

Ashford Board of Education
Meeting Minutes – March 3, 2022
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 Jane Urban called the meeting to order at 7:14 p.m.
- Present were members Tess Grous, Kim Kouatly, Jennifer Leszczynski, and Al Maccarone. Marian Matthews was present via Zoom. Jon Laughlin was absent.
- Also present were Superintendent Craig Creller, Director of Pupil Personnel Cindy Ford, Assistant Principal Polly Borysevicz, Business Manager Deana Chrzan, Zoom meeting host Scott Waddell, and Meghan Dudas. There were approximately 10 other members of the school staff and the public present via Zoom.

Board Chair Comments

- March is board member appreciation month – thank you to all members.

Pledge of Allegiance

Public Comment

- Meghan Dudas (Sand Hill Rd.): If we are going to have a public meeting on the internet, there needs to be some security. It sounds like this issue is being addressed. Perhaps we should not use Zoom, maybe another company that would track the MAC address of each person that comes in. Last week there were a lot of parents that spoke about masking. There was a compromise reached. It feels like the parents were not listened to. It is upsetting to the parents when they feel like their voice is not being heard or respected. When there is no response in public comment, it feels like we are not being listened to. Why is there money in the budget from the state for all of these programs but not the important ones such as math and reading? On Martin Luther King Day, my daughter learned that black people are different from white people. I don't want her to learn that. I want her to learn that we are all human. I do not want her to see a difference in people.
- Gary Gerstenlauer (Kidder Brook Rd.): What type of filters are being used in the air handler system for the school? How often are those filters changed? If the masks were ever reinstated before the end of the school year, these are things we should know. If the right filters were used, it could calm down the COVID spread. Why was there not a second opportunity for public comment at the last meeting? I'm glad we are beginning with a choice for masks on Monday, 03/07/2022. If there is consideration of reinstating masks, I hope that we have a vote
- Tess Grous (Chatey Rd.): Thank you for allowing the Pledge of Allegiance. It shows patriotism for our country and is one more thing to unite us rather than divide us.
- Kim Kouatly said the board is not meaning to be disrespectful by not answering questions during public comment. They are following guidance from CABE. They do sometimes add items to the agenda for current or future meetings. The board appreciates everyone who participates in public comment.
- Jane Urban said board meetings are not a public meeting. Rather, they are a business meeting held in public.

Board of Education Workshop – Special Education, Director of Pupil Personnel Cindy Ford

- Superintendent Craig Creller praised Director of Pupil Personnel Cindy Ford and the Special Education Department. No matter how you look at the numbers, our numbers are very good, and we are providing a service that is meeting the needs of parents and students. We are keeping our children in house with their peers where they belong. We have very few outplacements.
- Our overall strategy: We are personalizing learning and ensuring growth for all.
- Director of Pupil Personnel Cindy Ford is responsible for students with 504 (30 students), IEP (57 students), and SRBI (29 students). SRBI stands for Scientific Research-Based Intervention. This is approximately 30% of the student population. She oversees 11 special education teachers, support staff, and interventionists as well as 13.5 paraeducators.
- Our special education numbers were shared for the past few years as well as surrounding towns and state average.

- Current support staff includes two speech pathologists, occupational therapist, physical therapist, school psychologist, school social worker, school counselor, youth services, and Community Health Center. There is no cost to the BOE for youth services and Community Health Center.
- IDEA Grant Funding: ARP IDEA of \$19,143 must be expended by 06/2023; Yearly IDEA of \$117,853. The yearly IDEA is something we apply for every year for a two-year period.
- ESSER II Special Education Recovery Grant of \$55,650 must be expended by 06/30/2023. This must be used towards recovery activities above and beyond already budgeted programs within the district.
- School Readiness Grant (\$117,281) funds our preschool program.

Board of Education Subcommittees

a. Finance Committee

- There is an ongoing claim for unemployment that we are trying to fight.
- Change in health care insurance line item explained.
- Social Security/Medicare costs were broken down into regular education and special education categories.
- Nurse line item was broken down into nurse and substitute nurse.
- We do not currently have a school psychologist. There is a line item for the outsourced school psychology service.
- Breakdown of dues and fees provided.
- Shout out to Marianne Eddy for her efforts to begin processing payroll in house.
- There will likely be a negative line item for water monitoring because of extra testing required by the state. We failed a lead test in 2020-2021 when pipes were tested at the end of July before being flushed in August. We have passed every test since. It was unfortunate timing, which has been addressed with the company.
- Other professional services include our insurance broker and our finance consultant.

MOTION made by Kim Kouatly to accept the 02/28/2022 budget expenditure report. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.

b. Curriculum Committee – The curriculum committee did not meet. They would like to look at math curriculum next month.

COVID-19 Updates (Superintendent)

- Letters regarding "Mask Optional" policy were sent home with students as well as COVID-19 test kits.
- We have had only 2 COVID cases so far this week.
- Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children test Sunday night or Monday morning prior to returning to school on Monday, 03/07/2022.
- We want everybody to feel comfortable and safe coming to school. Parents were encouraged to have conversations with their children.
- CDC did relax the bus standards. We will be mask optional on buses as well beginning 03/07/2022.
- We have Alen BreatheSmart 75i medical grade air purifiers in every room in the building running all the time.

BOE Meeting Format

- We had difficulties last week with the Zoom meeting being hacked and inappropriate content displayed. The question on the table is continuing with Zoom or not. Some towns are posting on YouTube so that the public can watch but cannot comment.
- Discussion regarding possible options, including Zoom Webinar, Zoom with only board members allowed to join, YouTube, Zoom with audio only public comment. The board would like to keep an online component to their meetings that allows for board members to participate and for the public to comment in a safe way.

Public Comment

- Meghan Dudas (Sand Hill Rd.): Why can't we use something other than Zoom? Could we use something that would give the MAC address? Have we contacted the police about what happened? Contacting the police is imperative. I'm thankful for the special education component at our school. The education our kids get is the most important thing. Grades 5-8 should have a school psychologist as well. That is a difficult time for kids to navigate. Regarding

the dispensing of the tests, the test kits contain toxic substances, and those were just dispensed to children. Maybe they could have been available for parents but not necessarily given to the students. Regarding the mention of mitigation measures, my child was sick every month for the first four months of the school year.

- Tess Grous (Chatey Rd.): I'm so thankful to be a part of the Board of Education. We don't always agree, and that is okay. I appreciate Jane Urban as chair. We may not always have the same viewpoint, but we can come together and hash it out respectfully. Thank you to Meghan Dudas for attending and commenting.
- Gary Gerstenlauer (Kidder Brook Rd.): Thank you for allowing the Zoom audio only option for public comment. At this point, it is probably the safest. Would Teams be an option?
- Kim Johnston (Turnpike Rd.): I appreciate the fact that I am able to watch on Zoom. I used to attend in person and requested the ability to do this. Thank you for taking the time to discuss keeping the option open even if it is audio only.
- Jane Urban (Wormwood Hill Rd.): I use Teams for work, and it has not been reliable. Next Thursday night the budget goes to the Board of Finance again. It would be great to have people supporting the Board of Education. There are people who feel like they were not listened to with the masking decision. For many years, there have been dozens of parents asking the Board of Finance to support the Board of Education budget, but like the BOE, the BOF has other factors to consider when making their decision, and the Board of Finance has not once given the full amount we have asked for. I am proud of the work the Board of Education did last week to come to a decision on when to go "mask optional."

Adjournment

MOTION made by Al Maccarone to adjourn the meeting at 9:52 p.m. Motion seconded by Marian Matthews and carried unanimously.

Sara Wilson
Recording Secretary