

Ashford Board of Education  
Meeting Minutes – November 4, 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**

- Superintendent Craig Creller called the meeting to order at 7:29 p.m.
- Present were members Tess Grous, Jane Urban, Al Maccarone, Marian Matthews, Kim Kouatly, and Jon Laughlin. Tina Fradette was absent.
- Also present were Superintendent Craig Creller, Principal Troy Hopkins, Assistant Principal Polly Borysevich, Director of Pupil Personnel Cindy Ford, Business Manager Deana Chrzan, Teachers Allison Welz and Stephanie Noheimer, School Counselor Jessica Bernardi, School Psychologist Emily Deliberto, School Social Worker, Alissa Tatro, Zoom meeting host Scott Waddell, Selectman Cathryn Silver-Smith, and parent Brian Specyalski. Attending the meeting via the Zoom call were approximately 40 other members of the school staff and the public.
- The board welcomed Jon Laughlin to the Ashford Board of Education. Jon said he moved to Ashford about 3 years ago. He likes to stay involved in the community. He is a coach, a police officer, and a teacher at Manchester Community College.

**Board Reorganization**

a. Election of Officers

- Superintendent Craig Creller read policy for electing officers and opened the floor for nominations for Chairperson of the Board of Education.  
***Marian Matthews nominated Jane Urban for the position of Chairperson of the Board of Education. Nomination seconded by Al Maccarone.***  
Mr. Creller asked if there were any other nominations. There being none, the floor was closed. Mr. Creller asked for a vote on the nomination of Jane Urban.  
***The motion to appoint Jane Urban to the position of Chairperson of the Board of Education carried 5 to 0 with one abstention (J. Laughlin).***
- Chairperson Jane Urban read roles and responsibilities for officers and opened the floor for nominations for Vice Chairperson of the Board of Education.  
***Al Maccarone nominated Marian Matthews for the position of Vice Chairperson of the Board of Education. Nomination seconded by Kim Kouatly.***  
Mrs. Urban asked if there were any other nominations. There being none, the floor was closed. Mrs. Urban asked for a vote on the nomination of Marian Matthews.  
***The motion to appoint Marian Matthews to the position of Vice Chairperson of the Board of Education carried 5 to 0 with one abstention (J. Laughlin).***
- Chairperson Jane Urban opened the floor for nominations for Secretary of the Board of Education.  
***Al Maccarone nominated Kim Kouatly for the position of Secretary of the Board of Education. Nomination seconded by Marian Matthews.***  
Mrs. Urban asked if there were any other nominations. There being none, the floor was closed. Mrs. Urban asked for a vote on the nomination of Kim Kouatly.  
***The motion to appoint Kim Kouatly to the position of Secretary of the Board of Education carried 5 to 0 with one abstention (J. Laughlin).***

b. Establish Regular Meeting Date, Place and Time

- There is currently a conflict with the Board of Finance's meetings occurring on the same Thursdays. The Board of Education hopes that the Board of Finance will decide to meet 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays and the Board of Education will continue to meet the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursdays to avoid meeting conflicts next year.
- ***MOTION by Marian Matthews to approve the Board of Education 2022 Meeting Schedule. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.***

c. Committee Appointments (Policy, Finance, Curriculum, etc.)

- Curriculum/Building and Grounds/Long Term Planning/Cafeteria: Tess Grous, Marian Matthews, Al Maccarone.
- Finance/Personnel/Transportation: Kim Kouatly, Jon Laughlin, Tina Fradette.

- Policy: Full board.

### **Board of Education Workshop – Social Emotional Learning**

- Ashford SEL Committee: Alissa Tatro, LCSW, Emily Deliberto, Jessica Bernardi, Stephanie Noheimer, Allison Welz, Dory Moore.
- Polly Borysevicz, Assistant Principal. Mrs. Borysevicz shared the Ashford School mission statement: Ashford School learners engage in authentic EXPERIENCES to DISCOVER their passions, STRIVE for excellence, CONNECT with their community and the world, and CONTRIBUTE in positive and meaningful ways. She also shared Ashford School Goal #2: Support the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of the Ashford School community. SEL teaches students to regulate their emotions, to pay attention, and to work well with their peers. We want to help children and adults thrive personally and academically, develop and maintain positive relationships, become lifelong learners, and contribute to a more caring, connected world. When we have happy, confident kids, they are in a better place to learn, to start their school day, and to be successful. The SEL curriculum monthly topics include emotions, healthy boundaries, self-control, responsibility, problem solving, self-esteem, friendship and respect, honesty, stress and coping strategies, and perseverance.
- Allison Welz, 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher: Responsibility is the SEL theme for November. It is challenging to teach new content to a student who is disconnected emotionally. Helping them to manage their feelings gets them ready to learn academics. Mrs. Welz dedicates 20 minutes of their morning meeting to discuss the SEL theme of the month. The SEL activities include reading books, discussing a current event, or watching a short video and following up with conversation. Part of our SEL curriculum is working with EASTCONN through a grant/program called Mindful Transformations. This program connects our students with other 4<sup>th</sup> grade students in the state. Students learn to appreciate the value of different perspectives and establish meaningful relationships that extend beyond their classrooms and school communities. Mrs. Welz shared her digital classroom, which has links to different things related to SEL. In her classroom they say, "Practice makes much better because perfection is fictional."
- Stephanie Noheimer, health/physical education teacher: She is part of the WINGS program, which is adventure education. This program was developed by Marti Hardisty 35 years ago. The intent is to instill intrinsic motivation in students to make decisions that demonstrate good character to peers, community, and selves. This program looks at the whole child. It helps them to handle conflict, develop positive relationship skills, improve independence and positive relationships, problem solve, and develop positive morals/values. WINGS: Winning Innovations for Nurturing Growth in Students. SOAR: Showing Others Acceptance and Respect. SWINGS: Smaller WINGS. SOAR is for grades 1-6. They meet once a month and do an activity directly aligned with SEL theme of the month. SWINGS culminates their year of SOAR. SWINGS for grades 3-5 is led by former Ashford School graduates. SWINGS Jr. is for grades 1-2 and is led by 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Sixth graders culminate SOAR with WINGS Jr. where they go to the Boy Scout camp in town and do low ropes adventure course. WINGS happens at Hole in the Wall Gang Camp for grades 7-8 with low ropes activities. The 8<sup>th</sup> graders do two days and get to stay overnight in cabins. FLIGHT is the final stage of the program, culminating with high ropes at Holiday Hill. Adventure education activities are also called experiential learning. Example given of human knot. Cycle includes concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (application). A big portion of adventure ed is pushing students out of their comfort zone. The stretch zone is the optimal learning zone, where the magic happens.
- Jessica Bernardi, School Counselor grades 5-8: She does peer mediation multiple times each week, which teaches crucial life skills. It involves problem solving, conflict resolution, communication, brainstorming, and advocating. She is involved with tier 1 and tier 2 intervention. All students on her caseload have a "Minute Meeting" to check in. This helps to make sure nobody is slipping through the cracks. Tier 2 intervention is a small group strategy which is non-punitive. Ms. Bernardi has lunch with a small group of students for approximately 2 weeks.
- Emily Deliberto, School Psychologist: She provides support for tier 3 and special education for grades PK-3. They do social thinking lessons with kindergarten classes, foundational social-emotional skills. They have a school store cart for lower grades and online school store for upper grades. She works with the teachers to come up with strategies for behavior. With IEPs, students receive services on a weekly basis or more and it continues for a year or longer. Discussed the Zones of Regulation. Individualized assessments determine what may be impacting a student's ability to best access their education. In February 2022, they will be starting a DESSA screener to identify and progress monitor all students' SEL needs and progress. The administration expects that the screener will become mandatory in every school by the State of Connecticut.

- Alissa Tatro, LCSW, School Social Worker: She works with grades 4-8, creating behavior intervention plans and bridging connections between school and home. Community Health Center provides mental health care to 21 of our students right now. She also coordinates and collaborates with pediatricians, Joshua Center, EMPS Mobile Crisis, DCF, in-home treatment providers, Horizons, and EASTCONN.
- Polly Borysevich, Assistant Principal: Mrs. Borysevich reads SEL theme books during SEL story time for grades 1-2. They look to improve and repair relationships with Restorative Practices. There are Afternoon Opportunities with support for students after school with Mrs. Borysevich or Mr. Hopkins to work on academic, social, or behavior skills. Professional development was kicked off this year with staff planning and collaboration. They had training with Brian Mandler on engaging and managing hard to reach, uninterested, and disruptive students. They have monthly coaching sessions with him during grade level meetings. There will be SEL training through our HOT School grant at faculty meetings in December, February, and March. Social Emotional Wellness is imperative for staff as well. To best support our students, we know that our staff must be well.
- Board members expressed appreciation for all staff providing this SEL infrastructure for our students so they can learn without interference.

### **Opportunity for Public Comment**

- Brian Specyalski: He thanked Mrs. Welz. His son is in her class and loves her. Mindful Transformations is an experiential learning opportunity that will bring 4<sup>th</sup> grade student teams together in a focused exploration of differences and similarities across customs and communities to reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation. He feels everything is racial, mentioning CRT, CRE, and this Mindful Transformations. Parents were not asked about this. On the form, the parents are just asked if they read it. His kids are leaving the school to attend another school. Parents need to be involved. He would like the board to inform parents with emails so that they can participate in their children's curriculum. Parents are not as involved as they should be with their kids' homework, which is affecting test scores. We need to involve parents more in the curriculum and get a better understanding of what parents want.
- Cathryn Silver-Smith: It is not the school's responsibility for parents to be involved with their kids. Parents who care are involved and will reach out if they feel like they are not getting enough information.

### **Subcommittee Sessions**

- Subcommittees will meet next meeting, 11/18/2021.
- Chairperson Jane Urban requested that the financial materials be distributed to the Finance Committee in advance of their Board of Education meetings. This process would allow board members time to review them prior to the meeting.

### **Adjournment**

- ***MOTION made by Marian Matthews to adjourn the meeting at 9:29 p.m. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.***

Sara Wilson  
Recording Secretary