

Ashford Board of Education
Meeting Minutes – October 7, 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 7:05 p.m.
- Present were members Kim Kouatly, Jane Urban, and Al Maccarone. Marian Matthews was present via the Zoom call. Tina Fradette and Tess Grous were absent.
- Also present were Superintendent Craig Creller, Principal Troy Hopkins, Business Manager Deana Chrzan, Dr. Carly Imhoff, Arabic Teacher Sarah El Gammal, School Social Worker Alissa Tatro, parent Brian Specyalski, parent Nyaunu Stevens, and Zoom meeting host Scott Waddell. Attending the meeting via the Zoom call were Assistant Principal Polly Borysevicz, Director of Pupil Personnel Cindy Ford, First Selectman Cathryn Silver-Smith, and other members of the school staff and the public.

MOTION made by Jane Urban to add item 2.5 Public Comment to the agenda. Motion seconded by Kim Kouatly and carried unanimously.

BOE Workshop

- a. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Presentation presented by Superintendent Craig Creller, Principal Troy Hopkins, Dr. Carly Imhoff, Sarah El Gammal, and Alissa Tatro.
 - Ashford School mission: Ashford School learners engage in authentic experiences to discover their passion, strive for excellence, connect with their community and the world, and contribute in positive and meaningful ways.
 - Goal statement: All students are aware and respectful of differences, all students feel valued and safe to learn and grow so they will become empowered learners striving for positive change (in themselves and their world).
 - Developing global awareness and cultural competency.
 - Equity Mindset Teaching Matters was presented at NAESP National Conference in July 2021. Principal Baruti Kafele will be presenting 10/14/2021 on effective school leadership as it relates to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
 - Many teachers have participated in global professional development through Fund with Teachers and other organizations, including Equity Summit, Culturally Responsive Education, LGBTQ+, and Beads of Privilege – National Conference for Community and Justice.
 - Mirrors and Windows: A mirror reflects your own culture and helps you build your identity. A window offers you a view into someone else's experiences.
 - Themes from current state standards shared.
 - World Language and Culture Program: Five C's of American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages are communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. Arabic program discussed as well as German exchange and interns. Our students won Goethe Institute Our Sustainable Future Award in German.
 - International study trips and collaboration globally with other students highlighted.
 - Monthly cultural arts assemblies funded by PTO and HOT School Grant.
 - HOT School Arts Integrated Residency
 - Social Emotional Learning: Next BOE workshop will be Socially Savvy and Emotionally Educated Learners.
- b. Questions & Answers
 - Grades 5-8 are having Arabic class every other day when they would otherwise have Wolf Den (study hall).

Public Comment

- Nyaunu Stevens: She has a 3rd grader at Ashford School and one who graduated last year. They were renters in Ashford for several years. When they decided to buy, they wanted to stay in Ashford because of the school. She feels like her boys were very supported. She thanked the staff for all the opportunities offered to the students.
- Brian Specyalski: He said the Arabic teacher sounds fantastic. He asked how Middle Eastern countries treat their women, are we teaching the kids that, and is she really teaching the entire culture or just the good parts of the culture. Goals of the Board of Education mentioned in the last meeting by Superintendent Craig Creller were not listed in the minutes, which were hire a superintendent, oversee facilities, create budget, and create a curriculum committee. The board does not have a curriculum committee. The most important responsibility of the school boards is to work with communities to improve student achievement in local public schools. We are talking about social-emotional learning, but our scores are horrible. Our scores are way below the state mean. This superintendent is phenomenal. Where is the accountability for the last superintendent who never improved the scores? The online bullying of Meghan last time was terrible. There are bullying problems in the school. He disagrees with CRE. The board should be talking about the test scores. Arts are great, but we should be talking about how to improve test scores. The scores are on the Edcite website. He mentioned the possibility of teaching Mandarin next year and asked if we will be teaching all about their culture, including the millions of people enslaved there. He asked people to be careful who they vote for.
- Jonathan Laughlin: He asked if the consideration for the Arabic program is driven by the parents of the children attending this school or by the Board of Education and the superintendent. He is hearing from constituents in town that this agenda is not being driven by the parents. He asked why we are driving something that is not reflecting the wishes of the parents whose kids go to school. The Board of Education should support what the parents of the children in the school think is appropriate. It seems clear that this is an agenda that is spreading across the state, pushed by democratic governor and democratic leadership in this town. This is a national trend that has some people alarmed. K-8 is a young age for children to be educated in these topics. These children will not have a choice in which classes they attend. They are not elective classes. We need to focus on what is important for the kids in Ashford, Connecticut.
- Christina Davis: She supports the teaching of Arabic in the school. Her kid comes home and tells her all sorts of cool things he is learning in that class. She said some of the comments at this meeting and the last meeting show how important it is that we have culture education in our school. She commented about the pandemic, relieved that the cases in the school have calmed down. She does not want us to become complacent. She encouraged the administration to consider the quarantine policy and quarantine entire classes if there is one positive case. She encouraged parents to check into the weekly opt-in surveillance COVID testing program for their children. She also encouraged the board and administration to look into "test to stay" policies that are happening around the country. It could be a way for us to get away from wearing masks.
- Al Maccarone, as a parent: There are 22 countries in the Arab League. They represent 450 million people. We need to know more about them. He said we have made some real mistakes as far as our place in the world opposite the Middle East. Some of it came out of ignorance. Our kids need to know cultural diversity. He has a 7th grade grandson here at Ashford School with a Hispanic last name. He has some biracial grandchildren. He wants his grandchildren to see themselves in the curriculum.
- Lee Whitney: She supports the Arabic program and the efforts of the school to encourage and support diversity of students, their cultural education, sensitivity to different kinds of students that we have. She said we have kids who live in Ashford, but they also live in a global community. Most of our kids have access to media, and they know what is going on in the world. She said she knows we have gay children and transgender children at Ashford School, so we cannot say these children are too young to learn about these issues. They are being exposed to it on a daily basis, and we need to meet them so that they understand, so that they are appreciated, and so they are comforted if they struggle with any of these issues. She appreciated the presentation tonight.

Subcommittee Sessions

- a. Building & Grounds – This committee did not meet.
- b. Finance – All board members in attendance attended Finance Subcommittee.
 - Cafeteria line item will fluctuate from month to month, but it will always be negative. State reimbursement is received one to two months behind. This should break even and is not a concern at this point.
 - Employee benefits are in flux. They are going to monitor this closely.

- Medical insurance for retired teachers: Craig Creller has never seen this in a contract. He would like to see that sunset out of the contract. It does sunset in the contract from employee having a 17.5% contribution to having a 50% contribution.
- Workers' compensation: We share that cost with Region 19, so it will go down. Hopefully, we will be able to budget closer for that amount in future years.
- Other professional services: An expense that was not budgeted for was a consultant for the business office from March to July. This should not be an ongoing expense.
- Tuition account: Outplacement of special education for tuition. The state funding for excess costs will go against this line item as it comes in.
- Diesel/gasoline/propane: The town pays us for diesel. Region 19 will be reimbursing us. This line item should be zero or possibly have a little bit left over.
- Jane Urban asked about heating oil line item. Deana will check on that. Jane asked if the air purifiers will minimize the need to have windows open. Craig said they are wanting to suck air out rather than let in fresh air and that the air purification will help. Craig said with new heating system we may have some efficiencies.
- Equipment/furniture: Furniture was purchased to help with social distancing both inside and outside. We are hoping to get this covered by a grant.

MOTION made by Jane Urban to approve the budget expenditures YTD for September 2021. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.

Adjournment

- ***MOTION made by Marian Matthews to adjourn the meeting at 9:13 p.m. Motion seconded by Jane Urban and carried unanimously.***

Sara Wilson
Recording Secretary