

Ashford Board of Education
Meeting Minutes – August 19, 2021
7:00 pm

Meeting Held In Person and Electronically 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 7:06 p.m.
- Present were members Kim Kouatly, Tina Fradette, Tess Grous, Jane Urban, Al Maccarone, and Marian Matthews.
- Also present were Superintendent Craig Creller, Nurse Martha Sibley-Jett, Business Manager Deana Chrzan, First Selectman Cathryn Silver-Smith, and Zoom meeting host Scott Waddell, as well as approximately 18 other members of the school staff and the public.

Communications

- Notification from the state concerning school lunches, on agenda.
- Request regarding tuition for non-resident student, on agenda.

Opportunity for Public Comment

- Tess Grous mentioned the success of the board's planning meeting.
- Tiffany Marrara – She will have 2 sons in school this next year. She is a PE teacher in another district. If there is an opportunity in future, she hopes we consider going maskless. She questions the science proving they are helping. Student behavioral issues have increased. She mentioned that masks are restricted in the dress code. She would like to get a response from the board on what we will do different this year to help the students that are struggling with masks.
- Shannon Gamache – Read a statement regarding about masks/vaccine requirements for children. She suggested we make masks optional.
- Nyauna Stevens – She is parent of Ashford students. She thanked the school for doing everything they could last year to keep everybody safe and for following science.
- Pat Wilson Pheanious – We need to protect each other. She believes the mask mandate should remain. This is temporary until we conquer COVID.
- Christina Davis – Parent of two children in the school. Her kids had an awesome year last year, thanks in part to masking.
- Jennifer Leszczynski – Parent of two children in the school. She believes that children at in a classroom rather than at home is the goal. Quarantining and not being in the classroom is more of a developmental concern than being in school with a mask on. She feels like kids forget that they are even wearing masks. Could we get data on how many students and staff are vaccinated in Ashford? Will the children be in cohorts this year? What is the plan for lunch? Will they be using outdoor spaces and having open windows? Parents are wanting communication.
- Stephanie West – She teaches language acquisition and spoke about the difficulties she is seeing children have learning to read with masks on. Addressing prior comment about this being temporary and ending, when does this end? She does not want to vaccinate her children against COVID when they have already had it and have recovered.
- Cathryn Silver-Smith shared information from meeting with Eastern Highlands Health District. All municipal buildings have mask mandates. Report from 08/12/2021: Cumulative cases of COVID 261, two-week change of 10, 4 deaths. Vaccine statistics: 61% have first dose, 58% are fully vaccinated. Our town is in red status. The wearing of masks is important at this point.
- Tess Grous said with change in administration and planning with the board, communication regarding this next year will be coming soon.

MOTION made by Kim Kouatly to add item 6f COVID Discussion to the agenda. Motion seconded by Jane Urban and carried unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

- ***MOTION made by Jane Urban to approve minutes from 07/15/2021. Motion seconded by Tina Fradette.*** Jane Urban mentioned adoption of dress code policy and information about 7th/8th grade numbers are not on tonight's

agenda. Tess Grous was not aware she needed to email Craig Creller about the social distancing question on the buses. ***Motion carried with 6 yes votes and 1 no vote (T. Grous).***

Old Business

a. FY 21 Audit Update

- Superintendent Craig Creller said, subject to audit, we are returning \$174,577 to the Town of Ashford. We will ask the Board of Finance to put \$155,000 into the 2% non-lapsing fund.

b. Revisit Approval of Medical Standing Orders (Confidential, Not for Dissemination)

- ***MOTION made by Jane Urban to approve the 2021-2022 Medical Standing Orders. Motion seconded by Tina Fradette and carried unanimously.***

New Business

a. Staff Resignation

- ***MOTION made by Tess Grous to accept the resignation of Rob Ackerson. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.***

b. Acceptance of Donation

- The school received notice that a parent would like to make a donation to the school. Cathryn Silver-Smith suggested speaking with the auditor before accepting the donation to make sure bookkeeping is done properly. We appreciate the donation, and we will look into how to properly accept it.

c. Policy Updates Provided by Counsel

- Policies shared with board members for first reading. Any concerns can be discussed at the next meeting.

d. Bus Questions

- Tess Grous wanted to know what the policy was for social distancing on school buses last year and if those requirements were met. The rules for bussing are the same for this year as they were last year, 6 feet distancing to the best of our ability. Kids have assigned seats on the bus. Siblings are seated together to try to maximize space.
- John Lippert wanted to follow up on number of buses and if it is adequate.
- Jane Urban mentioned registration this year only asking about afternoon transportation, bus/parent pick up.

e. Cafeteria Regulations

- Two significant changes to cafeteria payment rules as of 07/01/2021. A child can no longer be denied any type of food service. If we are unable to collect after 30 days, we are to refer the child to our Director of Homelessness. It also allows people to make donations to help buy lunches for those who do not have money in their account. Information on how to make a donation will be put out for the public. For this year, all meals will be free for all children.

f. COVID Discussion

- We will be going back to metal utensils in the cafeteria. Marian Matthews would like the students to take on composting the food waste at the school. She would also like to get the school on the Pollinator Pathway.
- John Lippert thanked parents for their comments and sharing their personal experiences.
- To the best of our ability, the kids will be eating in the cafeteria with 6-foot distancing.
- In the classroom, the social distancing will be 3 feet.
- There will not be cohorts this year.
- Everyone will be wearing masks through September 30th. No masking outdoors. Neck gaiters are not acceptable. Masks cannot have a vent.
- Remote learning is not an option for this school year.
- There will be fall sports.
- The 7-point back to school plan was read by Superintendent Craig Creller. It will be posted on the school website 08/20/2021. If anyone has COVID-related questions, they can be directed to Nurse Martha Sibley-Jett.

Opportunity for Public Comment

- Tiffany Marrara asked if the school will be providing masks for the kids. Nurse Martha Sibley-Jett said the school will have some available if kids soil theirs.
- Shannon Gamache expressed her opinion that masks are useless. COVID is here to stay. We cannot vaccinate this way. She encouraged parents to pull children from public school.

- Jane Urban mentioned track school uniforms and how embarrassing they were with letters peeling off. If we don't have money in the budget for new uniforms, Jane would be happy to organize fundraising for that.

Next Meeting Date/Agenda Items

- Next meeting is 09/02/2021.
- Dress code approval
- Numbers of 7th and 8th graders
- Workshop: Assessments and Interventions

Executive Session Anticipated

a. Personnel Negotiations

b. Non-Resident Student Tuition

- *MOTION made by Kim Kouatly to enter executive session for the purpose of discussing personnel negotiations and non-resident student tuition, inviting Superintendent Craig Creller. Motion seconded by Tess Grous and carried unanimously.*
- The board and Craig Creller entered executive session at 8:55 p.m. They exited executive session at 11:12 p.m.
- *MOTION made by Kim Kouatly to set the tuition for the children of a non-resident Ashford School staff person to \$4000 and all others to the full tuition cost based on the CT NCEP tuition numbers. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.*

Adjournment

- *MOTION made by Marian Matthews to adjourn the meeting at 11:15 p.m. Motion seconded by Kim Kouatly and carried unanimously.*

Sara Wilson
Recording Secretary