

Ashford Board of Education
Special Meeting Minutes – June 8, 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 7:04 p.m.
- Present were members Kim Kouatly, Jennifer Leszczynski, Al Maccarone, and ex-officio member Bill Falletti. Jon Laughlin and Marian Matthews were absent. Tess Grous joined the meeting at 7:15 p.m.
- Also present were Superintendent Craig Creller, Director of Pupil Personnel Cindy Ford, Assistant Principal Polly Borysevicz, Business Manager Deana Chrzan, and Zoom meeting host Scott Waddell. There were approximately 40 members of the school staff and the public present. There were approximately 61 members of the school staff and the public present via Zoom.

Pledge of Allegiance

Opportunity for Public Comment

- Email from Tiffany Draczynski: Questions about why about one-third of the teachers have resigned since the superintendent began and the current morale at the school. What is the cause for this and what is the resolution to keep the current staff we have in place?
- Email from Jesse Burnham: He attended the recent 5th grade field trip to Boston. Their one bus broke down. The replacement bus arrived in a timely fashion. Thank you for the speed of response.
- Email from Beth Galvin: Where was the superintendent on the day of the school shooting at Uvalde? He was not here at the school to reassure parents at drop off, as a reassuring presence to children as they entered the school, or to support school staff. This speaks volumes about Mr. Creller's lack of commitment to the Ashford School community.
- Jen Lindsay (Axe Factory Rd.), on behalf of the AEA: We submit our vote of no confidence in Mr. Creller and his ability to successfully oversee Ashford School. We understand the severity of this unprecedented decision and did not arrive at it hastily, but after months at failed attempts at collaboration and any sign of progress with Mr. Creller, 100% of our union membership participated in the vote and 97.5% of our membership was in agreement.
- Other AEA members: Ashford has always been a district where decisions were made collaboratively with the best interests of our students in mind. We have been fortunate that Ashford School has experienced commitment from school administrators and teachers who are empowered to act in the best interests of the children of Ashford. However, during the 2021-2022 school year, there has been growing concern with Mr. Creller's competency in his leadership role, specifically regarding trust, collaboration, decision making, strategic vision, communication and respect or lack thereof for teachers, staff, and community members. The following 60 pages contain evidence to support our vote of no confidence. They include sections detailing the mishandling of the 2022-2023 proposed budget, the unprecedented loss of 32% of our certified teachers during the 2021-2022 school year, a survey showing the views of the teachers in both February and May, and evidence documenting Mr. Creller's refusal to collaborate along with his constant mistruths. We appreciate you taking the time to thoroughly review this lengthy document and are open to any questions you may have. Members of the Ashford Education Association request the removal of Mr. Creller from his position as superintendent so we can begin the hard and important work of bringing back integrity, collaboration, and respect toward the staff and children of Ashford School.
- Mandi Courtois (Turnpike Rd.), on behalf of the Ashford noncertified staff union, MEUI: Similar to the teachers, 100% of members of MEUI which include paraeducators, bus drivers, cafeteria and custodial workers, participated in a vote of no confidence. More than 97% of the members agree with and support the findings of the Ashford Education Association. Additional details relevant to the reasons behind the noncertified staff vote may be given upon request. MEUI stands in solidarity with AEA.
- Rebecca Haeger (Pembroke Dr.): I have always loved the school and the staff. I am shocked. For this group of amazing people to have to go to this extent says a lot. I want you to take this completely serious. Our school is essential to maintaining a great town. I have seen and heard several statements that are disturbing and completely false. Saying we can save money on insurance with staff leaving represents what is going on perhaps. It was said by the superintendent in a board meeting that everyone has to bite the bullet and that Mansfield had to bite the bullet,

releasing two principals. That is completely false. They are going from three schools to one, and those principals were reassigned. None of them lost their jobs. Losing 17 staff members in one year in the first year of a superintendent says a lot. I am urging you strongly to figure this out and deal with it.

- Lisa Centola (Seckar Rd.): I fully support our teachers at Ashford School. They are the best thing that happens at Ashford School because they make everything else happen. Our family has been fortunate to have interaction with extraordinary teachers. Way to go Ashford teachers.

Tess Grous joined the meeting at 7:15 p.m.

Search Committee Recommendation to Board for Appointment of Ashford School Principal

- Superintendent Craig Creller thanked the members of the committee for their work and collaboration. We had 30 applicants, 26 of which were qualified and certified or able to be certified. The committee screened down to 7. The Principal Search Committee recommends Polly Borysevicz for Ashford School Principal.

MOTION made by Kim Kouatly to accept the committee recommendation of Polly Borysevicz for the new Principal of Ashford School. Motion seconded by Jennifer Leszczynski. Tess Grous commented on the process. It was positive. It was great to meet with all the people that represent the town of Ashford. ***Motion carried unanimously.***

Discussion Concerning Superintendent's Evaluation and Superintendent's Contract (Executive Session)

MOTION made by Al Maccarone that the Board of Education enter into executive session for the purpose of discussing an attorney-client privileged written communication related to the superintendent evaluation format and contractual questions regarding superintendent's contract and for discussion concerning the superintendent's evaluation and the superintendent's contract and further that the board invite Attorney Anne Littlefield and Superintendent Craig Creller into relevant portions of the executive session as determined by the board. Motion seconded by Jennifer Leszczynski and carried unanimously.

The board and Anne Littlefield entered executive session at 7:27 p.m. Craig Creller joined the board and Anne Littlefield in executive session at 8:05 p.m. Craig Creller exited executive session at 10:32 p.m. The board and Anne Littlefield exited executive session at 10:45 p.m.

The board took a recess from 10:45 p.m. until 10:55 p.m. Anne Littlefield left the board meeting at 10:55 p.m.

MOTION made by Kim Kouatly to have the Board of Education authorize Attorney Anne Littlefield to prepare a document reflecting the mutual agreement of the superintendent and the Board of Education as to a superintendent evaluation format. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.

Discussion and Possible Action Concerning Superintendent's Contract

- This will be discussed at a future meeting.

Opportunity for Public Comment - None

Adjournment

MOTION made by Tess Grous to adjourn the meeting at 10:59 p.m. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.

Sara Wilson
Recording Secretary