

Ashford Board of Education
Special Meeting Minutes – June 28, 2022
7:00 pm
Meeting 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 7:06 p.m.
- Present via Zoom were members Tess Grous, Kim Kouatly, Jennifer Leszczynski, Al Maccarone, and Marian Matthews. Jon Laughlin was absent.
- Also present via Zoom were Director of Pupil Personnel Cindy Ford, Assistant Principal Polly Borysevicz, and Zoom host Scott Waddell. There were approximately 55 members of the school staff and the public present via Zoom.

Pledge of Allegiance

Board Chair Remarks

- Jon Laughlin has indicated to the board that he intends to resign from the Board of Education. There will be a request sent out to solicit people who are interested in joining the board. The new board member must not be registered as a democrat. There are 5 democrats currently on the board, the maximum number from one party for a 7-member board.
- It is not the board's choice that they do not answer or respond to public comments. They want to stay on task for the agenda items. Sometimes public comments will result in items being added to the agenda for a future meeting. There has been frustration with the number of times the board has been in executive session in recent meetings. That is a legal requirement for the personnel issues that the board has been discussing. It is not something the board is doing to be secretive or keep information from the public.

Opportunity for Public Comment

- The board received communication from Dr. James Longo, former superintendent, regarding outsourcing technology services: He has heard very little positive about outsourcing technology services from other superintendents. Staff members who need IT help usually need it immediately and are more likely to get help quickly with an in-house person. The full email will be attached to the minutes.
- Dr. James Longo: If anyone has questions, feel free to send him a text or an email.
- Steve Morytko (Varga Rd.): He echoed what Dr. Longo said. He visited Savage Systems' website and was unimpressed with the company. They juxtapose the salary of the full-time person as cost savings, but he feels the school will need some local support. The town will also need some local people. Did this go through an RFP process?

Appointment of Assistant Principal

- Polly Borysevicz said we are excited to welcome David Eichorn to Ashford School. There were 11 people on the hiring committee. He was the unanimous number one choice.

Kim Kouatly moved to appoint David Eichorn as the new Assistant Principal of Ashford School. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.

- David Eichorn thanked the board for the opportunity. He said he is looking forward to working with the students, parents, and staff of Ashford School.

Approval of Request to Broaden Scope of Specials Offered at Ashford School

- Polly Borysevicz spoke about the difficulty finding a music teacher. She mentioned other possibilities for specials, including computer science and drama. She spoke with Kate Craven, who mentioned a computer science program called code.org.
- Kim Kouatly asked if it is a state requirement that we have music for elementary education.
- Jennifer Leszczynski spoke in support of having more arts and asked if we could get some stakeholder input.

- Tess Grous would like to get input from parents and teachers.
- Jane Urban would prefer to try to stay in the arts. Drama would be an exciting addition. She wondered if we could broaden our advertisement for a specials teacher.
- Cindy Ford said she does not think there is any state requirement for music. She said it would be good to put feelers out to the teachers and the community to see what other ideas there are.
- Polly Borysevich will proceed with getting input from parents and teachers as well as possibly working on creative advertising for a specials teacher.

Discussion and Action Concerning Contract for Technology Services

- Proposal from Savage Systems is in the agenda packet.
- Kim Kouatly spoke about her concerns, including turnaround times and what our people currently do being more than what is included in this contract.
- Jennifer Leszczynski spoke against outsourcing, saying technology is absolutely essential on an everyday basis when you teach.
- Tess Grous said before we make a hasty decision, we need to ask some important questions. Could we have someone from Savage come and speak to the board?
- Jane Urban said the proposal is dated 05/24/2022, but it just now coming before the board with our new fiscal year starting 07/01/2022. This is a 5-year contract with no way for us to get out.
- Kim Kouatly said we should get multiple estimates, and we need more time.
- Al Maccarone asked what gain there would be for Ashford School to join with the town for this service. When you have a vendor on the outside, you are dependent on when they show up.
- Kim Kouatly said it looks like the town already uses this for their phone system.
- Scott Waddell said somehow Savage Systems is in our school system, but he has no knowledge of what they are currently doing for the school. He said our business manager has a prior connection with Savage Systems.
- The board will take some more time to consider this, hoping to discuss with First Selectman Bill Falletti and possibly have an opportunity to hear from Savage Systems.

Discussion and Action Concerning Exploration of After School Childcare Program

- Sherry York said they are exploring the possibility of being able to offer an after school program run through the Ashford Parks and Recreation Department. Would Ashford School be willing to house this program?
- Discussion about the need in the community for an after school childcare program.

Kim Kouatly moved to authorize the school administration to work with Ashford Parks and Recreation to explore an after school childcare program for children of Ashford. Motion seconded by Tess Grous and carried unanimously.

Discussion Regarding Performance Evaluation of Superintendent

Discussion Regarding Agreement with Superintendent

Discussion Regarding Appointment of Acting Superintendent

Al Maccarone moved to enter into executive session for discussion regarding performance evaluation of superintendent, agreement with superintendent, and appointment of acting superintendent. Motion seconded by Tess Grous and carried unanimously.

The board entered the executive session at 8:03 p.m. The board exited the executive session at 9:06 p.m.

Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Agreement with Superintendent

Kim Kouatly moved that the Ashford Board of Education authorize the Board Chair, Jane Urban, to enter into an agreement with Superintendent of Schools, Craig Creller, reflecting the terms and conditions of his employment through September 30, 2022 and replacing his current contract of employment. Motion seconded by Marian Matthews and carried unanimously.

Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Appointment of Acting Superintendent

Kim Kouatly moved, in accordance with Section 10-157 of the Connecticut General Statutes, that the Board appoint Cindy Ford as Acting Superintendent of Schools, effective July 1, 2022, subject to the following conditions: 1) approval of the Commissioner of Education in accordance with Section 10-157 of the Connecticut General Statutes; and 2) completion of

satisfactory negotiations on the terms and conditions of her employment and moved further that the Board Chair be authorized to negotiate, finalize, and execute the proposed employment contract with Cindy Ford on behalf of the Board. Motion seconded by Marian Matthews and carried unanimously.

Discussion and Possible Action Concerning Acting Superintendent's Legal Authority

- Per board legal counsel, this is not necessary. There will be no action taken on this agenda item.

Opportunity for Public Comment

- Steve Morytko (Varga Rd.): Spoke congratulating the board on resolving the superintendent matter. He said Cheryl Baker retired recently from the Ashford Town Hall, and she did a lot of their website work, which may have put them in a bit of a bind. He said it may make sense at some point for the town and the school to share IT resources, but this seems rushed. He suggested it be studied carefully.
- Rick Kouatly (Eastford Rd.): Spoke in agreement with Steve Morytko. He said the effort Savage Systems put forth is minimal and that multiyear contracts need to be examined really closely. He said a 5-year contract is a red flag.
- Christina Davis (Squaw Hollow Rd.): Spoke to thank the board for their efforts to resolve the issue with the superintendent and to thank Cindy Ford for stepping up.
- Morgan Gerstenlauer (Kidderbrook Rd.): Spoke to thank the board for looking into the issues with the superintendent. As a parent and as a taxpayer, she asked to see the superintendent's review. Kim Kouatly said the superintendent's review is not public.
- Chonte Fields (Southworth Dr.): Spoke and said the superintendent was investigating an issue she raised. With Cindy stepping up, she wondered how her issue would be handled. She is waiting for his report.

Adjournment

Marian Matthews moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:23 p.m. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.

Sara Wilson
Recording Secretary

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**An open letter to the Ashford Board of Education.
Notes for consideration Regarding Outsourcing Technology Services**

I served as a school and district administrator for nearly forty years after thirteen years as a teacher. My last twelve years as an educator were as Superintendent of Ashford School.

During those years I have had many occasions to hear superintendents speak about their experience outsourcing services.

Such as: Food services
Custodial Services
Technology services

Very little of what I heard was positive. Mostly, it turns out the outsourced providers do not do much of what the in-house employee did.

I heard story after story of how they had to hire an in-house person to complement the outsourced provider. It should be noted that very few districts of the 162 use outsourced technology providers alone. There is a reason for that. It is very unlikely that anyone who has actually administered a school or had to lead a staff would endorse an outsourced technology provider.

- The few towns that I know about only outsource because they cannot find someone with the skills that our IT person has. He is a skilled network person, understands and works with Apple and PC products, has worked in schools for over thirty years.
 - Those towns also ended up having to hire a tech person to supplement the outsourced provider.

- Within a few years prices went up in the name of new services to circumvent the contract.
- If you are a classroom teacher and your computer is not working or your network is not working or some other technology failure, you need immediate help. Most cases you will get help almost instantly from in-house staff, but are likely to be told by an outsource company that they will get to it in a while. Meanwhile, students you have during the wait time do not receive their expected lessons. Plans have to be abandoned, instruction changed, and lessons modified.
- The in-house person does many other tasks beyond servicing the network and computers.
 - Enrollment updates
 - Power School maintenance
 - Keeping inventory
 - Cleaning and preparing hundreds of computers each summer for the next year
 - Working on the District Tech Plan
 - Training staff and providing situational assistance
 - Problem solving in real time
 - Advising on purchases
- The Technology assistant is much more than a technology assistant, and does many other tasks daily.
 - Lunch Duty
 - Bus Duty
 - Media Center Duty
 - Classroom Para Work
 - Filling in where needed

Ashford has a highly qualified Technology Department. Our system works very well, we are up to date, people get service in a timely fashion, advice is solid and dependable, and the future is looking good.

Be careful of sacrificing quality learning to save a few dollars. Especially if it is not reliable that the saving will be lasting.

I suppose you remember that no classroom person or administrator of the school who has actually had the responsibility of running a school is recommending this change.

Education is about creating the best learning environment for the money, not how little money you can spend. Anyone who has taught, or been a principal or assistant principal, will tell you that messing with a teacher's plans or time with students is not acceptable.

In closing, there are hundreds of computers requiring updating, cleaning and repairing. Who do you expect to do it.

If you outsource, you will be hiring help in a year and not be happy. Remember, if it were so great, as those who have never taught tell you, it would be a common practice. The savings will not materialize as promised, but then it will be too late.