

Ashford Board of Education
Meeting Minutes – March 4, 2021
7:00 pm
Meeting Held Via Zoom

Note: Per CGS 10-218, Board of Education Meeting Minutes are provided in a draft format within 48 hours of the date the meeting was held. With the exceptions of motions and votes recorded, the minutes are unofficial until they have been read and approved by a majority vote by the Board. Should edits be necessary, they will be made at a regularly scheduled meeting, noted in the meeting minutes, and so voted upon.

Call to Order

Chair John Lippert called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

- Present were members Kim Kouatly, Tess Grous, Al Maccarone, and Marian Matthews. Tina Fradette joined the meeting at 7:57 p.m. Jane Urban was absent.
- Also present were Superintendent Dr. James Longo, Principal Troy Hopkins, Asst. Principal Polly Borysevicz, Director of Pupil Personnel Cindy Ford, and Zoom meeting host Scott Waddell as well as approximately 15 other members of the school staff and the public.

Communications

- Tess Grous – Facebook post from a parent raising a concern about kids on social media sites communicating with adults. What kind of internet security measures are being taken for the students? Dr. Longo – Connecticut Education Network has a robust filtering system for internet provided. While the kids are using computers in school, they cannot access anything inappropriate. When they are on their family's internet or using their phone as internet, there could be issues. If there is a site being used that seems inappropriate, it can be brought to administration and blocked if necessary.

Opportunity for Public Comment

- Al Maccarone, as a taxpayer and a parent, addressed the concern raised at Board of Finance meeting about approximately 70% of town income/taxes consumed by the school. Other small communities are in similar situations. They fund their schools and provide limited services other than schooling. In Ashford, the school is the largest employer, serves the largest number of people (400 students), feeds the largest number, and offers the largest transportation system in the community. We have to look at it in those terms. Over the last 5 years, what has been presented to the Board of Finance and been funded is less than the cost of living. Most of the money is basically encumbered by contract. If we talk about reducing the proposal, there are going to be a lot of things that people support for their kids that will go away (extracurricular, fields trips, etc.).
- Tess Grous – Cutting programs or staff would be such a disservice. We have something really special going on at Ashford School.

Approval of Minutes

- ***MOTION by Kim Kouatly to approve minutes from 02/18/2021. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.***

Committee Break Out

Building and Grounds Committee – Marian Matthews, Kim Kouatly, and Principal Troy Hopkins

- There is a project manager starting, Mark Robbins. He will be working with the roofing contractor on whether or not solar will work on the roof. The application to Eversource has to be in by April. The project manager seems to be capable and knowledgeable. He has done work for other towns in Connecticut. The committee wants to use building and grounds renovations (such as solar and Pollinator Pathway) as teaching experiences for students as well as the community.

Personnel Committee – Tess Grous, Al Maccarone, John Lippert, and Dr. Longo.

- Upcoming negotiations for noncertified personnel in the month of March.

Link for Channel 8 video and article, "Ashford School's Biggest Priority Lies in Community Building, a Decision That's Seeing a Heartwarming Payoff," will be put on the school website.

Marian Matthews left the meeting at 7:47 p.m.

Tina Fradette joined the meeting at 7:57 p.m.

Old Business

a. FY22 Budget

b. Superintendent Search Update

- Job has been posted with CABE and CAPSS.
- The committee will start to meet to decide how they will go about the interview process.

c. Administrative Reports Follow Up

- Mask wearing: Polly Borysevicz spoke with Jane Urban and addressed her questions. Any teachers who have concerns or issues do reach out, and they have taken care of that on a case-by-case basis. If anyone has specific concerns, they can contact Polly directly.

d. Technology Discussion Follow Up

- **Cybersecurity Audit** - Dr. Longo said the material requested has been submitted. They are in the process of upgrading our contract with Dropbox to ensure everybody's desktop is protected and backed up on a regular basis. Scott Waddell has almost completed the classroom technology survey; it will probably be done by 03/05/2021. The audit could cost \$20,000 to \$30,000. Martha Guidry is still working on getting a price to give the town.
- **Computer Tracking** - The computer tracking system proposed in the budget would add another dimension to what is currently done to keep inventory of technology, which would be very helpful. It is a cloud-based database that can utilize a barcode scanner. They can put barcode stickers on items and track them.
- John Lippert asked about the budgeting for technology. If the idea is to be on a 5-year rotation, that means replacing 100 or so computers each year. Is that the right place that we should be in our budget? Scott Waddell said in the past they had 5 carts, and they would replace a cart every year. They now have 9 carts. They try and keep the laptops cycled at 5 years. It is reaching more like 7-8 years now. They are keeping desktops for 7-10 years. They usually downgrade the oldest computers and repurpose them until they can no longer be used. Reasonable life expectancy for a MacBook is 10 years. Right now, they are cycling through the 2012 devices. Cycle maybe should be more 7-8 years. It has been the item in the budget that gets cut if necessary to get it through the Board of Finance and then the item we spend money on if we have any left over. The concern is if we have a run of two or three years where we are not able to purchase technology. Scott said they are running into situations where they cannot keep the operating system current. John would like a conceptual number for a healthy, ongoing year-to-year replacement of technology as needed from Scott and administration. We need a yearly technology budget that we can establish and justify to the town, a number that will best serve the kids in our community.

New Business

a. Establish Bicknell Trust Scholarship Committee

- For many years, scholarships were awarded by a separate company. The extra \$900 mentioned in a prior meeting was the amount we paid annually to the company. Jen Barsaleau was not able to find a replacement company. The committee should not include board members who have seniors or current college students who would be applying. Al Maccarone and John Lippert volunteered for the committee. Jane Urban was nominated. The application time period is open right now and closes in April. Bicknell Scholarship information is on the website.

b. Staff Resignation

- A teacher has resigned. Administration will be meeting to address how to deal with filling the position or absorbing students into other classes. They will explore different options.
- **MOTION by Kim Kouatly to accept certified staff resignation received by administration. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried with one abstention (T. Grous).**

Opportunity for Public Comment

- Kim Kouatly thanked administration, teachers, and nurse Martha Sibley-Jett for everything being done to keep kids in school. Dr. Longo said some kids benefit greatly by the fact that we have a kind and caring nurse at Ashford School who provides emotional support as well.
- Tess Grous thanked Principal Troy Hopkins, the face of the school. There is a lot on his shoulders. She is glad for the news interview to share the quality of our school.
- Dr. Longo felt confident to have students return to school at the beginning of the school year even when other towns around were not because he knew we had such a good administrative team and good teachers. He knew it would work.

- Al Maccarone and his wife are raising a couple of grandkids. They have kept the 6th grader distance learning, but he is moving to in-person now that they are inoculated. They are confident about the program he is moving into.

Next Meeting Date/Agenda Items

- Next Board of Education meeting will be 03/18/2021.
- Tuesday, 03/23/2021 is the public hearing about the budget. This will allow for town's feedback before Board of Finance determines the final budget.
- Administrative Reports
- FY22 Budget
- Mental Health Staff Update

Adjournment

MOTION by Kim Kouatly to adjourn the meeting (8:43 p.m.). Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.

Sara Wilson
Recording Secretary