

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON FEBRUARY 20, 2025, AT 7:30 PM**

Board Members Present: Samantha Rosenberg, Chair (8:00); Anne Harrigan, Vice Chair; Adam Grippo, Secretary; Anne Marie Cullinan; Mark Ecke; Anthony Perugini; Timothy White (7:38)

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; Amy O'Brien, Principal, Doolittle School; Scott Jeffrey, Principal, Highland Elementary School; Kevin Hanlon, K-8 Curriculum Coordinator and Interim Principal, Cheshire High School; Christina Sherwood, Supervisor of Elementary Special Education; Marie Broadway, Supervisor of Secondary Special Education

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. Harrigan 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. The reps reported on recent events and activities at the high school, including a “Play for a Day” program where students from elementary and middle schools had the opportunity to enter into a raffle to be to be part of a team for the day. They also reported on the Polar Plunge, 28 Days of Black History Month, the Career Fair and the spring musical, Footloose, that will be held on March 27-29th.

Dr. Solan noted that due to technical difficulties, tonight’s meeting is not being recorded or live streamed.

2. PRESENTATIONS

A. CHRO Bright Lights Award Winners

Doolittle Principal, Amy O'Brien, introduced Doolittle students, Ezekiel Works and Jeremy Works who were recognized for winning the Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities’ 2024 Bright Lights Awards! These young people are lighting the way for a bright future for our state and nation. Ezekiel and Jeremy were recognized by CHRO on November 14 for a night celebrating the people and organizations standing up for civil rights in Connecticut.

B. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest Winner

Norton Elementary School student, Vaasvik Narayanam, was among the 15 elementary, middle, and high school students from across Connecticut selected as winners of U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy's ninth annual “Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Essay Contest.” Vaasvik was unable to join us this evening, but we hope to recognize him at a future meeting.

3. **AUDIENCE**

Angelica Bradley, 788 Devonwood Drive and Tricia Rowald, 557 South Meriden Road. The parents, and Angelica’s son Caleb spoke about the new playground at Highland School. Parents raised \$60,000 and are hoping that the balance of \$200,000 can be funded through the Capital Budget.

Dr. Solan thanked the parents for coming to the meeting this evening and for their fundraising efforts. He said the new playground at Highland and the Adventure Playground at Norton, which was created by their PTA, are great spaces to engage students in play based experiences.

4. **REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES**

A. **CURRICULUM**

I. **Curriculum Report**

Assistant Superintendent Silano said she received some guidance from the state level on safe school climate surveys, which will supersede the information that is shared in the Board Packet. She said the Curriculum Committee will be reviewing the state’s Safe School Climate Committee surveys and will then report back to the full Board.

B. **FINANCE**

I. **Financial Report**

Dr. Harrigan, Finance Committee Chair, reported we have expended and encumbered \$77,723,410 during the 7 months of the fiscal year, which includes encumbrances for our largest accounts, payroll and transportation.

II. **Medical Benefits Report**

Mr. Masciana said through January, medical benefit claims averaged \$1,338,769 per month, or 10.2% higher than the expected rate of \$1,188,000. While January’s claims were above the expected claim rate at \$1,281,418, our reserve balance increased \$44,809 due to the Stop-Loss reimbursements received during the month for claims over \$175,000. He said they continue to work with Cigna and USI on the impact to this fiscal year’s budget, if any, as well as next year’s benefits budget.

III. **Discussion/Possible Action on Extension of Cleaning Contract**

Mr. Masciana reported that we are currently engaged with SMG Corporate Services to clean our school buildings and facilities, which includes the bus depot, the buildings and grounds offices, the maintenance garage and. our concession stand at the high school. He noted that SMG has done a very good job and are in the second year of the contract that was issued in 2023. SMG provided a fixed price for 2 years at a rate of \$750,739 per year. Mr.

Masciana said he is recommending the extension of this contract for one year. SMG has made it clear that they hope to continue to be our cleaning services contractor in the future and have offered to extend the contract for one additional year at a price of \$859,612.85, an increase of 14.5%. Mr. Masciana said the considerations evaluated with respect to their proposal are as follows:

- SMG honored the price submitted in their response to our Invitation to Bid despite the contractual obligations they subsequently had with SEIU Local 32BJ to pay higher wages and broader benefits.
- SMG had provided an expected price of \$908,029 if we extended the contract to year 3. Their willingness to extend the contract at a price of \$859,613 is a testament to their desire to retain our business.
- The minimum wage in CT increased from \$15/hour from when their contract began to a previously unforeseen \$16.35/hour as of 1-1-2025, an increase of 9%.
- It is highly unlikely that if we were to issue an Invitation to Bid at this time that we would be able to achieve a lower cost given the 9% increase in the minimum wage since we last bid this contract with a further increase very likely in January of 2026.
- We plan to issue an Invitation to Bid for a new contract effective July 1, 2026 that will include the two new elementary schools that will be opening that fall.

Mr. Masciana said we are quite satisfied with their work. We would like to extend the contract for one more year at the \$859,612.85 that they quoted.

MOTION by Mr. White and seconded Mr. Ecke.

MOVED that the Board of Education extend the contract with SMG Corporate Services from 7/1/2025 to 6/30/2026 with a base contract cost of \$859,612.85.

Discussion:

Mr. White said he will support the Motion and appreciates the time Mr. Masciana put into his explanation for extending versus an RFP. Mr. Grippo noted that the minimum wage went up 9% and asked why this is going up 14.5%. Dr. Solan explained there are also operational costs such as transportation and supply costs factored in.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

C. PLANNING**I. Report on Meeting Held January 30, 2025.**

Mr. Ecke reported that at the meeting they had a very informative presentation by Emily Taylor, Assistant COO, regarding the Capital Budget.

II. Approval of Five-Year Capital Plan

Ms. Taylor said at the meeting the Committee reviewed and outlined potential scenarios where they prioritized Year 1 projects out of the Five-Year Plan. She said they reviewed three scenarios, one in which we would have all high, medium and low priority projects in Year 1, a total of \$7.71 million. Another scenario in which all high and medium projects that were outlined in Year 1 were accomplished, and that was for \$7.49 million, and another scenario, which would be the least aggressive, and it would just be high priority items for \$4.54 million in Year 1.

Ms. Taylor reported on the committee made adjustments to the way that we prioritize some of these items. In total, there were 17 projects designated as high or urgent; three of those were urgent, and 14 of those were high priority items. One of the high priority items we spoke about was the playground renovation at Highland. Ultimately, the Planning Committee unanimously agreed to a Five-Year Capital Plan for \$62,625,000 with \$5.04 million spent in Year 1.

Mr. Perugini asked to confirm that the Highland playground improvements are in Year 1. Ms. Taylor confirmed.

Mr. Grippo asked about HVAC projects and if the grant programs went away. Mr. Masciana responded, no, there were two rounds of HVAC grants. We had no approval in the first round, and we did get approval in the second round for projects that were at or near completion. There was a third round that was planned, but it was not released yet. We received information recently that they are not committing to a third round at this point in time. So even though there's funding at the state level, they are not, or have not released any of that funding.

Mr. White noted regarding the generator it is really valuable if we get the 15-minute interval demand data, because a generator should at least take our demand into account. And if we don't know what the demand is, from a certain perspective, we're operating blindly and getting a new generator without knowing our demand. He asked them to please get that data and just look at it before they go down the path of getting a generator. Mr. Masciana responded that we could not install a generator until we have the electrical switchgear upgraded so we will have time to talk this through. We do have a request in this year's capital budget to upgrade that electrical switchgear.

MOTION by Mr. Ecke and seconded by Mr. White

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education recommends to the Town Council, the approval of the Five-Year Capital Expenditure Plan and Budget for Improvements to Current Buildings, in the total amount of \$62,625,000 with \$5.04M to be funded in Year 1 and with annual allocations as follows:

2025-2026- \$5,040,000
 2026-2027- \$12,200,000
 2027-2028- \$16,895,000
 2028-2029- \$13,115,000
 2029-2030- \$15,375,000

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

Mr. Ecke reported that at the meeting they also talked about the Energy Performance Contract and asked Mr. Masciana to give an update. Mr. Masciana said there are three proposals for an energy performance contract. The Town Council, at their last meeting, appointed three representatives that will be involved in the interview process.

D. POLICY

I. Policy Report

Mr. Ecke, Chair of the Policy Committee, reported on the meeting held February 3, 2025.

II. First Reading of Policies

Mr. Ecke gave a first reading to policies # 5131.81 Electronic Devices, #5131.911 Bullying, and #5111.3 Undocumented Students. He noted they spent a great deal of time reviewing the Undocumented Students policy in light of the current political situation. He asked the Board members to review it and provide feedback to the Committee.

III. Third Reading and Approval of Policies

After a thorough review, Policy Committee Chair, Mr. Ecke, brought forward policy #0521 Non-Discrimination for a third reading and approval:

MOTION by Mr. Ecke and seconded by Mr. Grippo.

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education give a third and final reading to Policy #0521 Non-Discrimination and direct the Superintendent to put said policy into immediate effect.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

IV. Rescind Policies

Mr. Ecke explained that policies #5144 Discipline and #5131 Conduct have been incorporated into Policy #5114 Suspension and Expulsion Due Process

that was adopted by the Board in January. Policies #5144 and #5131 and their appendixes are redundant and can be rescinded per the advice of CABE.

MOTION by Mr. Ecke and seconded by Mr. Grippo.

MOVED *that the Board of Education Rescind Policies #5144 Discipline and #5131 Conduct.*

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

E. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES

None.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

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

MOVED *that the Cheshire Board of Education approve the Minutes from the meetings held on January 16, 2025, and January 30, 2025.*

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

6. CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. Grippo read correspondence from Mr. John Connell. Mr. Connell wrote in support of health and safety for all children but especially children who identify as Trans boys and Trans girls.

7. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Solan reported we have our accreditation for our early childhood program coming up in February 2027. The National Association for the Education of Young Children establishes standards and criteria by which they evaluate our early childhood program. We have applied for support available through the state. The Accreditation Quality Improvement Support program will assist us. They require that he notifies the Board that they are applying for that grant to provide support to help our team at Darcey through the accreditation process. The Superintendent also reported on the Career Fair at Cheshire High School, where we will have over 100 presenters, 80 different careers, and 16 different career clusters.

He updated the Board on the CHS principal process, with over 50 applicants. They have worked diligently over the last several weeks to whittle that down to a group to go before stakeholders at Cheshire High School for their feedback. We will have four candidates who will meet with groups so we can get their feedback, before we turn to the Board to get your feedback on candidates.

Mr. Grippo asked about legislation around special education funding. Dr. Solan said they are still working on the legislation, but what they are looking for is to find ways to help keep students in their own district and for districts to collaborate.

Mr. Ecke asked if we have any concerns about any of our policies affecting federal funding. Dr. Solan said the DEI executive order should not impact Cheshire. We do not receive any funding for DEI. The biggest impact is the Title I funding. Those were in place prior to the Education Department. If that money (IDEA Grant) was taken away, it would really affect a lot of states.

Mr. Perugini gave a CABE update. He said CABE has a DEI position to help districts with initiatives. It is not a mandate, just diversity as we have practiced. He said school districts in Connecticut do not get funding for diversity. The problem would be for Title I – IV funding. School districts are bracing for possible cuts over the next 3 years. He said special education funding is getting a lot of support.

8. OLD BUSINESS

None.

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Chairperson's Update

Dr. Harrigan said it was only last month that the Board passed a DEI policy. She said we have diverse students in our school district, and we want all of our students to feel included. She read the list of upcoming meetings.

10. ADJOURNMENT

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

MOVED to amend the agenda to add Executive Session to discuss pending litigation to include Superintendent Jeffrey Solan and Chief Operating Officer, Vincent Masciana, with no action to follow.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Anne Harrigan, Board Vice Chair

Attest: _____
Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

Filed at the Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, Cheshire: _____.