



Mission Statement of the Cheshire Public Schools

In partnership with families and the community, the Cheshire Public Schools will provide outstanding educational opportunities that inspire lifelong learning and prepare students to successfully meet the challenges of a changing, global society.

SUPERINTENDENT'S BUDGET MESSAGE

	EXPENDED 2008/09	BUDGET 2009/10	REQUESTED 2010/11	CHANGE (From BGT)	% inc/ % dec
CERTIFIED SALARIES	\$ 31,051,072	\$ 31,105,518	\$ 32,199,880	\$ 1,094,362	3.52%
NON-CERTIFIED SALARIES	\$ 7,467,543	\$ 7,293,399	\$ 7,393,197	\$ 99,798	1.37%
EMPLOYEE BENEFITS	\$ 7,628,393	\$ 8,891,716	\$ 9,621,118	\$ 729,402	8.20%
INSTRUCTIONAL EXPENSE	\$ 3,749,770	\$ 3,497,512	\$ 3,626,752	\$ 129,240	3.70%
SUPPORT SERVICES	\$ 5,011,257	\$ 5,171,807	\$ 5,352,200	\$ 180,393	3.49%
MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS	\$ 3,433,812	\$ 3,490,611	\$ 3,549,476	\$ 58,865	1.69%
TOTAL	\$ 58,341,847	\$ 59,450,563	\$ 61,742,623	\$ 2,292,060	3.86%

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times” Charles Dickens opened with this famous line in his novel, A Tale of Two Cities in 1859, and though he wrote these words more than a century ago, they could apply to the times we are living in today.

There is no doubt that the current state of the economy could be described as the “worst of times.” All municipalities confront very real economic challenges. There is also much uncertainty facing every school system in Connecticut. School systems must deal with the continuing pressure to meet higher and higher demands for student achievement and provide for mandated services that are continuing to expand and be redefined - all in the face of uncertain revenue streams from federal, state, and local sources. Still, for each child entering school each year, it is our collective responsibility to provide the “best of times” in terms of educational content and quality. It is our responsibility to make sure that programs and services are in place to assure that every student will be successful in their academic development and in building the solid foundation they will need as they graduate from Cheshire High School and move on into their adult lives.

In December, the Town Council and Board of Education met to review the financial status of the community. A review of the projected cost of services and the concerns about the potential reductions of state and local revenues certainly had a “worst of times” feel. However, it was also evident that prudent management during the “best of times” has placed Cheshire in a stronger position than most municipalities to weather the fiscal storm we face. A strong balance sheet for the town and some good fortune has placed Cheshire in a position to continue to provide the same quality of services that this community demands. With prudent use of resources including a combination of cost containment, judicious use of town reserves and, unfortunately, the need to increase revenues through modest tax increases, Cheshire is well positioned to continue to provide sound levels of service to its students and residents.

The recommendation for the 2010/11 Budget for the Cheshire Board of Education provides the best possible services for our students given the economic realities facing our community. This proposal maintains the current level of services in 2010/11 as are in place in the current year. The request is a 3.86% increase over the current budget.

This budget recommendation does not restore any of the almost seventeen teaching positions that were reduced in the 2009/10 budget, any support staff that were eliminated, or replenish accounts for supplies, materials and equipment that were cut. The recommended budget requests funds to support contracted increases for employees, services, and special education. The budget maintains funding levels in most accounts at current levels, but reduces funding in several, such as supplies and textbooks.

It is important to note that we are engaged in continuing discussions with the major employee groups of the school district regarding efforts to mitigate the cost increases for 2010/11. No adjustments have been factored into this proposal; however, it is assumed that before the budget process is complete, these figures will be reduced either through adjustments to current contracted costs or most assuredly will require reductions in staffing levels. This includes all employee groups. Cheshire Administrators have already acknowledged that a contract modification can be considered for 2010/11. The specifics of the modification are still being discussed. Last year the union representing the Instructional Assistants and Lunchroom/Playground Aides agreed to a one-year contract extension

that included a wage freeze for the current fiscal year. That group along with the Custodial/Maintenance Union will be negotiating contracts that will take effect beginning in 2010/11. Informal conversations, which have been ongoing for several months, will need to be formalized.

There are few options that can be considered to save significant funds short of major program loss. Last year, teaching positions were reduced at all levels, including elementary and middle school classroom teachers, high school subject area teachers and support staff including art, guidance and special education. Further staffing reductions would devastate class sizes or require wholesale changes, and/or the elimination of programs. Tweaking class sizes or the high school schedule will not result in any significant savings. Options would have to include programmatic reduction such as the Academically Gifted program, reductions in the instrumental music program, elimination of electives at Cheshire High School in departments such as Business or Technology Education, and reductions to support service areas including guidance or other counseling services. None of these options are good ones, nor does a community that has high expectations for its schools and its students desire them.

As I stated in a recent year's budget message, in the early 1990's the mission statement used by the Superintendent included a conclusion that called for excellence in educational services delivered at a "fair price" to the community. I believe, that despite the heated debate over the cost of education in Cheshire, the reliance on local tax dollars for our schools, the concern over an ever-growing base of fixed costs, and the myriad legislative mandates that must be met, the Cheshire Public Schools is an efficient and productive organization. As suggested in the past, residents may go to the Connecticut State Department of Education website (<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/site/default.asp>) and compare the 2008/2009 per pupil cost for all 166 school districts in the State to learn that Cheshire ranked 136th in per pupil spending. The state average for spending was \$13,118 per student compared to Cheshire's average of \$11,553 - a difference of \$1,435 per student. Three-year averages from 2007 through 2009 indicate that out of Connecticut's 166 school districts, Cheshire's average ranking was 141st for that period. During those three years, the State average expenditure was \$12,510 compared to Cheshire's average of \$10,883.

I share this information to express how strongly I feel about the efficiency and effectiveness of our school system in terms of the value of dollars spent and the results obtained by our students. While regularly spending in the lowest 15-20% of state school districts on a per pupil basis, our students' results on the Connecticut Mastery Test, Connecticut Academic Performance Test and other measures regularly place our students in the top 15-20% of school systems. The information indicates a lean and efficient operation, which in turn, means little room for reduction without significant impact to program quality.

In 2008, the Spring Edition of *The Connecticut Economy*, published by the University of Connecticut, reported on the change in tax levy over a five-year period for all 169 Connecticut cities and towns. The change in the tax levy relative to the value of property in Cheshire was one of the five lowest in the entire state for the five-year period earlier in the past decade. The most recent edition of the publication (Winter 2010) includes an article that measures the efficiency of Connecticut high schools. The measures of inputs

compared four data points to three outputs. These inputs included Teachers per 100 Students (Cheshire 7.57, State Average 9.05), Administrators per 100 Students (Cheshire 1.16, State Average 1.56), Computers per 100 Students (Cheshire 26.12, State Average 33.47) and Annual Hours of Instruction (Cheshire 1001, State Average 997). Cheshire is more efficient by all four measures of input. The overall input efficiency rating for Cheshire High School is .898 compared to the State average of .823. As far as output, Cheshire was very effective at a rating of .970 that matched the state average. Cheshire is a well-managed town, with an efficient and effective public school system.

As I approach the completion of my involvement in my twentieth budget as a member of the administration of the Cheshire Public Schools, I take pause and reflect on the highs and lows of nearly two decades. For some, it was always the worst of times. I often heard concerns each year from those claiming spending was too high and the economic climate was not supportive of cost increases. I also heard from those that expressed concern that spending was too low and that funding for education was a paramount need for our community. Given that history, there is one thing that certainly can be said for the 2010/11 Budget regardless of past sentiments on education spending – times are tough. This economic climate is certainly the worst that I have seen in my time in education and the question marks and uncertainties that exist are troubling at best, and at worst, downright scary. To succeed in this challenging budget year, the Cheshire Public Schools administrative staff and I are fully prepared to continue in our commitment to carefully manage all our resources and follow sound financial practices as we have over the past decade. Of course, we will also need, more than ever, the continued cooperation, support and coordinated efforts of our elected officials, our vendors, our staff and the unions that represent them, the parents and students, and Cheshire taxpayers to contribute their fair share in order to develop a sensible budget that ensures that we can continue to offer the high quality education and related services that our children deserve. Collectively, we must make the best of the worst of times. I ask you to support my budget recommendation.

Greg J. Florio, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools