

**MINUTES OF CHESHIRE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON MARCH 20, 2025 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; Robin-Anne Carey, Director, Pupil Personnel Services; Kevin Hanlon, Interim 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; John Perosino, Athletic Director, Cheshire High School; Kelly Grippo, Principal, Dodd Middle School; Ryan Murphy, Assistant Principal, Dodd Middle School; Diana Burns, Principal, Chapman Elementary School; Katharine Carlucci, Assistant Principal, Chapman & Norton Elementary Schools; Kimberly Dessert, Principal, Darcey School; Amy O'Brien, Principal, Doolittle School; Kristin Lopa, Assistant Principal, Doolittle School; Jodie Roden, Principal, Norton School; Scott Jeffrey, Principal, Highland Elementary School; Kevin Hanlon, K-8 Curriculum Coordinator; 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. 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 activities at Cheshire High School. They gave an update on sports including the peer health unified sports basketball tournament, cheerleading, fencing, hockey and track. They also reported that SATs would be taking place on April 3 and on the spring play, Footloose.

2. PRESENTATIONS

A. School Partnership Awards

Cheshire High School Partnership Award

Mark Ecke, the Board of Education representative to Cheshire High School, introduced the school's recipient, Dan Lee and the Ryan T. Lee Foundation. The Ryan T. Lee Memorial Foundation was chosen for its outstanding partnership with Cheshire High School a partnership that not only changes lives but also

amplifies the impact of student leadership in extraordinary ways. The Foundation, created in honor of Ryan T. Lee, carries forward his spirit by empowering students to serve others. Under the direction of the foundation board, and with PE and Health teacher Dan Lee serving as a liaison to the school community, this Foundation has become a force for good, rooted in the principles of service leadership. Everything they do centers around giving students the tools, confidence, and support to turn their ideas into reality. Here is what makes it remarkable, every student-led initiative they support is not just about one group of students making a difference, it is about students inspiring students, creating a ripple effect of leadership and service.

Through the Peer Health Educators program, the Foundation helps high school students design and run leadership conferences for younger peers for elementary, middle, and high school students, including students from other schools outside of Cheshire, instilling in them the same desire to lead and serve. They support community service projects such as collecting food and essentials for the Cheshire Community Food Pantry. The Foundation provides not just financial support (funding supplies, conference materials, and lunches) but something far greater; the belief that students, when given the right support, can change the world around them.

Darcey School Partnership Award

Samantha Rosenberg, the Board of Education representative to Darcey School, introduced the school's recipients, Cheshire Public Library Interim Director, Sandy Hernandez, April Jones, Head of Youth Services, and Stori Anne Neesingham, Youth Services Librarian, who were nominated by Darcey Principal, Kim Dessert. Cheshire Public Library has been a part of the Darcey community this year. April and Stori Anne went to Darcey School to read to the children and share their love of books. They also engage the children in songs or rhymes that are related to the stories they share. These visits get the children familiar with the staff at the Public Library and encourages families to visit our town library together. April and Stori Anne share books that are relevant to children. One that April shared was about what happens when a mitten goes missing and that it is okay to wear mis-matched mittens. Stori Anne has an amazing way to engage children in the silly voices of each character. The children love when there is a special guest reader from the Cheshire Public Library. Principal Dessert said they extremely fortunate to call Cheshire Public Librarians friends to Darcey School.

B. German Student Awards

Dr. Solan introduced German Teacher, Kristin Haase, who introduced the students who have been awarded a Gold, Silver or Bronze Medals or a special recognition certificate on the National German Exam Honor Roll for outstanding performance on the 2025 National German Exam for High School Students.

Isabella Hu-Voong and Hayden Wang both scored in the 90th percentile and are therefore eligible to apply for an all-expense paid trip to Germany this summer. Students receiving recognition included,

Bismah Arif	Wyatt Jalowiec	Eric Voong
Carly Cahill	Clare McManus	Carter Wang
Sadie Eisbach	Nina Moutinho	Hayden Wang
Mairead Hall	Joseph Norton	Matthew Wild
Colin Harkins	Zoe Renker	Christina Yong
Isabella Hu-Voong	Katarina Rutka	

3. **AUDIENCE**

None.

4. **REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES**

A. **CURRICULUM**

I. **Report on Meeting Held March 10, 2025.**

Ms. Cullinan reported that at the meeting they discussed the math benchmark assessment, received an update on the Safe School Climate Survey, and Mr. Hanlon reviewed the Algebra 1 resource update and discussed summer projects. They also received an update on the presentation to the Connecticut Literacy Council by Dr. Solan, Ms. Silano, Mr. Hanlon and Ms. Castle. She asked Ms. Silano to expand on those topics.

Assistant Superintendent Silano said Kevin Hanlon provided an overview on in i-Ready Math Diagnostic. i-Ready is the program that they are using in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. This is the second year with this resource. She said they also made programmatic changes at the middle school level. They moved away from a tiered level of math to pre-algebra for all students in the 7th grade next year. All student in 8th grade will take algebra. She said all students did markedly better this year with the new resource and all students being in the same pre-algebra class. She said our students came in stronger from 6th grade this year than they have in the past.

Regarding the Safe School Climate Survey, Ms. Silano said they just received documentation through state channels. She distributed documents to the Board explaining that one is the parent/guardian survey that shows what the parents would see, and the other document is a sample opt-out form. The questions are very close, if not verbatim, and are similar to what this district has used in the past. One of the questions that came up as a concern was a demographic question that asks what is your gender or

gender identity, and you select female, male, other, or I prefer not to answer. In the past, the survey that we used had a question that was very similar but more detailed. It was male, female, non-binary gender fluid, or prefer not to say. She said they appreciate the questions from the state and are recommending our district use the questions that were provided using the state's questions.

Ms. Silano reported they have been looking at an Algebra 1 resource that has been taught in 8th grade and at the high school. During the Curriculum Writing Institute, it was decided that we would pilot the i-Ready resource. She said it is likely that Algebra 1 i-Ready, will be brought to the May Board of Education Curriculum Committee meeting to be discussed and recommended to the full Board. Ms. Silano reviewed response rates at various grade levels.

She noted they talked about upcoming projects for the Curriculum Writing Institute. She said they are talking about scaling it back.

She reported that lastly, they informed the Committee about their invitation to present our journey with reading to the Connecticut Literacy Council. She said it was a good opportunity for us to be very honest about what our progress has been and what we have done as a result. The highlight of that was that we truly believe you can go into our classrooms and see the fidelity to which our teachers are implementing the science of reading in K-3. She said they did share that we have had an increase in multilingual learners over the years and that is where we struggle, as does everyone in Connecticut.

Mr. Grippo said he wanted to commend Ms. Silano and staff for defending our program, which is proven effective and for showing the State Department of Education how good it is and why we need to keep it.

B. FINANCE

I. Finance Report

Ms. Harrigan reported our approved budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year is \$89,542,609. We have expended and encumbered \$79,969,013, which includes our encumbrances for our largest accounts, namely payroll and transportation.

Mr. Masciana added the principals and department heads have been advised that we are allowing non-payroll expenditures up to 70%. We will begin the prep for summer purchases and projects next month. The year-end close will be on Monday, June 30. There are no concerns about being able to end with a balanced budget.

II. **Medical Benefits Update**

Mr. Masciana reported that as expected, because employees have not yet met their deductibles, claims for February were down at \$942,900, lower than the expected \$1.18 million. Our reserve balance increased by \$205,491 this month. For four months in a row, our reserve balance has been increasing. Partly because claims have dropped this month, but also because we have received stop-loss reimbursements and prescription rebates as well. As we close the month of February, the reserve balance is now back over \$2 million, about 1.71 months claims. He added that we would be receiving an additional \$200,000 in prescription rebates, which would bring the reserve balance to \$2.23 million. Our goal is to end the year where we started in the reserve, which is 2.3 million.

Mr. Ecke asked about outstanding lunch balances. Mr. Masciana answered that we have about \$21,000 in unpaid balances. There was discussion regarding collecting the funds and soliciting help from our legislators.

Ms. Rosenberg noted that Mr. Masciana and Dr. Solan gave a presentation to the Town Council on our health and wellness programs and asked for a recap. Mr. Masciana said Cigna funds \$80,000 per year, split between Town and Board of Education. We work collaboratively with the Town and use funds for fun programs like yoga classes and sponsoring some YMCA classes, but we are also doing some more specific things, like diabetes management, something that we have had in place for many years. Cigna still provides a health coach who is a registered nurse. Coach Jen is available in our town and our schools two days per week and then three days per week on alternate weeks. She holds individual sessions with employees, but she will also come and do different programs about healthy eating. There are no cost implications to the Board or Town for these programs.

C. **PERSONNEL**

I. **Appointment of Cheshire High School Principal.**

Superintendent Solan explained that after interviewing a large group of candidates and getting down to the final four, he asked Mr. Hanlon, who has been serving as interim principal, if he would like to be considered. Mr. Hanlon said he was interested. Staff and faculty interviewed him and then the Board interviewed him. Dr. Solan said tonight he is recommending Mr. Hanlon be appointed to the position of Cheshire High School Principal.

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

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education appoints Mr. Kevin Hanlon to the position of Principal of Cheshire High School effective April 21, 2025. Further, that Mr. Hanlon is compensated in accordance with the 2024-2028 Agreement Between the Cheshire Board of Education and Cheshire Administrative Personnel.

Discussion:

Board Members voiced their support for Mr. Hanlon.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

D. PLANNING

I. Energy Performance Contract Update

Mr. Masciana reported that they began interviews this past Monday evening and will be interviewing the next two Mondays. There is a working group that has been appointed, including Mr. White from the Board, Fiona Pearson from the Town Council, Chris Smith from the Energy Commission, as well as Town and Cheshire Public Schools staff members. After the interviews are completed, the goal is to select one of the three vendors to go forward and then do an investment-grade study, which will take about three months. As part of the study, they will go into every single school and town building and look at the HVAC systems, the motors, pumps, water usage, electricity usage, and natural gas usage. It will all be examined carefully before a final recommendation is made for an Energy Performance Contract with multiple energy conservation measures.

Mr. White added that it went really well, and the process overall is going really well. He said his one caution on all of it is the first contract we did was 15 years. This comes directly into either conflict or confluence support with the school modernization. If we end up making a recommendation on improvements, it could be for 10-15 years. When we are looking at a 15-year improvement, potentially a costly one, where are we five years from now, when we are talking about doing something different with the high school or with Dodd? Mr. White said he does not have any answers, wanted to point that out, in case anyone does have strong feelings about any of the schools in relation to school modernization. Mr. Masciana said the Board does not have to vote. He said ultimately the project could go to 20 years. He said they have the option to not go forward with any improvements. The Council has the ultimate approval, but the working group will continue to report back.

Mr. Grippo asked what the major improvements were in the last contract. Mr. Masciana said there were three. One was to replace the electric heat at Highland with natural gas-fired heat. At the same time, we were able to air condition the building, and the energy cost still, was better than heating a building of that size with electricity. In the back of Cheshire High School also was electric heat that was converted to natural gas. The third major improvement was replacing all the fluorescent lighting in classrooms and in the hallways across all the district schools with computer controlled LED lighting. There were other items like replacing motors, replacing all the refrigerators with more efficient refrigerators across the district, replacing some of the toilets with low flush toilets. This time it would be improvements to the building management systems and eliminating the hydraulic controls with digital controls. We will be looking at solar opportunities. The vendors will be making solar recommendations as well as a number of other things, but those are really kind of the larger items.

E. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES

Mr. Grippo shared his recent experience attending an arts and culture collaborative meeting for the Waterbury region. He noted there were several members from the community there. They discussed the need for more community involvement in the arts now that there is no local newspaper and discussed a need for spaces to hold events, the fees for using our spaces and their wish to have more students involved in the artistic community. Mr. Grippo said he told the group he would bring the information back to the Board.

Ms. Cullinan said she was invited to attend a meeting with the Cheshire Town Players. They mentioned the same concerns of having no newspaper and how to get their information out to the community.

Board members discussed our building use and rental fees. Mr. Masciana explained that certain Cheshire-based groups do not pay a building use fee; they will only pay a fee if a custodian is required. If it is a Cheshire group that does pay, the fees are typically pretty modest. Any group that is interested can go to the Cheshire Public School website and fill out a Building Use Request. We will provide a price, or if there were no fee, we would let them know. Emily Taylor, our Assistant COO, is working on a project to review our pricing and groups, and we will be coming to the Policy Committee with some recommendations for changes.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION by Mr. Grippo and seconded by Mr. White.

MOVED Board of Education approve the minutes from meeting held on February 20, 2025.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

6. **CORRESPONDENCE**

There was no correspondence.

7. **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

Superintendent Solan distributed a copy of the presentation he gave to the Town Council this week. He noted there is a reduction of \$4 million in state aid to the community. Most is not education based but community based, but there is a substantial hole in the budget. If the town were to keep the mill rate and the tax bill exactly as it was last year, to include everything that had been proposed in the budget, it'd be a roughly \$1,200 annual impact for the average taxpayer. The Council and Board collectively, as well as the Town Departments, are all taking a hard look at their budgets. We had projected 70 more students for next year, but the projection is now 154. This puts an additional strain on the system and requires additional funding. There has also been uncertainty around education in the federal government with anxiety around funding implications. We receive roughly \$1.28 million through the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act) and grants including child nutrition and other title grants and competitive grants. The federal money that was provided to states around school lunches, where you can use federal money for us, it was about \$25,000 to purchase vegetables and fruits from local farms. That money was cut from next year's budget so we will not be supplementing lunch with those local produce products.

Dr. Solan discussed budget unknowns. There is legislation that would actually support our Educational Cost Share Grant by \$211,000 but the State does not settle their budget until after the Town does. We will not have the final medical benefits rate, other insurance rates or the final pension contribution amount until later next month. We do not have Teacher retirements yet. The question is how do we close this gap? We know there are going to have to be concessions across the community and education. At an initial glance, maybe we could come up with \$400,000 but all of the reductions have pros and cons such as increased class sizes, flat-lined non-payroll accounts, like maintenance and instructional accounts, increased fees, or cutting programs altogether. We do not want to do any of those things, but we will have to consider them.

He said the Town Council asked what the budget would look like if it were flat, with the exception of the enrollment increases and contractual items. Dr. Solan shared possible cuts that do not affect enrollment including the director and supervisor position, a reduction of \$175,000 from the salary line. He reviewed other possible reductions totaling about \$684,000. He said this is a draft.

Mr. White asked if the deficit was right, including the budget increase is \$15 million. Dr Solan responded, yes, if you took the CPS budget and all of the department budgets and the debt service of approximately \$3 million, it is about \$15 million. Dr. Solan said we are looking at maybe some rainy-day funds, tax increase and budget reductions.

There was continued discussions regarding the budget, reductions and enrollment. There will be a meeting with the Council on April 8. Dr. Solan said knows the Council wants to work with the Board to figure out this problem.

Dr. Solan encouraged people to watch the drone videos of the new construction on our website. He noted that this morning he attended a conference where the Governor and the past Secretary of Education spoke along with Jonathan Haidt, the author of the Anxious Generation, and his presentation was compelling about the correlation between cell phones and social media and problems it has caused our students academically, behaviorally and psychiatrically. He said for Professional Development tomorrow, there would be a districtwide presentation to all staff on AI.

Dr. Solan said this is Board Member Appreciation this month and acknowledged our appreciation for what our Board does for the students of Cheshire Public Schools.

8. OLD BUSINESS

None.

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Health Food Certification

Mr. Masciana said they are recommending that Cheshire Public Schools continue with the Healthy Food Certification program. Connecticut General Statutes requires that all Connecticut public school districts that are eligible to participate in the Healthy Food Certification take action to certify whether all food items sold to students will or will not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards. He asked Assistant Chief Operating Officer, Emily Taylor to explain. Ms. Taylor explained the Healthy Food Certification is required each year. It only applies to foods that are sold, not food that is given to students. It is not applicable to adults in what we sell to adults, and it does not apply to field trips. We are reimbursed 10 cents for every lunch that we serve, which is about \$20k in revenue for us from this initiative. There are three very specific motions that we need to pass tonight, one motion to participate, and two motions for a food and a beverage exemption.

Motion #1 (For Healthy Food Option)

MOTION by Ms. Harrigan and seconded by Mr. Grippo.

MOVED that Pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the Cheshire Board of Education certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut

Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to, school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or by non-school organizations and groups.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

Motion #2 (For Food Exemptions)

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

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An “event” is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The “regular school day” is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held, and must be the same place as the food sales.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

Motion #3 (For Beverage Exemptions)

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

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education will allow the sale to students of beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the beverages are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An “event” is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting or extracurricular activity. The “school day” is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held, and must be the same place as the beverage sales.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

B. Chairperson's Update

Ms. Rosenberg said she invites residents to attend the meetings that are coming up, ask clarifying questions so we can understand the impact of the budget.

Chairman Rosenberg announced the upcoming meetings.

10. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Mr. Grippo, and seconded by Mr. White, the meeting was adjourned at 10:02 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: 4/7/2025.