

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING  
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON NOVEMBER 21, 2024 AT 7:30 PM**

---

Board Members Present: Samantha Rosenberg, Chair; Anne Harrigan, Vice Chair; Adam Grippo, Secretary; Anne Marie Cullinan; Mark Ecke; Anthony Perugini; Timothy White

Board Members Absent: None

Administrators Present: Jeffrey F. Solan, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools; Vincent Masciana, Chief Operating Officer; Marlene Silano, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Kevin Hanlon, K-8 Curriculum Coordinator

---

**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. Malakhi Beyah and Lydia Ghaly, student representatives for the 2024/2025 school year, reported on recent events at Cheshire High School including Thanksgiving Day Football, Alumni College and Career Fair, Fall Play and holiday concerts.

**2. PRESENTATIONS**

**A. District Performance Index – Dr. Solan**

Dr. Solan gave an informative presentation on the District Performance Index. He said each fall, the Connecticut State Department of Education releases their next generation accountability report. It is a comprehensive snapshot of district performance. He said the purpose of the accountability system is to track district progress in every school system across the state helping to identify areas for improvement and to see how we are performing relative to other school systems in our state and DRG. Dr. Solan reviewed the 12 indicators. He noted the improvement in chronic absenteeism, which was an area of focus. Overall, we have the eighth best performance in Connecticut, just ahead of Westport. We were 9th last year and 23rd in 2015.

**3. AUDIENCE**

Pam Salomon, 659 Cornwall Avenue. Ms. Salomon said she was there to address the recent video by former teacher Annie Dunleavy who threatened Donald Trump supporters. She stated she did not feel things were handled well. She questioned the timing of notification, lack of police presence and why the teacher was not fired immediately.

Amy Bourdon, 35 Pehr Lane. Ms. Bourdon said she was also there to discuss the events that happened as a result and Annie Dunleavy's video and how it was addressed. She

also spoke of books that she feels should not be allowed in our school libraries because of questionable content.

Karen Buell, 3 Ives Hill Court. Ms. Buell said she was in attendance to discuss books that are in the school libraries that she thinks are inappropriate for children.

Joe Kulas, 176 Tuttle Avenue. Mr. Kulas, a psychologist with a background in threat assessment spoke in support of the way the video incident was handled.

Dr. Solan stated that in his position, evaluating threats, unfortunately, is something they do on a regular basis. He evaluated the situation, including contact with the teacher, and did not deem it an imminent threat. The teacher was not at any school on Monday, and the idea that, I might compromise student safety to protect our interests is insulting. With respect to employment, Dr. Solan said they work very closely with legal counsel to make determinations. He said the content of the video was abhorrent, but he was not in a position where he could say that without compromising the school system until after the teacher resigned. He said the video scared people in our community. It undermined confidence of people, not only in our community, but broader, in what educators do for our students and families. He said we will continue to evaluate this and determine how we can improve on anything because we take what we do seriously, and nothing is more important than the trust that our community has in our staff and our people.

Ms. Silano addressed the questions about the books that the audience said has questionable content. Many of our books in the curriculum come through the Curriculum Committee and then come to the full board for approval. Other books, like books in our library are usually gleaned from many of the lists that are available from other libraries. She said they communicate with our Public Library and do not offer everything that the public library does, but we do have a good selection. I cannot speak to the list that Ms. Buell mentioned but some of those may be in our circulation. In many cases, students can self-select a book. Teachers will work with students to select those books and as we've done in the past here in recent years, if there's a book that a parent or a family is not in favor of their child reading, our teachers have always worked with the families to select another option.

#### **4. REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES**

##### **A. CURRICULUM**

###### **I. Report on Meetings Held October 21 and November 17, 2024**

Ms. Cullinan first reported on the October 21 meeting where they began a review a new textbook, The Essentials of Human Anatomy and Physiology, 13<sup>th</sup> edition. In addition, Dr. Maureen Reed provided an overview of the recommended new courses, course changes, and level changes to the 2025-26 Cheshire High School (CHS) Program of Studies. Kevin Hanlon provided an update on the multilingual learner (ML) enrollment for the 2024-25 school year. The total number of MLs in the district is 159, up from 129 the previous year. Marlene Silano and Kevin

Hanlon provided information on the district’s pilot of iReady Math as an Algebra I curricular resource. iReady Algebra I is in the pilot phase of development and Cheshire is part of the pilot program. Professional development specialists oriented the teachers to the program in August and will be back in the district on November 1 for further support.

For Informational Items at the meeting, Ms. Silano provided an update on manufacturing technology: This district continues to explore and develop programs to support student experiences in manufacturing, technology, and business. They discussed our Strategic Planning Committee, which is looking at two things this year: first, delving deeper into The Anxious Generation, a book that many community members have attended our book clubs, and second looking at artificial intelligence in public schools, and how our teachers, our staff, our students, what will be the appropriate use of AI.

Ms. Cullinan reported that at the November 11 meeting they continued their review of the new textbook recommendation, The Essentials of Human Anatomy and Physiology, 13th edition. In addition, they heard results from the PASS Survey. They discussed an updated science course pathway for students at Cheshire High School. Mr. Hanlon provided changes for Grade 5 report card the 2024-25 school year.

**II. Notice of Textbooks on Display**

Ms. Cullinan announced that in accordance with Board Policy, the following textbooks will be made available for public viewing in the Cheshire Public Library and the Office of Curriculum and Instruction at 29 Main Street from Thursday, November 21, 2024 through Monday, December 5, 2024 and slated for approval and adoption at the Board of Education meeting on December 19, 2024.

<b>Textbook</b>	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Grades</b>
<u>Essentials of Human Anatomy &amp; Physiology, 13th Edition</u>	Pearson	11-12

**B. FINANCE**

**I. Finance Report**

Mr. Masciana reported we have expended and encumbered about 77% of the budget, and we are keeping our expenditure cap for non-payroll at 50% at this time.

**II. Medical Benefits Update**

For the month of October, our claims were expected and budgeted at \$1.2 million for each month of the year. Claims were \$1.8 million, substantially

higher than what was expected. Unfortunately, it is a record high medical claims month. The reserve balance started the year at \$2.3 million and has decreased to \$1.3 million so that gives us about 1.16 months in reserves. As the board knows, we like to have two months of reserves. This was driven by one significantly high claim, and we will receive stop loss reimbursement of \$250,000 because we have insurance for claims over \$175,000 so that will help. He said there are meetings that were previously scheduled with our benefits consultant as well as Cigna representatives and we will be exploring, not only this month's claims, but also our trend this year. As we prepare next year's budget, these claims that are running above expected this year, will drive an increase in next year's budget as well. There is not much we can do if someone has a severe illness, including cancer.

Mr. Grippo asked if we are concerned that we may need to freeze the budget if these high claims continue. Mr. Masciana said we would watch what happens in the next few months. This is one of the reasons that we have the expenditure cap. Dr. Solan added that in January, deductibles kick back and typically, claims in January through March are lower.

Mr. White asked for an update on the Energy Performance Contract. Mr. Masciana said we did issue the bid for the new contract, and few had an initial visit by vendors. We have five different vendors who have expressed interest. The bids from those vendors are due in December. Mr. White said one thing that he has mentioned and hopes it is in the RFP, is the potential for using virtual net metering and buying our electricity off-site. Mr. Masciana said the RFP is all-encompassing.

C. **PLANNING**

- I. **Report on Joint Meeting with Town Council Held November 14, 2024**  
Mr. Ecke reported we had a joint meeting with the Town Council Planning Committee and established the process for the North End School. The Town Council is going to post an Open Forum to take recommendations of names for the new school using an established policy that the town has for naming buildings. There will be a meeting in January where people can bring forth recommendations. According to their policy, if three different letters are received with the same person's name on it, that name is on the list of potential school names. Right now, Barney Barnum's name is on that list. After the hearing, the joint planning committees will make a recommendation for the Town Council to vote on. At this time, we are just looking at naming the North End School, although there is discussion about renaming other schools, including Highland in the future.

D. **POLICY**

- I. **Report on Meeting Held November 12, 2024.**  
Mr. Ecke reported that at the meeting they reviewed a number of policies.

**II. First Reading of Policies**

Mr. Ecke said the following policies are being brought forward for a first reading after a thorough review by the Policy Committee. Most of the policies are being updated to be in compliance with current law. The Social Networking policy is being updated under the advisement of our attorney.

- 4112.5/4212.5 Fingerprinting
- 4118.51 Social Networking
- 6148 FAFSA
- 6172 Alternative Education Program

**III. Second Reading of Policies**

Mr. Ecke said the following policies are being brought forward for a second reading after a thorough review by the Policy Committee. Changes to these policies are to make them compliant with state and federal law.

- 4000.1/4200.1/5145.44 – Sexual Harassment/Title IX
- 5114 Suspension & Expulsion Due Process

Mr. Grippo recommended, due to the recent incident with our former staff member on social media, that we pull any policy that may have been affected by legal discovery, because it appears we are looking at the social networking policy in real time while that situation was going on. He said he would make the recommendation over the next months to identify the policies that would have been affected by this situation, so that we can be better prepared to deal with them.

Dr. Harrigan noted we have been sitting on the Equity and Diversity policy for a few months and would really like to get it to a third reading.

**E. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES**

None.

**5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES****A. Board of Education Meetings Held October 17 and November 7, 2024**

**MOTION** by Mr. Grippo and seconded by Ms. Cullinan

**MOVED** that the Cheshire Board of Education approve the minutes of the meetings held on October 17 and November 7, 2024.

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

6. **CORRESPONDENCE**

Mr. Grippo read an email from Shannon Gniazdowski (attached) regarding the Annie Dunleavy video.

7. **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

A. **New Schools Report**

Dr. Solan noted that he was sorry he missed the high school showcase meeting last month. He noted that a group of our students is traveling in Seoul, South Korea as part of a science team that is giving a presentation on various labs that they have done. He gave an update on steps he is taking on The Anxious Generation, kid-friendly cellphones and working with the Parks and Rec Department to offer more options for kids and their parents to engage in unstructured playtime. He noted at the CABE/CAPSS Convention the Board of Education earned another award of distinction. This is American Education Week, and we were thrilled to recognize so many outstanding students and their guest teachers at the Superintendent's Awards dinner. It's always one of the highlights of the year, certainly to acknowledge those incredible students. But this year, we had about a half dozen guest teachers that were there, invited by those honored students who happened to graduate from Cheshire High School. We have our groundbreaking ceremony coming up in a matter of weeks for the North End and for Norton School on December 16, at noon. There is a weather date on December 18. Our goal is to live stream that event too, but people are welcome to visit the sites, and hopefully the weather cooperates as we kick off an exciting period for the Cheshire public schools.

Mr. White mentioned he received an email from a resident who is concerned because their grandson just got a student from Afghanistan in his third-grade class who does not speak any English. Mr. White said he understands his concern that this will take time away from the other students in the classroom. Dr. Solan said he is particularly sensitive, as my father came here from Dublin as a 9-year-old, probably about third grade. He said he recognizes the question about supporting students with different levels of need who are in our classrooms, whether it be students who are acquiring another language or have special education needs, or maybe social emotional needs or some other need. He said he would like to acknowledge that, in this case, with somebody who is coming here from another country to embrace the opportunities that exist in the United States through, legal immigration, there are benefits to the other students in that class who embrace somebody from another culture and learn maybe a little bit more of a global world view. And what an amazing country we live in. This is a land of opportunity that America presents to welcome people from other cultures and enrich our communities, as I am sure this young man has. Dr. Solan asked Assistant Superintendent Silano to talk a little about the supports that are in place.

Ms. Silano said we have significant supports in place for our multilingual learners. Some of our learners come here not knowing any English as apparently

the child that you described. So, it looks different in different classrooms, mostly depending on the age of the students. In the very younger classes, we really use an immersion model where students are learning along with the rest of the class, learning to read, learning to write. In the upper grades, we have tutors. Multilingual learners. The state has some requirements in place for students to pass a test called the LAS Assessment. Every student who comes into our school who is a native speaker will have a plan. They receive support, both in the classroom and some tutoring, most of our support, especially at those younger grades, is given through one-on-one coaching to the teacher, and sometimes that's in the classroom, and sometimes that looks like pull out professional development in small bursts. We also have TESOL consultation through ACES, which is paid for through the Title III grant. We also, through that money, are able to buy supplies, to fund staff, and we are able to provide summer enrichment experiences, all of which really help our students. More discussion ensued on this topic, including Ms. Rosenberg who said she is a first-generation immigrant. She credits her teacher for bringing her to this point in her life.

8. **OLD BUSINESS**

None.

9. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **Chairperson's Update**

Ms. Rosenberg noted that many Board members attended the CABE/CAPSS Convention. The keynote speaker gave a very powerful talk on unity. She wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving and thanked the parents for coming and speaking this evening. Ms. Rosenberg read the list of upcoming meetings.

10. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Ms. Cullinan, and seconded by Mr. Grippo, the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 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: 12/18/2024.