

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING
HELD IN TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON FEBRUARY 17, 2022 AT 7:30 PM**

Board Members Present: Anthony Perugini-Chair; Adam Grippo-Vice Chair; Anne Harrigan-Secretary; Faith Ham, Andrew Martelli, Samantha Rosenberg, Timothy White

Board Members Absent: None.

Administrators Present: Jeffrey F. Solan, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools; Marlene Silano, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Vincent Masciana, Chief Operating Officer

Public access made available through live streaming the Cheshire Public School's YouTube Channel at www.youtube.com/cheshirepublicschools. Public comments were accepted at CPSCovid19@cheshire.k12.ct.us.

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.
Mr. Perugini led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
- C. Student Representatives. Annabelle Kailan, student representative for the 2021/22 school year, reported on recent events at Cheshire High School. Annabelle noted that Rowan Scassellati was not in attendance this evening because he was at rehearsal for the school play. Annabelle reported that they were able to hold the first in-person Curriculum Night since 2020 this year. It was very well attended by eighth graders and their families. She reported course selection is in progress at Cheshire High School. Annabelle also reported that College Board SATs will be administered electronically this year on March 24th. There are student activities taking place centered on Black History Month. And, lastly, she gave an update on winter sports and the beginning of spring sports.

2. PRESENTATIONS

A. School Partnership Award – Dodd Middle School

Ms. Rosenberg, the Board of Education representative to Dodd Middle School, introduced the school's award recipient, Elizabeth "Liz" DeCicco. The Parent Teacher Association is an important and integral part of every school, and the support the Dodd PTA contributes to the faculty and families is both unparalleled and appreciated. The Dodd family has been very fortunate to have the wonderful assistance of the PTA as it has provided abundantly for items and experiences that have benefited the students. Liz DeCicco is a very important part of the Dodd Community. Not only does she help lead the Dodd PTA, she is also a parent representative on the Dodd Safe School Climate Committee. Liz's insight is one of a parent and a professional. As a teacher herself, Liz has a unique combination of perspectives that are valued by the Dodd Administration and the Cheshire community at-large. Over these past challenging years, Liz DeCicco has never

wavered in her support for Dodd Middle School and all those who are a part of the school. Dodd Middle School sincerely thanks Liz DeCicco for all of her time and effort over the years. We do not know what we would do without her and are very grateful that she is a part of our Dodd community. The Cheshire Board of Education thanks Liz DeCicco for going above and beyond for the students of Cheshire. Ms. DeCicco was presented with a certificate and small gift.

B. CABE Award of Excellence

Dr. Solan introduced Matthew Planeta, the recipient of the CABE Bonnie B. Carney Award of Excellence for Educational Communications. Mr. Planeta's project, *Digital Storybooks*, won in the category of Special Project (AV). Dr. Solan said that Mr. Planeta and his students created, digital storyboards, trying to find ways to connect during the pandemic. He had his students in seventh and eighth grade, identify what five favorite childhood stories. They created digital readings of those stories and shared them with elementary students. They were very popular with our elementary students. Mr. Planeta was presented with a plaque for this achievement.

C. COVID-19 Update

Dr. Solan read the message he sent to parents that day (on file). In part, the message said that he, along with the Executive Director of the Chesprocott Health District, our district physician, and our district nursing supervisor, identified metrics previously used by the CDC (positivity rate and case rate/100,000) with what the CDC strongly advises to be critical to warding off the impact of COVID-19 (vaccination rate). The team felt that meeting 2 of 3 of these criteria would provide a strong likelihood that our ability to have people access school would be uninterrupted. He said he is happy to report that as of this afternoon, with these metrics being met, the district will be mask optional.

Mr. White said he agrees with what the Superintendent is doing and appreciates him using metrics for this decision. He told the Superintendent he has used good judgement over the last two years with the pandemic. He said he would encourage families to make their own decisions on whether or not to wear masks.

Ms. Harrigan thanked Dr. Solan and his team who have put in so many hours to make sure that we are confident in these decisions. Ms. Rosenberg thanked Dr. Solan for keeping the kids safe throughout this pandemic.

Ms. Ham said we have had some pretty heavy arguments about the viability of masks and it has become political. She said she hopes that this does not get into the classroom and that the students who are masked, as well as the children who are unmasked, are not in any way taunted. And we've got to accept and respect what the parents have chosen for their children. Ms. Ham thinks it goes not just the children, but the adults as well.

Mr. Perugini summarized that, effective March 1st, Cheshire Public Schools will be mask-optional, barring any announcements from Hartford. He said the Governor's announcement to leave the decision up to individual districts took everyone by surprise, and the SDE and DPH were not ready for this, so he appreciates Superintendent Solan taking the lead.

3. **AUDIENCE**

Mr. Perugini noted the guidelines for public speaking this evening. There will be a three-minute limit per speaker. Speakers will come to the podium and state their name and address. He asked the audience to keep their comments civil. He said if the meeting gets out of order or disruptive he will either call for a recess to clear the room or, if necessary, adjourn the meeting.

Olivia Caciopoli, 241 Mountain Road. A fifth-grader at Doolittle School, Olivia said she hasn't seen anyone's full face in her school. Wearing a mask is difficult for her playing basketball and also because she wears glasses that fog up. She said she is happy that she will be able to see faces on March 1st and hopes they can go the rest of the school year with no masks.

Rob Brucato, 1146 Wolf Hill Road. Mr. Brucato said the systemic progressive curriculum needs to be stopped and reversed, and there is a lack of proper civics being taught in the schools. He said Cheshire is a Republican-held super majority and they need to do their part to uphold the Constitution. He asked to create a curriculum task force and would volunteer to be on it.

Colleen Depkowski, on behalf of Leona Santopietro, 2071 Scott Road. Ms. Depkowski is not a Cheshire resident and is from Parent's Choice. She is against students wearing masks.

Sharon Hauck, 424 Cardinal Lane. Ms. Hauck, a former teacher, said we need to consider the effects on the mental health of the children from wearing masks. She said children need to socialize and she does not agree with social distancing.

Jonathan Hauck, 424 Cardinal Lane. Mr. Hauck suggested the Board vote to make masks optional effective the following morning, to make masks optional on transportation, and to stop social distancing in schools.

Ava Hartunian, 1106 Peck Lane. A 7th grader at Dodd Middle School, Ava spoke about how hard it is to wear masks in gym class, and she said that teachers don't recognize students because of their masks. She also said they watch CNN every Friday in Social Studies, and when she expressed her opinion, people said she was dumb.

Amber Brucato, 1106 Peck Lane. Ms. Brucato encouraged all to watch Senator Ron Johnson's 5-hour panel. She is against vaccines and does not want the district to push vaccines on anyone.

Amy Bourden, 35 Pehr Lane. Ms. Bourne said she does not agree with the metrics the Superintendent is using for masking and questioned the qualifications of the people he relies on to make these decisions.

Christopher Affee, 204 Peck Lane. Mr. Affee thanked the Cheshire School system for the excellent education his son is receiving. He is grateful for the metrics that the Superintendent has put into place. He said it is the work of Dr. Solan and Maura Esposito and all of the mitigation strategies and procedures that were put into place have gotten them to this point.

Olympia Brucato, 1146 Wolf Hill Road. Mrs. Brucato said she is pro parents' choice. She wants district decisions to be made in conference with the parents. She does not agree with the Superintendent's metric system. She would like for masks to be optional.

Gareth Jones, 925 East Johnson Avenue. Mr. Jones said he respects everyone's right to be vaccinated or wear masks if they wish. He is against vaccines and said masks do not work. He said the pandemic is over.

Mr. Perugini thanked all of the audience members for their comments and their civility this evening. He said the Board heard them. He noted that the Board has several committees, including Finance, Policy, Curriculum, and Planning. Mr. Brucato had some ideas for the Curriculum Committee. There is a list of all Committees and their members on our website.

A member of the audience, Christos Constanti asked to address the Board. Mr. Perugini said the public comment section was over, but he allowed 3 minutes to speak.

Christos Constanti, 978 Marion Road. Mr. Constanti said he does not understand the metrics. He will not play a mask-on, mask-off game. He addressed the Superintendent and said this is not a win; it is nonsense and told the Superintendent not to gaslight him. He asked what will happen in September and asked the Superintendent to explain where he gets his percentages from. He said, this is nonsense and "your Reich, your regime, whatever you want to call the SS." He asked when the Superintendent went on to CNN, did he talk to anybody to take a vote before your metrics went out, was it just I'm gonna say my metrics and I'm so smart and everybody's gonna listen?

At this point Mr. Constanti was very agitated and Mr. Perugini called for a point of order. Mr. Constanti said he has been hanging on for two years and doesn't need "his shit." Mr. Constanti called Mr. Perugini a coward for holding the gavel. Mr. Perugini called for a

motion to take a 10-minute recess to clear the room, at which point the meeting will continue without public audience.

On a motion by Mr. White, seconded by Ms. Rosenberg, the Board unanimously voted to take a 10-minute recess at 8:46 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 8:59 p.m.

4. **REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES**

A. **CURRICULUM**

I. **Report on Meeting Held February 14, 2022.**

Ms. Ham, the Chair of the Curriculum Committee will report on the meeting held February 14, 2022. The meeting began with a review and discussion of a question that has come up about how to how the public how the parents can submit questions or requests for reconsideration of library and classroom resources. The Committee will be reviewing these options and the steps we take to develop a review policy. It will have to go to the Policy Committee, at some point. The Committee will continue their review and finally bring forward a formal motion and make recommendations to pass on to the Policy Committee which will then pass it on to the full Board.

Next, the Committee talked about two new Physical Education programs, bike safety at the elementary level, and golf. Ms. Ham thanked Jim Jenks and Doug Levins of the Cheshire YMCA, who were able to obtain grants to obtain bikes and a trailer to transport the bikes. The golf class, is possible through an initial grant from the Cheshire Education Foundation.

Next, there was a review of Courses to Career. The presentation included representatives from the Middle and High School sharing various exploratory and Courses to Career opportunities provided to students in Cheshire Public Schools.

At the Middle School level, Kristin Castellano shared the Unified Arts offerings beyond those offered at the Elementary level that allow students to explore and gain a foundation in some pre-career areas. Some of those classes include: Engineering and Production, Robotics, Digital Design, Multimedia, and Consumer Economics. Michelle Catucci provided information regarding the use of Naviance in Grades 8-10 as a means for career exploration, the CHS Courses to Career online resource, as well as other ways the counseling department supports students to research careers and complete Post-Secondary applications. Sean McKeon and Leslie Paier provided an overview of key opportunities for high school

students connected to both the CTE and Business departments at CHS. The Committee heard from Ian Wildermann and Amy Balisciano on what types of reading students are doing at the high school level. Lastly, they reviewed the 2024 SAT format.

Ms. Harrigan added that it was a great Curriculum Meeting where there was a lot of enthusiasm and informative information was shared by the faculty. She said meetings are not all negative as what was just witnessed at this meeting. There will be student presentations from the African American Latino studies class.

B. FINANCE

I. Finance Report

Mr. Masciana reported there have been no significant changes since December. In regard to the pandemic, we will be ending intra-day cleaning as of April 1st. Also, because cases continue to decline, we will not be needing to rent tents. The cost for tents is about \$150,000, which comes out of ESSR funding, meaning that the funds can be used for learning.

II. Medical Benefits Update

Mr. Masciana reported that January marks the first month of the new HSA plan year. As expected, claims were lower this month at \$843,714. That is the lowest claim month that we've had so far this year. We also received \$370,170 in stop-loss reimbursements. That's from claims that exceeded \$175,000. Our reserve fund balance actually increased by 342,000. So as of the end of January, the medical benefits reserve stands at \$1,391,000, about 1.55 months of claims. Because we are in January, it will take several months for employees to meet their HSA deductible. Therefore, the claims, barring any extraordinary large claims, should stay relatively low compared to the first six months for the year.

C. PLANNING

I. Report on Meetings Held February 2 & 10, 2022.

Mr. Martelli reported there have been two Planning Committee meetings since the last time we met as a full Board. As reported previously, we are going through the process of not only adopting the plan for 2022/23, but also the five-year capital plan. He said they trying to be as thoughtful as possible as they embark on the school modernization effort which will hopefully go to referendum in November. At the February 2nd meeting, the Committee toured the various schools, beginning at Highland

Elementary School, then to Dodd Middle School and ending at Doolittle Elementary to see the areas where the bulk of the projects are being proposed.

At the February 10th meeting, the Committee thoughtfully went through all of the projects, looking at what Phase One of Next Generation is going to mean to the district and thinking about the next five years. The original Capital Budget for the 2022/23 year was provided to us in the amount of \$5,605,000. The Committee went through the plan, knowing there will potentially be a major request of the town voters this coming November. They would like to keep the buildings in great operating condition, however, they don't want to have a slew of projects placed before the voters when we will potentially have two \$50 million requests for two new elementary school buildings. The Committee revised the \$5.6 million budget down to a \$2,610,000 request. Mr. Martelli reviewed the projects being requested by school building.

In 2020/23:

- Districtwide acoustic ceiling tile replacement - \$100,000
- Districtwide flooring replacements - \$200,000
- Dodd Middle School fire alarm control system - \$650,000
- Highlands School planning money to expand parking, general paving for \$50,000; entrance modifications for traffic flow improvements for design funding for another \$50,000
- Cheshire High School for HVAC improvements for air conditioning phase-in - \$225,000
- Dodd Middle School - \$120,000 for HVAC improvements for rooftop units; \$200,000 for individual classroom ventilation improvements
- Doolittle School - \$100,000 for unit ventilator replacements.
- Cheshire High School - cam lock for the rear electrical service for the generator for \$60,000
- Highland Elementary School - \$310,000 for exterior lighting improvements; \$220,000 for a full-building emergency generator.
- Districtwide repaving \$100,000; roof replacements - \$125,000;
- \$50,000 for design funding at Doolittle school for roof replacement and another \$50,000 for window replacement planning money for the school

Mr. Martelli said the one item that they decided was important enough to bring to the voters, a life/safety issue, is the Dodd Middle School Fire Alarm Control System, which is a \$650,000 request. If the current system

should fail, it would be a major issue and the Committee thinks this is really important to take care of this now.

Mr. White said we will potentially have the two elementary schools and the \$650K project at Dodd, but are there any other projects that aggregated to \$500,000? Mr. Martelli said no, there were several that have been pushed off to subsequent years in the five-year plan.

II. Approval of Five-Year Capital Plan

MOTION by Mr. Martelli and seconded by Mr. White.

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education approves the Five Year Capital Expenditure Plan and Budget for Improvements to Current Buildings, in the total amount of \$32,532,500, with \$2,610,000 to be funded in Year 1 and with annual allocations as follows:

2022-23 - \$2,610,000

2023-24 - \$8,065,000

2024-25 - \$7,895,000

2025-26 - \$6,875,000

2026-27 - \$7,087,500

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously by those present.

III. School Modernization Report

Mr. Martelli reported that the Executive Steering Committee had a call with Office of State Construction Grants (OSCGR) to discuss the current status of the Cheshire Public Schools Next Generation Plan. Members of the Town Council, Board of Education, Board and Town staff and Colliers were in attendance on the call with Michelle Dixon and other OSCGR representatives. On the call, the Superintendent gave an overview as to what the plan will be and what the grant application will look like on June 30th to be submitted if everything goes well with the Town. It was a good call and a good discussion. Mr. Martelli said the Town Council previously approved the plan. They met last week and resolved that the Town Council accepts and approves the Next Generation Phase One Plan for the construction of a new elementary school and the replacement of Norton Elementary School and will call for a referendum after approval of the capital appropriation for said plan. Mr. Martelli noted this is another step in the right direction to get this project moving forward. They also allocated additional funding for traffic and environmental studies in the Marion Road area, as well as for the Casertano plan and updates for the enrollment study, plus some additional funding for our project leaders,

Colliers, who has been helping to guide this project locally for us. He reported that they are expecting the enrollment study to come in around April.

Mr. White inquired about the Ed Specs. He said one of his concerns is sustainable construction. He asked if the Ed Specs will go through the Planning Committee. Mr. Masciana answered that the Board will approve the Specs. The Ed Specs are for programming, not a construction document. He said there will be general statements regarding technology and sustainability. Ms. Rosenberg asked if the Planning Committee gets an initial overview. Dr. Solan said he is not sure, but he will find out.

Mr. Perugini said, on that call, they emphasized a focus on K-6 Special Education and they want to see security reflected in the Ed Specs. They also cautioned not to over-design. But there's still a lot to be done between now and June, but we are on the right path. Mr. Perugini said he appreciates everyone's time working on this plan.

D. POLICY

I. Report on Meeting Held February 8, 2022.

Mr. Grippo, Chair of the Policy Committee, reported the Committee met on February 8, 2022 and reviewed five policies for a first reading.

II. First Reading of Policies

Mr. Grippo reviewed the changes to the following policies. Changes are being made due to changes in State Statute.

- 1101.1 Community Relations – Parent Involvement
- 6146 Instruction – Graduation Requirements
- 6146.1 Instruction – Grading Systems
- 6159 Instruction – Individualized Education Program/Special Education Program
- 6148 Instruction – FAFSA Completion Program

Ms. Harrigan asked why in Policy #6146.1, new language is being added that states that “the Board is in favor of weighted grading”. Dr. Solan said he cannot remember a time when Cheshire High School did not have weighted graded. The law states that if we have it, the Board must make the statement that they are in favor of it.

Ms. Ham asked, per Policy #6146, are we really asking students to make career choices in middle school? Dr. Solan answered, no, it is really career “exploration”, not “choices”. Ms. Harrigan asked if we can change the language to state “exploration”, not “choice”. Dr. Solan said he will review the statute and we can discuss it in Policy Committee.

In regard to FAFSA, Ms. Ham said she heard of a bill that, as of 2025, all high school parents must complete a FAFSA as a requirement of graduation. She said this is inappropriate and over-stepping. Dr. Solan said he is not aware of that and noted that we do have a high enough rate of FAFSA applications that we won an award last year for having 72% of students with completed applications.

Ms. Rosenberg said this is more to increase awareness. She said there are parents who do not understand that there is funding if you choose to go in the college direction. She said she thinks this is more for other districts who may need the funding, but are not aware of the FAFSA program.

E. CALENDAR COMMITTEE

I. Report on Meeting Held January 31, 2022

Ms. Harrigan reported on the meeting that was held on January 31, 2022. At the meeting, the Committee reviewed the draft calendar for 2022/23 and the draft proposed calendar for 2023/24. After review and discussion, the Committee unanimously agreed to bring forth the calendars to the full Board for approval.

II. Approval of the 2022-23 District Calendar

Ms. Harrigan reviewed the important dates on the calendar. The first day of school for students is August 30, 2022. Convocation is scheduled for August 25, 2022, and Professional Development (PD) days will be held on August 26, August 29, November 8, 2022 and March 17, 2023.

Cheshire Public Schools will be closed on the following days: Labor Day (September 2-5, 2022), Rosh Hashanah (September 26, 2022), Yom Kippur (October 5, 2022), Columbus Day (October 10, 2022), Thanksgiving Break (November 24 - 25, 2022), Winter Recess, including Christmas and New Year's Day (December 23, 2022 - January 2, 2023), Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (January 16, 2023), February Recess (February 20 - 21, 2023), Good Friday (April 7, 2023), April Break (April 10 - 14, 2023), and Memorial Day (May 29, 2023).

With no snow days, the last day of school for students is projected be June 13, 2023 and the last day for teachers would be June 14, 2023. Snow days will be made up June 14 – June 30, 2023. Additional snow days needed beyond these 13 days will begin with April 14, 2023 and move backward.

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

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education adopts the 2022/23 School Calendar as presented.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

III. Approval of 2023-2024 Draft Proposed Calendar

Ms. Harrigan reported the notable dates for the Proposed Draft 2023/24 Calendar including the first day of school as August 31, 2023, Convocation is scheduled for August 28, 2023, and Professional Development (PD) days will be held on August 29, August 30, November 7, 2023 and March 15, 2024. Cheshire Public Schools will be closed on the following days: Labor Day (September 4, 2023), Yom Kippur (September 25, 2023), Columbus Day (October 9, 2023), Thanksgiving Break (November 23 - 24, 2023), Winter Recess, including Christmas and New Year's Day (December 25, 2023 – January 1, 2024), Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (January 15, 2024), February Recess (February 19 - 20, 2024), Good Friday (March 29, 2024), April Break (April 8 - 12, 2024), and Memorial Day (May 27, 2024). With no snow days, the last day of school for students is scheduled for June 10, 2024 and the last day for teachers is June 11, 2024. Snow days will be made up June 11 – June 28, 2024. Additional snow days needed beyond these 14 days will begin with April 12, 2024 and move backward

MOTION by Ms. Harrigan and seconded by Ms. Ham.

MOVED that the Cheshire Board of Education adopts the 2023/24 Proposed Draft School Calendar as presented.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

F. OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES

There were no other standing committee reports.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

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

MOVED that the Board of Education approve the Minutes from meetings held on January 20, 2022 and February 3, 2022.

VOTE: The Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

6. CORRESPONDENCE

Ms. Harrigan read emails from the following individuals, who asked that their comments are filed with the minutes.

Christos Constanti – Asked that the medical team (his Reich) be at the meeting regarding the decisions that have been made.

Arielle Harrison – Expressed strong support for using metrics.

Jonathan Bruneau – Thanked Dr. Solan for his efforts and said he supports his recommendations.

Gary Riccini – Thanked Dr. Solan for his work and his time dedicated to Cheshire Public Schools. He said he is hoping for a mask optional rule.

Mr. Perugini noted there were many more emails received. Those emails are available for reading on the website and are also on file in the Board of Education offices.

7. **SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT**

Dr. Solan did not have any more to report at this time. He did, however, hand out Presidential cookies to Board members in honor of President’s Day.

8. **OLD BUSINESS**

None.

9. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **Chairperson’s Update**

Chairman Perugini reported that he and Dr. Solan will be leading a seminar on Civility with CCM in conjunction with CAFE on March 8th.

10. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mr. Grippo, and seconded by Ms. Harrigan, the meeting was adjourned into Executive Session at 10:05 p.m. to discuss union negotiations including Dr. Solan and Mr. Masciana with no action to follow. Executive Session adjourned at approximately 10:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anthony Perugini, Board Chair

Attest:

Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

Filed at the Town Clerk’s Office, Town Hall, Cheshire: 3/9/2022.