

Ashford Board of Education
Special Meeting Minutes – June 14, 2022
6:00 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 6:04 p.m.
- Present were members Tess Grous, Kim Kouatly, Jennifer Leszczynski, Al Maccarone, and Marian Matthews. Jon Laughlin was absent. Ex-officio member Bill Falletti joined the meeting at 6:06 p.m.
- Also present were Superintendent Craig Creller, Director of Pupil Personnel Cindy Ford, Principal Troy Hopkins, Assistant Principal Polly Borysevich, Business Manager Deana Chrzan, and Zoom meeting host Scott Waddell. There were 2 members of the public present. There were approximately 57 members of the school staff and the public present via Zoom.

Pledge of Allegiance

Ex-officio member Bill Falletti joined the meeting at 6:06 p.m.

Opportunity for Public Comment

- Kim Kouatly read emails the board received from Carrie Pramuka (6/9), Sabrina and Dan Bowersett (6/9), Amanda Cantrell (6/9), Cortney and Brandon Gerlach (6/9), Jennifer Mozeiko (6/9), Corinne Zanetti (6/12), Susan Irvine (6/12), Crystal Carvalho (6/13), James Hendricks (6/13), Toni Gobin (6/14), Chantel Pelletier (6/14), Melissa Knight (6/14), and Katherine Duval (6/14) expressing support for the teachers and noncertified staff in their vote of no confidence in Superintendent Craig Creller. Emails attached.
- Kim Kouatly read an email received by the board from Traci Dutcher Hastings with The Chronicle (6/11). Email attached.
- John Kopec (North Rd.): When I bought property here in 2017, Ashford School was somewhere in the middle of rankings by U.S. News and World Report; now, they rank the top 420 out of 560 elementary schools in Connecticut, and we are unranked. SchoolDigger.com ranked us in the top 65% of schools in 2017; now, we are in the bottom 35%. Realtor.com (GreatSchools.org) ranked us a 7 in 2017; now, we are a 4. This slide predates the current superintendent. For people on the outside, test scores are the information they have access to. If I was looking at towns today, I would have written this town off right from the start. I hear people say that investing in Ashford School increases property value, but if we keep on our current trajectory, it will become a liability. Something is not working. We must improve. We must make changes. Demonizing the superintendent the way that I have seen...do you really think he is trying to hurt education? I have heard so much talk about how poorly he handled the budget, yet he got the largest increase in recent memory at least, if not ever. I have had several conversations with him. He wants to turn things around, and I am confident that he will. I think that you need to hear from some different perspectives. I have four kids in Ashford School. You may not like what I have to say, but surely you cannot think that I want anything but the best for my children's education. I am asking that each of you individually have a private conversation. Let's see if we can understand each other a little better. It would be very nice to have a conversation outside the stress of budget season.

Personnel Discussion – Exit Interview

MOTION made by Marian Matthews to enter executive session for the purpose of conducting an exit interview, inviting Troy Hopkins and Craig Creller. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.

The board, Troy Hopkins, and Craig Creller entered executive session at 6:27 p.m. At 6:57 p.m., the board, Troy Hopkins, and Craig Creller exited the executive session and took a brief recess.

Discussion Concerning Superintendent's Performance Evaluation and Superintendent's Contract

MOTION made by Marian Matthews to enter executive session for discussion concerning the superintendent's performance evaluation and superintendent's contract, inviting Craig Creller. Motion seconded by Kim Kouatly and carried unanimously.

The board and Craig Creller entered executive session at 7:03 p.m. Bill Falletti exited the executive session at 9:11 p.m. Craig Creller exited the executive session at 9:21 p.m. The board exited the executive session at 9:54 p.m. and took a recess until 10:00 p.m.

Discussion and Possible Action Concerning Adoption of Superintendent’s Performance Evaluation

- There will be no action taken on that tonight.

Discussion and Possible Action Concerning Superintendent’s Contract

MOTION made by Kim Kouatly to approve the contract request discussed in executive session related to the current 2021-2022 year. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone. Motion failed with 2 yes votes (A. Maccarone, T. Grous) and 4 no votes (J. Leszczynski, K. Kouatly, M. Matthews, J. Urban)

MOTION made by Kim Kouatly to approve the contract request discussed in executive session related to the 2022-2023 year. Motion seconded by Jennifer Leszczynski. Motion failed unanimously.

Opportunity for Public Comment - None

Adjournment

MOTION made by Marian Matthews to adjourn the meeting at 10:05 p.m. Motion seconded by Kim Kouatly and carried unanimously.

Sara Wilson
Recording Secretary



Board Of Education <boe@ashfordct.org>

Superintendent

1 message

Carrie Pramuka <carrie7180@gmail.com>
To: boe@ashfordct.org

Thu, Jun 9, 2022 at 4:36 PM

To whom it may concern,

As a parent of three children at Ashford school, I fully support the staff's decision to terminate superintendent Craig Creller.

Thank you
Carrie Pramuka

Sent from my iPhone



Teacher Support

1 message

Sabrina Bowersett <sabaloha@hotmail.com>

Thu, Jun 9, 2022 at 6:22 PM

To: "AshfordBOE@ashfordct.org" <AshfordBOE@ashfordct.org>

Dear Ashford Board of Education,

We are writing to express our support for the teachers at Ashford School. Throughout the past 13 years, the teachers and staff at Ashford School have collectively had a positive influence on our family and children. They have encouraged hard work, kindness, caring, compassion, respect and humor. If they are gathering and organizing because they are not satisfied with the level of commitment or direction of the new superintendent, then we feel this needs to be taken seriously. We trust that the teachers and staff have the best interest of the students and families in all that they do. We support them in their mission to remove the superintendent and hope that you will too.

Thank you for all that you do for our town and community.

Sincerely,
Sabrina and Dan Bowersett
Zaicek Road
Ashford, CT



6/8 Special Meeting

2 messages

Amanda Cantrell <amanda.marty@gmail.com>

Thu, Jun 9, 2022 at 10:28 PM

To: boe@ashfordct.org, jurban@ashfordct.org, kkouatly@ashfordct.org

Please feel free to share this email as public comment, if there is an opportunity at the next BOE meeting.

Board Members,

I would like to start off by thanking you for all of your time, patience, and work you put into assuring our town has a top notch school system. The hours you put in are surely far more than just scheduled meetings. Your commitment does not go unnoticed. I truly appreciate what you do for our community.

I just want to let you all know I fully support what the staff of Ashford School presented at the special meeting last night. For such high numbers of the union members to be in agreement for a request to terminate Mr. Creller, the board of education must strongly consider this serious request. I know this will likely be a long process, but I do not doubt it will be very thorough. Morale seems to be at an all time low, and it does not seem like the result of the stress the pandemic has brought upon all of us. This is not okay. Our staff should feel trusted, cared for, and heard. I urge you to do everything in your power to investigate and make the right decision for our teachers, support staff, and most of all, our children. Without a positive and supportive leader, the negativity and stress will likely trickle down to our children. My children. Your children. Keeping Mr. Creller as Ashford School's superintendent will likely increase staff resignations. We do not want this for our school. As elected members of the Board of Education, you are to make this difficult decision on behalf of our community, and I ask of you to think of the environment of our school prior to Mr. Creller. I would love to see that again.

Again, I sincerely appreciate everything you do for all of us.

Amanda Cantrell

Amanda Cantrell <amanda.marty@gmail.com>

Thu, Jun 9, 2022 at 11:23 PM

To: jleszczynski@ashfordct.org, ashfordBOE@ashfordct.org, mmathews@ashfordct.org

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Amanda Cantrell <amanda.marty@gmail.com>

Date: June 9, 2022 at 10:28:20 PM EDT

To: boe@ashfordct.org, jurban@ashfordct.org, kkouatly@ashfordct.org

Subject: 6/8 Special Meeting

Please feel free to share this email as public comment, if there is an opportunity at the next BOE meeting.

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Encouragement

2 messages

Cortney Gerlach <Cortneysamperi@hotmail.com>
To: BOE@ashfordct.org, jurban@ashfordct.org, kkouatly@ashfordct.org

Thu, Jun 9, 2022 at 7:44 PM

Good Evening BOE Members,

We are writing to encourage your action in removing Craig Creller as superintendent of Ashford School. We fully support the staff, both certified and non-certified, of Ashford School in their vote of no confidence in Mr. Creller's ability to effectively oversee Ashford School.

Thank you,

Cortney and Brandon Gerlach

Sent from my iPhone

Jane Urban <jurban@ashfordct.org>
To: ashfordboe@ashfordct.org

Fri, Jun 10, 2022 at 2:51 PM

Please do not reply all.

Just realized that this email and another (to follow) were sent to the old board email address. Please see email below to the BOE.

Begin forwarded message:

From: Cortney Gerlach <cortneysamperi@hotmail.com>
Date: June 9, 2022 at 7:44:43 PM EDT
To: boe@ashfordct.org, jurban@ashfordct.org, kkouatly@ashfordct.org
Subject: Encouragement

[Quoted text hidden]



In Support of Ashford School Faculty and Staff

2 messages

Jennifer Mozeiko <jenmozeiko@gmail.com>

Thu, Jun 9, 2022 at 2:28 PM

To: boe@ashfordct.org, jurban@ashfordct.org, kkouatly@ashfordct.org

Dear Ashford BOE,

I am writing as a town resident in support of the teachers and staff who have overwhelmingly decided that the superintendent must go. I have not had personal interactions with him so cannot speak to the problem in specific; I do, however, know well the Ashford School staff and faculty and I hold them in high regard. My children both attended preschool and elementary school and one also attended middle school there. I also served as an interim member of the Ashford BOE for 9 months. If the faculty and staff are saying there is a problem with the leadership as 97% of them are, I would urge the board to take action as soon as possible. The health and energy of the school as a whole comes from the teachers and the staff. We need to do everything in our power to ensure that they feel well supported so they can continue to do their best by our children.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Mozeiko

88 Ashford Lake Dr
Ashford, CT 06278

Jane Urban <jurban@ashfordct.org>

Fri, Jun 10, 2022 at 2:52 PM

To: ashfordboe@ashfordct.org

Please do not reply all.

Second message that did not go to the full board.

Begin forwarded message:

From: Jennifer Mozeiko <jenmozeiko@gmail.com>

Date: June 9, 2022 at 2:28:19 PM EDT

To: boe@ashfordct.org, jurban@ashfordct.org, kkouatly@ashfordct.org

Subject: In Support of Ashford School Faculty and Staff

[Quoted text hidden]



Ashford school vote of no confidence

2 messages

Corinne Zanetti <zanettibrass@gmail.com>
To: boe@ashfordct.org, jurban@ashfordct.org

Sun, Jun 12, 2022 at 4:15 PM

To the Board of Education, Ashford,

As a retired music teacher living in Ashford since 1984, I was shocked and disappointed to hear about the vote of no confidence given to the superintendent by an extremely large proportion of teachers and staff. I have always been proud of our education system. This issue needs to be addressed.

Having taught in the public schools of Manchester CT for 36 years, I know how challenging it is to be successful in our profession. Good teaching requires dedication, effort, endless enthusiasm, management and people skills as well as knowledge of the subject area. It is hard and demanding work.

Over the span of my career, I taught in a dozen different schools. I know from personal experience that principals and superintendents who are supportive and listen to their staff make a huge difference in morale and our ability to perform our jobs well. It is vital to maintain an environment of collaboration and trust between administrators and teachers.

I hope you will make every effort to find a more suitable leader for Ashford. Our children and educators are counting on your decision to continue a level of performance in our school that we can remain proud of.

Sincerely,
Corinne Zanetti
183 Amidon Rd.
Ashford, CT

Jane Urban <jurban@ashfordct.org>
To: ashfordboe@ashfordct.org

Sun, Jun 12, 2022 at 9:33 PM

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Corinne Zanetti <zanettibrass@gmail.com>
Date: June 12, 2022 at 4:15:55 PM EDT
To: boe@ashfordct.org, jurban@ashfordct.org
Subject: Ashford school vote of no confidence

[Quoted text hidden]



Expressing concern

2 messages

Susan Irvine <susanirvine0@gmail.com>

Sun, Jun 12, 2022 at 10:06 PM

To: boe@ashfordct.org, jurban@ashfordct.org, kkouatly@ashfordct.org

Dear members of Ashford Board of Education,

I am writing as a parent of two Ashford School graduates, as an educator, and as a community member. I want to express my concern about the leadership of Ashford's Superintendent Craig Creller. I understand that the Ashford Education Association, along with the MEUI, submitted a vote of no confidence with Superintendent Creller. I think the message sent with this is very clear. If 97% of the staff is in agreement about this issue, it is critical for the Board of Education to listen and take action.

Of course you know that the last few years have been extraordinarily stressful for educators (and for families) and the Ashford BOE has been so supportive. Ashford School staff need administrative leadership who lead, inspire, solve problems, build relationships, and pull staff together instead of degrading staff and pulling them apart. Please support our wonderful Ashford staff!

Thank you for all that you do to support Ashford staff members, students, and families!

Sincerely,

Susan Irvine

Susanirvine0@gmail.com

Jane Urban <jurban@ashfordct.org>

Sun, Jun 12, 2022 at 10:20 PM

To: ashfordboe@ashfordct.org

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Susan Irvine <susanirvine0@gmail.com>

Date: June 12, 2022 at 10:06:20 PM EDT

To: boe@ashfordct.org, jurban@ashfordct.org, kkouatly@ashfordct.org

Subject: Expressing concern

[Quoted text hidden]



Public Comment

1 message

Jamie Hendricks <james.s.hendricks@gmail.com>

Mon, Jun 13, 2022 at 7:29 PM

To: AshfordBOE@ashfordct.org, jurban@ashfordct.org, kkouatly@ashfordct.org, mmatthews@ashfordct.org, tgrous@ashfordct.org, jlaughlin@ashfordct.org, jleszczynski@ashfordct.org, amaccarone@ashfordct.org, boe@ashfordct.org

Official Communication to the Board of Education

To the Ashford Board of Education:

The public comments of your June 8, 2022 meeting were disturbing. The Ashford Education Association and local MEUI non-certified staff union speak volumes in a united mission - to make sure that you hear issues that affect the students of the Town of Ashford. I would like the documents shared to be part of the public record. The public should be aware of the employees' concerns with the top leader of the district. Does the current superintendent embody the mission and goals of the Board of Education? Is this leader the one you want to represent our school district?

A quick investigation needs to be initiated and immediate action needs to take place. Support the teachers and non-certified staff of the Ashford Public Schools.

James Hendricks
264 Horse Hill Road
Ashford, CT 06278



Leadership concerns

Sarah Bajger <sarah.bajger@gmail.com>
To: jurban@ashfordct.org, boe@ashfordct.org

Tue, Jun 14, 2022 at 4:29 PM

Dear Ashford Board of Education,

I am writing this email as I am very concerned with the direction Ashford School has taken and with the districts leadership.

I wrote to the Board in April regarding concerns with Mr. Creller's proposed budget and communication around the mask survey as well as an incident on the bus involving a dangerous object. Unfortunately, my concerns have only grown.

I am a parent of two young children and my family chose to purchase a home in Ashford in part due to Ashford School's longstanding excellent reputation. It has become increasingly clear that Ashford School's future as a high quality educational institution is in grave danger.

Teacher morale is at an all-time low as evidenced by the mass exodus of quality educators and the documented correspondence from the Ashford Education Association and their vote of no confidence. Retaining quality educators is essential to providing our children with a rich and meaningful education.

It is quite disheartening and worrisome that Mr. Creller has not appeared to respond to several communications from the AEA nor does he appear to be willing to collaborate. I think Mr. Creller should be reminded that he works for our community and is paid with our tax dollars. Ashford School has provided high quality education for years and he is new to our community. I wish he had taken this position with a more collaborative, rather than authoritarian, approach.

It is imperative that the district leadership find a way to boost morale immediately. It will already be quite a difficult feat to fulfill all of the certified vacancies that our school is left with. Many districts are faced with the challenge of filling vacancies while there is a shortage of teachers/applicants - how will Ashford School overcome this when teacher salaries are already lower than many other districts? Who would want to work in Ashford if the pay is low and the building morale has hit rock bottom? The district leadership must do whatever it takes to boost teacher morale and rebuild a trusting relationship between our teachers and the administration. The leadership must find a way to make Ashford School a desirable place to work or the effects of this will trickle down onto our students.

I feel as though Mr. Creller has been given multiple opportunities to rectify the staff morale and embark on a collaborative journey with our teachers, however he has not been successful and it seems to be due to a lack of effort. My hope is that Ashford School and the Board will find a way to replace Mr. Creller with a more effective, collaborative, and community-centered leader who puts our children first.

Respectfully,
Sarah Bajger

rec'd via 6/14/22
email

I pulled one of my children out of Ashford School because Ashford School failed him. His incredible ability to disguise his disabilities meant his 504 was not being followed because teachers didn't think it was necessary. His disability also meant that he was being treated at his grade level, when in fact, he was in some areas 4 years behind his peers and unable to meet their expectations. We had daily issues with interactions with peers and at the end of every single day he would lose control once he put away his disguise. His quality of life was severely diminished, our quality of life was severely diminished. The amount of time I spent battling was much better spent educating him myself and homeschooling, while challenging at times, has been great for him.

I have a son younger than him, #3, who was not thriving in the homeschool environment. We planned on homeschooling him until he didn't want to be, I was not going through any of that again. The decision to put him in in January was incredibly difficult for my husband and I, but #3 was not receptive to homeschooling and it seemed like if we didn't do something he would slip farther behind. He started 1st grade in January not being able to read, by March he was at grade level with his peers. He has never had a bad word to say about his classroom, teacher, or the school environment. This year has been amazing, so amazing he is sad that he has to take a brake for summer. A vital aspect to this success story is that #3 has a teacher that my older son already had, the teachers across the hall? My son had them. The teachers down the hall? My other sons had her. The lunch lady, the office staff, I could go on and on, they know my family and that familiarity was an asset to his acclimation to the new environment and schedules.

Reading the AEA document yesterday left me incredibly upset, a punch in the gut. We ask a lot of our teachers. Way too much in my opinion. The fact that his teacher was able to provide the environment she did under those circumstances without projecting what was happening behind the scenes on him is absolutely amazing. It takes an enormous amount of strength and discipline.

The Board of Education is the failure in this scenario. You have failed your teachers, you have failed their students, and you have failed those who elected you to your positions. You are wholeheartedly responsible for what has happened here, and you need to rectify this situation.

Craig Creller is not fit for the position of Superintendent of Ashford School and likely wasn't from the beginning. I know that no matter what happens this week, the staff at Ashford School will do what they do best, put on smiley faces and teach their hearts out. The question is, how long are you going to let the current environment suck the life out of them before you recognize your mistake. I would like for #3's teacher is still there if #4 decides to go to Ashford School.

Katherine Duval