

Ashford Board of Education  
**Special Meeting Minutes – June 23, 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 7:03 p.m.
- Present were members Tess Grous, Kim Kouatly, Jennifer Leszczynski, Al Maccarone, and Marian Matthews. Jon Laughlin was absent.
- Also present was Attorney Anne Littlefield, Director of Pupil Personnel Cindy Ford, Assistant Principal Polly Borysevicz, and one member of the public. There were approximately 27 members of the school staff and the public present via Zoom.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Communications (Secretary)**

- Email from Judith Austin (Mansfield Rd.) on 06/21/2022 – She is trying to learn both sides of the current situation with the superintendent. It is unfair to say the loss of 13 teachers rests on one individual. The public should hear the superintendent’s perspective. She praised the superintendent for his handling of budget season.
- Email from The Chronicle on 06/23/2022 requesting comment.
- Email from Paul Varga on 06/23/2022 – He is concerned about the issue with the board and superintendent. He has not heard facts, only opinions and assumptions. Staff leaving is not a problem unique to this district. He asked that the 60-page document the teachers submitted be made available to the public.
- Email from Christina Davis on 06/23/2022 – Smart and well-intentioned people are not always fit for the job. She was disappointed in the superintendent’s performance during budget season, mentioning lack of transparency and health plan savings that never materialized. She said there seems to be a lack of alignment between the board and the superintendent, and she hopes the board listens to the teachers and parents.
- Two additional communications were received, one being a personnel issue and one that has been referred to the union.
- Tess Grous and Marian Matthews did not receive the last two communications. Discussion about this being an ongoing problem that needs to be resolved. The correct email address to use for the board is [ashfordboe@ashfordct.org](mailto:ashfordboe@ashfordct.org). All members of the board should receive emails sent to that email address.

**Opportunity for Public Comment**

- No public comment.

**Discussion and Possible Action Concerning Town Request for Information/Action on Ashford School Oil Tank**

- Chair, Jane Urban, summarized information from the 06/20/2022 Board of Selectmen meeting: Jim Rupert mentioned that he had serious concerns about the progress we are making getting the oil tank removed. He provided the school with information on the steps that needed to be taken, but he had no information on current status. He felt that the project was in jeopardy due to insurance expiring as well as lead times on supplies and getting contractors. He recommended that we consider having a consultant lead the process because, right now, it is getting lost between the school and the town. He recommended that the Board of Education make a request of up to \$15,000 from the non-lapsing fund to cover this project management piece. Jim Rupert will be getting a quote from Friar and Associates.
- Tess Grous asked if we would be getting multiple quotes.
- Jane Urban said at last week’s meeting Superintendent Craig Creller mentioned likely being held up by the supply chain and inability to get the size tank that we need. When Jane Urban reached out to him 06/22/2022, Mr. Creller also said there was a miscommunication between him and Friar and Associates regarding an application that is needed for state reimbursement.

- Marian Matthews said we may not need to get multiple quotes to hire a consultant for this, with cost less than \$15,000 and the urgent need to get this done. Friar and Associates is already familiar with our building.
- Jane Urban said it would be up to the Building Committee to select the consultant.
- Jennifer Leszczynski also listened to the Board of Selectman meeting. She wanted the public to understand that we may lose funding because letters were not sent on time. Hiring this consultant would not have been necessary if the process had been followed.

***MOTION made by Marian Matthews to authorize Chair Jane Urban to request up to \$15,000 from the non-lapsing fund to hire a consultant. Motion seconded by Kim Kouatly and carried unanimously.***

**Discussion Concerning Superintendent’s Performance Evaluation and Superintendent’s Contract  
Discussion Regarding Appointment of Acting Superintendent**

***MOTION made by Marian Matthews to enter into executive session for discussion concerning superintendent’s performance evaluation and superintendent’s contract, inviting board counsel Anne Littlefield. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously. Motion amended by Marian Matthews to include discussion regarding appointment of acting superintendent. Amended motion seconded by Kim Kouatly and carried unanimously.***

The board and Anne Littlefield entered the executive session at 7:28 p.m. Anne Littlefield exited the executive session and left the meeting at 9:25 p.m. The board exited the executive session at 9:30 p.m.

**Discussion and Possible Action Concerning Superintendent’s Performance Evaluation**

***MOTION made by Kim Kouatly to extend the chair’s authority to finalize and issue the superintendent’s evaluation. Motion seconded by Marian Matthews and carried unanimously.***

**Discussion and Possible Action Concerning Superintendent’s Contract**

**Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Appointment of Acting Superintendent**

- These items will not be discussed tonight. The board will be holding a special meeting on Tuesday, 06/28/2022 at 7:00 p.m. to address these items.

**Opportunity for Public Comment**

- No public comment.

**Adjournment**

***MOTION made by Marian Matthews to adjourn the meeting at 9:32 p.m. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.***

Sara Wilson  
Recording Secretary

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**Paul Varga**

368 Zaicek Rd  
Ashford, CT 06278

June 23, 2022

**Ashford Board of Education**

440 Westford Rd  
Ashford, CT 06278

Board Members,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the current situation involving Superintendent Creller and the Board of Education.

I have attended several of the meetings , virtually, and read through any minutes or watched video of those I could not attend. All in an effort to gain an understanding of the situation and listen for facts as they were presented. I have not heard, nor have I read any facts. I have heard and read several opinions and subjective statements. Many of those opinions seem to be regarding the recent budget process; a communication, or mis-communication, between Superintendent Creller and staff members; and assumptions of why staff members have left the school system. The 60 page document referenced in the June 8th meeting has not been made public to my knowledge. It is not attached to the meeting minutes. This makes it difficult for a taxpayer to try to understand what possible ground the no-confidence vote is based on. Has there been a law violated? Did Superintendent Creller violate his contract?

Here are some facts. Superintendent Creller successfully negotiated a policy change with the Board of Finance, allowing for the increase of funding into the Board of Education's non-lapsing fund. Superintendent Creller also successfully negotiated with the Board of Finance a 4.21% increase in the Board of Education Budget, The largest percentage I can recall, and I'm sure, the largest dollar amount in history. (As a taxpayer I will add, the initial increase requested was unacceptable, irresponsible, and unsustainable, especially given the current economic crisis.) Several staff members have left the Ashford school system. This is not a problem unique to Ashford. A quick google search will reveal just how large a problem this is nationwide. The business office under Superintendent Creller has been more responsive and communicating with the town and other boards and commissions.

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I request the Board of Education immediately stop what appears to be an unfounded process based on the limited public information. Continued action by the Board of Education jeopardizes the board, and the town, financially, and could have far reaching effects. Funds used for legal actions will be unavailable for better uses. Future candidates for administrative positions in the Town of Ashford will reconsider, or possibly not apply at all.

In closing, the referenced 60 page document should be made available to the public immediately. In addition, the discrepancy and confusion created by meeting minutes being posted inconsistently (town website, school website) and difficult to locate on the school website is unacceptable.

Respectfully,

Paul Varga



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## Fwd: Superintendent feedback

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

Thu, Jun 23, 2022 at 4:22 PM

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Christina Davis <christinahdavis@gmail.com>  
**Date:** June 23, 2022 at 4:15:41 PM EDT  
**To:** Jane Urban <jurban@ashfordct.org>  
**Subject:** Superintendent feedback

Dear Board of Education members:

I wanted to take a moment to share my perspective on Superintendent Craig Creller's performance since I know this board is currently evaluating his work.

First, I want to note that smart, well intentioned people aren't always a good fit for a job. And it is up to the Board of Education, and that board alone, to determine if someone is a good fit. Just because someone has a good-looking resume or performed well during an interview, does not mean that they are perfect for every job.

I attended all the budget meetings as an alternate for the board of finance. I can say that I was disappointed in the superintendent's performance. I felt like the presentation we were given was not as strong as in year's past. It was not transparent and it was clear that the teachers and staff were left out of the process. Also, we were told that there would be over \$200,000 in savings through a health plan switch that never materialized, allegedly necessitating the need at the last minute to cut all the general ed paras from the budget. Then in the end, it was this board - not the superintendent - that found the savings could be had not through cuts, but by simply leaving vacant positions open. Why was this the case unless the superintendent wanted to cut those para positions? And if that's the case, why didn't he simply explain to this board why cutting paras would be the best fiscal strategy moving forward and get this board's backing of that plan? It smacked of manipulation, to be quite frank, and clearly shows a lack of alignment between the board of education and its employee, the superintendent.

I felt and still do that the superintendent did not handle this process smoothly and he showed real inexperience. He alienated a majority of his board, some members of the board of finance (like myself) and the teachers and staff.

It's never easy to make these decisions, but in my experience, they often work out best for all parties involved. I hope this board listens to the teachers, staff and parents who have spoken up so eloquently in support of education in our town.

Sincerely,  
Christina Davis



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**from the Chronicle**

1 message

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TL Hastings <tdutcher@snet.net>  
Reply-To: TL Hastings <tdutcher@snet.net>  
To: "ashfordboe@ashfordct.org" <ashfordboe@ashfordct.org>

Thu, Jun 23, 2022 at 12:46 PM

I am so sorry that I unable to attend tonight's meeting, but I wondered if you would be able to comment on any action taken after executive session tonight. Thanks so much.

~Traci Dutcher Hastings, Chronicle freelance staff writer  
tdutcher@snet.net  
Follow the Chronicle on Twitter - @thechroniclect

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: TL Hastings <tdutcher@snet.net>  
To: AshfordBOE@ashfordct.org <ashfordboe@ashfordct.org>  
Sent: Saturday, June 11, 2022, 05:13:25 PM EDT  
Subject: from the Chronicle newspaper

Hello, this is Traci with *the Chronicle*. I understand that the union is calling for the dismissal of the superintendent. I understand that there is probably not a lot that can be discussed but I wanted to know if you had any comment at all. Thank you so much for your time.

~Traci Dutcher Hastings, Chronicle freelance staff writer  
tdutcher@snet.net  
Follow the Chronicle on Twitter - @thechroniclect



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## Fwd: Superintendent Crellar

1 message

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

Tue, Jun 21, 2022 at 9:58 PM

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Board of Finance Ashford <bofashford@ashfordtownhall.org>  
**Date:** June 21, 2022 at 8:37:39 PM EDT  
**To:** jurban@ashfordct.org  
**Subject:** Superintendent Crellar

I am writing to the board to give a different perspective by what I have witnessed, being said at the BOE meetings. I tried to learn both sides of the current situation with Superintendent Crellar. All I have seen and heard comes from the public meetings from the Board of Ed. and the comments seem to be one sided. I know some facts for instance that E.O.Smith has lost 30 teachers. I don't assume that it's their administration, no more than I assume it is Ashford School's administration for the loss of 13 teachers. Something else is going on that needs to be evaluate for root cause. We as the public do not know the circumstances and it would be unfair for us to conclude that it rests on one individual. Most of the details are in executive session. This gives the impression that the board has control of the conversation and the outcome of what the public hears. It also creates an unfair advantage for the public not to hear the superintendent's side of the story. I would recommend being more respectful during the meetings and by not posting things on social media or in the newspaper. I understand by law there are many things that can't be discussed in public and the public is unaware of.

During the budget process he was very helpful and patient with all the inquiries from the Board of Finance. He always made time for me to ask questions and I felt he answered them honestly. It was refreshing to have a new perspective and working relationship with the school. It's a win, win. That being said I don't feel it's Mr. Crellar's fault that you did not receive the 7.6% you requested during the budget season. The Board of Finance always has thought highly of all the teachers and the hard work they do. We have been covering the salaries and benefits for as long as I can remember hoping that they are being taking care of. The Board of Ed received more than it ever had in the past, in fact, almost double from the prior year at 4.1%. My understanding at the time of the referendum was that you were pleased. It only makes sense that if the school keeps expanding the numbers of staff, that it takes away from the others that have been loyal for many years. I think given the opportunity and the willingness to work with the Superintendent that things can be looked at as a team and perhaps stuctured to become more feasible for the community and the school. My hope is you can work it out because I believe the Superintendent is a huge asset for this current environment we are going through. Take advantage of this unique opportunity.