

## Ashford Board of Education Ashford, Connecticut

*Note: Per C.G.S. §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 exception of motions and votes recorded, these minutes are unofficial until they have been read and approved by a majority vote of the Board. Should edits be necessary, they will be made at a regularly scheduled meeting, noted in the meeting minutes, and so voted upon.*

### Special Meeting Minutes – March 27, 2014 Ashford School Library Media Center

#### **Call to Order**

Chair J. Rupert called the meeting to order at 6:40 pm. Present were members J. Lippert, K. Warren, J. Rupert, K. Rourke, D. Wesson and L. Donegan (6:54 pm). Also present were Dr. J. Longo, Superintendent, T. Hopkins, Principal; Business Office staff D. Morgan, L. SanDiego and recording secretary J. Barsaleau. There were approximately 35 persons in the audience.

#### **Board Response to Public Budget Comment (limited to 20 minutes per board policy)**

J. Rupert welcomed everyone and began the meeting by outlining how this meeting would be conducted. The sequence would begin with the reading of a prepared statement (attached) to the audience, followed by a brief opportunity for audience comment. The chair asked that comment be limited to input the board has not previously heard; then the budget was to be reviewed in its entirety. Following that review, there will be a second opportunity for public commentary.

#### **Public Response**

*Maureen Connolly*, AEA co-president, read a letter representing the Ashford Education Association concerning the impact of the reductions in staffing as proposed by the board. (copy attached)

*Mark Phelps*, physical education and the most senior teacher at Ashford School, read an emotional letter outlining the physical education program at Ashford School, the lasting programs that have been developed over the years and recognition of the same; and the impact reductions will have. His letter addressed his 34 years of service to Ashford, and the personal impact this reduction will have on him and his family.

*Dee Dreslough*, spoke of the advantages of using technology in communicating to the public and encouraged the board to seek improvements in these communications.

*Steve Morytko*, again addressed the school website, and his feeling that improvements there would improve the transparency of information shared. He stated his feeling that board was somewhat defensive at the last budget meeting, and stated they are obligated to the public. He thought it might be helpful for the board to have a master plan in the future that would help in garnering public support.

*Nichole Rice*, addressed the possibility of adding an advisory question, or whatever it takes, to support the teachers in the budget.

#### **Final Review of 2014-2015 Budget**

Dr. Longo introduced the budget review document that was displayed on the projector. The document is posted on the Ashford School website homepage and contains explanatory text in comparing the Board of Education's budget for fiscal years 2012, 2013, 2014 and the proposed 2015. Extensive review of the 80-page document commenced beginning with certified staff, and lines within the object. Discussion included, but was not limited to, the total savings projected by reducing specific subject areas by .2 FTE for FY 15; Ed Jobs grant funding restoring .2 FTE for some of these same positions that had been reduced in a past budget; program advisors; IDEA grant funding in relation to salaries that are funded; commentary to

board members asking why the assistant principal is needed. T. Hopkins spoke to the necessity of having an assistant principal for numerous reasons, but the primary role of assistant principal is the management of students and related matters. This allows the principal a more efficient support of teaching and learning, and being present in classrooms. Without the assistant principal, retaining a principal would be very difficult. Dr. Longo explained that his becoming part time was predicated on adding an assistant principal.

The board took a brief recess at 9:02 pm.

The meeting resumed at 9:13 pm, with the document review resumed with members of the business office staff answering questions from the board concerning specific lines.

As was the case in past meetings, employee insurance objects were discussed. The general consensus was that the board was not comfortable in recommending any reductions to this area of the budget pending the outcome of the annual open enrollment period. Other areas discussed were substitute personnel, substitute nurses, class and field trips, high school transportation and late bus, magnet school tuition, library books, legal costs, audit fees, utilities, plant maintenance and supplies, plant diesel fuel/gasoline, and several lines with the special education objects.

The review took several hours to complete. During this period of time, C. Silver-Smith, chair of the Ashford Board of Finance arrived (10:12 pm). J. Rupert asked Ms. Silver-Smith to share the outcome of the Board of Finance meeting.

Ms. Silver-Smith stated that the board of finance, while not unanimous in its decision, voted to approve the 3.59% budget presented by the Board of Education. She reiterated that there was still a feeling that some areas of that budget be addressed for potential saving and she was pleased to see the board diligently reviewing it this evening. The board thanked Ms. Silver-Smith for attending and for her input.

As the goal of this meeting was to identify any areas within the proposed budget where reductions may be found, Dr. Longo and the business office staff are directed to review the following objects and/or lines and report those findings to the board.

01-1112-111-01012 Coaches

01-2200-319-02220 Audit

01-2540-321-00254 Plant Utilities

Object 323 Equipment Maintenance

01-2540-410-01254 through 05254 Plant Supplies

01-2550-412-02254 through 04254 Transportation Supplies

01-2550-412-01255 Diesel

01-2550-412-02255 Gasoline

*Special Education*

01-1200-319-04120 Evaluations Outsourced

01-1103-410-01120 Special Education Supplies (overall)

### **Budget Action (if necessary)**

The chair again thanked everyone for their attendance and stated that it was clear that no action could be taken this evening, as there is much more work to do before May 6<sup>th</sup>, including the completion of open enrollment, examining the impact of possible retirements and attrition.

### **Public Response (limited to 20 minutes per board policy)**

The floor was opened for brief comments. Questions from the audience that were asked were about the restoration of positions by using the 1% carryover fund, business manager duties performed by a consultant and which line the expense should appear and would the board consider eliminating a full time position of another teacher to restore the .2 FTE reductions.

The board will hold a special meeting to discuss the budget on Tuesday, April 1<sup>st</sup> at 7 PM in the library media center.

Motion to adjourn the meeting (12:26 am) made by K. Warren, seconded by D. Wesson and carried unanimously.

Recorded by:

Jennifer Barsaleau  
Recording Secretary

3/27/14

Dear Mrs. Silver-Smith, Members of the Board of Finance, First Selectman Mike Zambo and Ashford Citizens,

Regrettably I will not be in attendance at the Board of Finance Meeting this evening as I am at the Board of Education meeting. First I would like for everyone to be assured that even though at times it seems the Board of Education and Board of Finance are at odds, Cathryn and I communicate regularly and are committed to the same goals, which are fiscal responsibility to the tax payers and supporting an education budget that benefits our students and prepares them for the future. We have also committed to meeting prior to the budget process next year with specific goals in mind to improve the process which will include better meeting date planning, frank discussions about Board of Education goals, consistent formatting for budget documents and the fiscal aspects of each budget and the impact to tax payers.

At the meeting of the Board of Education this evening the goal of the Board is to carefully and open mindedly review each line item of the budget at the urging of the public and the Board of Finance. The public and Board of Finance have indicated that they believe that there may be areas of the BOE budget that may be robustly funded and through a careful review funding may be reallocated within the budget to restore the proposed cuts. My goal as Chairman is to ensure that our members do look at this with an open mind, and should it become apparent that there are significant monies available for reallocation, either after the review this evening or after the close of open enrollment to give priority consideration to the restoration of the positions that have been cut or reduced in the proposed budget. Please understand that although I am able to promise to give restoration of those positions priority consideration I am in no way able to promise the outcome. That outcome will be based not only on finding enough funding within the budget to reallocate along with a supporting vote of the members of the BOE but also successfully passing the Town and Board of Education budgets at referendum.

It is my sincere hope that the public will continue to be a part of the process by attending the BOE, BOF and BOS meetings and share their goals and priorities with their elected officials. I would like to see the public participate in the upcoming Public Hearing on April 8<sup>th</sup> and the Town Meeting on April 22<sup>nd</sup> followed by the referendum on May 6<sup>th</sup>.

Respectfully,

James Rupert  
Board of Education Chairman

Ashford Education Association  
Ashford School  
440 Westford Road  
Ashford, CT 06278

March 27, 2014

Mr. James Rupert  
Board of Education Members  
Ashford Board of Education  
Ashford School  
440 Westford Road  
Ashford, CT 06278

Good Evening Mr. Rupert and Board of Education Members,

We speak to you this evening on behalf of the Ashford Education Association. We appreciate that you have the very challenging task of balancing fiscal responsibility with the educational needs of children. We do not envy you this situation, and we trust that you are taking into consideration the thoughts, ideas, hopes, and wishes of the taxpayers of Ashford as you make the decisions that affect the children who have been entrusted to our care. If you feel that reducing the time children spend in certain classes is the most effective way to prepare them for the world ahead, that is your prerogative. Please know that while we do not envy you, we also do not necessarily agree with you.

Along with their parents, the children of Ashford School are our responsibility. We spend hours with them daily and spend countless hours beyond our time together determining the best lessons for these precious people. We feel responsible for educating the whole child and take pride in having a role in the people our students become. We worry about their health, their education, and their futures. When they leave us, we keep in touch. They matter to us—from the first child we met on our first day at Ashford School to the one we spoke to last today, they belong to us. And so, as you make your decisions, we ask you to truly think about the kids. Yes, keep in mind the fiscal responsibilities, and the taxpayers, but please don't allow those things to replace the faces of children who rely on us to do what's best for them. For some, it's more music. For some, it's more art. For some, it's P.E. For some it's reading. For some it's the character development program. We may not even know what it was about Ashford School

that made a difference in a child's life--but it would be irresponsible to think that there was not an adult in the building who did not connect with these kids.

With this in mind, we would also like to remind the Board that in addition to having the responsibility for the education of children, you are also employers. When you make the decision to cut a program—even by 20%—you are impacting your employees as well as the children they teach. The employees who you have selected for these cuts are Ashford's most veteran teachers. They have dedicated their lives to teaching Ashford's children for decades—close to or more than *30 years*—and will lose *1/5* of their salary under this proposal. But that's just the beginning. Because their salaries are being so drastically reduced, so will their pension benefits be significantly reduced for the rest of their lives. According to information provided by the Administration, we have also learned that these employees will see their health insurance premiums increase as well for years to come. In a world where people are rarely loyal to their employers, Ashford has been so incredibly fortunate to have these teachers who have devoted decades of their lives to the children of Ashford. To repay them by cutting their positions at the end of their careers sends a message—loyalty is not appreciated.

Last week, a concerned parent implored the board to consider ways to make Ashford School teachers less poachable. She recognized how lucky we are to have a caring, educated, and dedicated staff. Reducing positions—cutting salaries—of teachers who are nearing retirement not only impacts those particular teachers financially for the rest of their lives, it sends the message to other teachers that there is no appreciation for a lifetime of service. What quality of teachers can this district expect to attract and *retain* if we are known for treating our most senior and dedicated teachers this way in their final years of service?

When you speak of wanting the best education for children and your very important role as guardians of kids, please consider how your choices impact the adults in this building who are also the guardians of kids. In this age of internet and electronic obsession, it is a struggle to get our children to spend less time on line and on social networking sites, and more time exercising their young bodies, reading books; expanding their minds through the arts, and developing healthy habits. If you're looking for a cost/benefit analysis, these are areas where it is more important than ever to fully fund these positions and provide children an alternative to their virtual computer screen worlds.

When you speak of wanting the best education for children, please also consider those who have served this community for longer than some of our members have been alive. We encourage you to bravely defend those who have given their careers to the children of Ashford by restoring these positions to full time.

Sincerely,

The Ashford Education Association  
Jennifer W. Lindsay and Maureen Connolly, Co-Presidents