clear instructional purpose. Ms. Silano clarified that the planned AI rollout concerns AI literacy instruction rather than a new student technology tool and will first be reviewed by the Curriculum Committee.

4. **OLD BUSINESS**

None.

5. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **Affirmation of Strategic Plan**

Chair Rosenberg explained that the Cheshire Public Schools Strategic Planning Initiative reflects goals developed through extensive community participation and serves as the overarching framework for District and school goals and objectives. State law requires local boards of education to establish annual goals and objectives.

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

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education reaffirm the Cheshire Public Schools strategic objectives and goals for 2026-27.

VOTE: The motion was approved unanimously 7-0.

Chair Rosenberg wished Luther Miller well in retirement, thanked Dr. Solan and staff for Convocation and the successful opening of school, and noted that student representatives from Dodd Middle School and Cheshire High School would attend the next Board meeting.

6. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mr. White, and seconded by Mr. Colehour, 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: _____.