

Ashford Board of Education
Meeting Minutes – January 7, 2021
7:00 pm
Meeting Held 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 John Lippert called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

- Present were members Jane Urban, Tina Fradette, Kim Kouatly, and Marian Matthews. Al Maccarone joined the meeting at 7:04 p.m. Tess Grous joined the meeting at 7:08 p.m.
- Also present were Superintendent Dr. James Longo, Principal Troy Hopkins, Asst. Principal Polly Borysevicz, Director of Pupil Personnel Cindy Ford, Business Manager Martha Guidry, and Zoom meeting host Scott Waddell as well as approximately 30 other members of the school staff and the public.

Student Presentation to Board – No presentation. This will be presented at the second meeting in January.

MOTION by Marian Matthews to add item 7.5 Ashford School Building Committee Report to the agenda. Motion seconded by Tina Fradette and carried unanimously.

FY 22 Public Budget Input

- Carolyn Trotta, parent of 5th grader and 7th grader: In Willington and Mansfield, they break out regular ed from special ed in their budget. It might be advantageous to do the same when we present it to the town. Older residents may not understand the costs involved and the need for special education. It is dispersed throughout the budget currently, rather than pulled out separately. In Social Studies, do we budget for access to news organizations (CNN 10) or is that a grant? This question was addressed in Administrative Reports.

Communications – None.

Opportunity for Public Comment

- Jane Urban: As a parent of a 7th grader, class size seems to keep increasing. Is the school looking into ways to improve the social distancing in that grade, especially during lunch? When instruction is happening, there may be a benefit to having them in one room. They are less than 6 feet apart during the school day and eating lunch without masks in that same situation. Troy Hopkins will report on this in next meeting.

Approval of Minutes

- ***MOTION by Al Maccarone to approve minutes from 12/03/2020. Motion seconded by Jane Urban.*** Kim Kouatly mentioned that Marian Matthews is spokesperson for Building and Grounds Committee. ***Motion carried unanimously with one abstention (M. Matthews).***
- ***MOTION by Marian Matthews to approve minutes from 12/17/2020. Motion seconded by Jane Urban.*** Jane Urban questioned whether the motion that was withdrawn should have been mentioned in the minutes. John Lippert will follow up with Cathryn Silver-Smith. ***Motion carried unanimously with two abstentions (K. Kouatly, T. Fradette).***

Administrative Reports

Superintendent Dr. James Longo

- Families First Coronavirus Response Act expired on 12/31/2020. Dr. Longo is going to allow staff members currently on this leave to remain on leave until the break in February. With our tight budget, it is expensive, roughly \$15,000 per person for 12 weeks of leave. There has been no funding received to provide for this. Dr. Longo had expected the governor to extend it, but that did not happen.
- Dr. Longo said there were a few people present for the community meeting regarding the budget who just wanted to listen to what was being put forward.

Social Distancing in 7th Grade

- Troy Hopkins said, coming back from vacation, staff were reminded of safety measures. They are collecting updated seating charts. Kids follow those seating charts even during lunch.
- Polly Borysevicz met with 7th and 8th grade teams. There will be a legitimate seating chart for them when they are eating in the cafeteria. Both grades share the same lunch time, so 7th grade eats lunch in the cafeteria one week and 8th grade the next week. They give teams time in the morning to meet. The 7th grade is better off in the cafeteria where they can have assigned seats. The 8th grade will be meeting in the gym.
- Kim Kouatly asked if there is any thought about putting 7th graders in cafeteria for lunch all the time because they are a larger grade. Troy Hopkins said they are trying to give both grades an opportunity to get out of the classroom for lunch.
- Troy Hopkins said if it starts feeling unsafe, they could consider splitting 7th graders into 3 groups instead of 2. Currently, Troy feels they are between 4 and 5 feet apart in the classrooms. Dr. Longo suggested splitting 7th grade into 3 groups just during lunch? Troy said they could look into doing that.

Social Studies – Civic Lessons

- Al Maccarone said, given the events of 01/06/2021 and lack of awareness about the election process, kids need to understand constitutional provisions we have. What are we doing in terms of educating kids about civic responsibility?
- Troy Hopkins said they were not prepared to fully answer that question during the meeting. It is in the curriculum. They study the three branches of government in grade 3. In 7th and 8th grade, they follow up current events all the time. Polly Borysevicz and Troy addressed the staff that morning to help prepare them for talking to students, giving specific points that would be appropriate to discuss in a nonpolitical way. Mr. Caldwell had a lesson on it. He sometimes uses CNN 10, which is free and available online to everyone. CNN 10 is separate from CNN. It is very apolitical. They also use Newsela and Scholastic News. The 8th graders just finished up a month-long unit on U.S. government.
- Jane Urban said she feels like the school does a great job at building learning about the government and election process into what they are doing in the classroom.
- John Lippert said he is always shocked that not everybody votes. If our curriculum ends with students who feel like their voice matters and they are part of this country, this state, and this town, then we are doing something really good.
- Dr. Longo said we could pick 6 or 7 months that are not budget months and put different curriculum items on the agenda every month. Al Maccarone said that would help educate the public about what goes on at Ashford School.

Ashford School Building Committee

- Marian Matthews said the Ashford School Building Committee met 01/06/2021. They have an agenda. The next thing that needs to be done, which needs to be on Capital Projects Committee for this year, is to hire a consultant to get a qualified design professional to design specs for our facility, to include sprinkler and fire alarm throughout the school, roof, solar, mechanical, and HVAC (possibly mini splits or geothermal). Geothermal would replace boilers and oil tanks and add air conditioning. Included in that are the heat pump water heaters. We need to encourage the town to hire a consultant to help us get this done.
- Dr. Longo said they have been using Friar Associates. They will have to put forth a request for proposals. The Friar contact could provide a template or examples from other towns. Dr. Longo said usually you have bids back within 3 weeks.
- Jane Urban asked if the consultant would be something that comes out of the town's budget or the school's budget? Marian Matthews said the cost would come out of Capital Projects.
- John Lippert and Al Maccarone would like Marian Matthews to be on the Capital Projects Committee.
- Jim Rupert is chairing the Building Committee. Dr. Longo will connect with both Jim and Marian.

Old Business

- a. BOE Roles and Responsibilities – Code of Ethics and CAFE responsibilities.
 - Code of ethics –Board members are staunch advocates of high-quality free public education for all Connecticut children. Tess Grous mentioned her question from 12/03/2021 meeting - what are we doing to connect the home school community with the school? Dr. Longo said the state does not give us any funding for connecting to home

schoolers. They have the option to allow them to participate in sports. Troy Hopkins said some athletic leagues do not allow home schools to participate. They have been allowed to participate in extracurricular activities in the past. Tess asked how many students have transitioned from Ashford School to home school. Troy thinks it has been less than 10. Dr. Longo asked Tess to send an email to Jen Barsaleau to ask that question. Marian Matthews asked how many kids are home schooled in the area and have never been in the school. A letter of intent is not a requirement. Jane Urban and Tess mentioned other states that require home schoolers to be more connected to public schools. Al Maccarone feels like the board members are staunch advocates of high-quality free public education, striving for the best education we can afford and making it available for all kids. Dr. Longo said we cannot presume to know the reasons why people choose options other than public school.

- John Lippert said the board has not leaned on CAFE enough. Marian Matthews said they are willing to do a workshop with us, and we should take advantage of that.

b. FY 22 Budget

- Martha Guidry and Karen Munroe have gone through every account and made sure things were properly categorized. Maintenance budget is a 4.1% increase over our adopted budget right now. It represents meeting all the contractual obligations for existing staff. For the past 3 years, the actual increases have been 1.4%, 1.8%, and 2%.
- They perceive plan C as a starting point, which is a 5.5% increase. That reflects keeping the 1:1 program for computers for students as well as technology for an anticipated new superintendent.
- In this budget, 83% of the total increase is required salary increases, 23% of the total increase is required benefits, and everything else actually decreased by 5%.
- They are renegotiating the MEUI contract this year. There are two administrator contracts that will be renegotiated this year.
- Al Maccarone asked how the budget was developed and what are Troy Hopkins' priorities in this budget. The budget is developed with wish lists from each teacher as well as wish lists from Troy and the administrative team. The budget process includes everyone, and it is a very transparent process. The budget presented to the Board of Finance includes every object, 3-year history for the object, and bullet points. John Lippert, Martha Guidry, and Dr. Longo will work together on a budget presentation.
- Martha Guidry said it is easy for them to extract special education out of regular education. Of the salary increases, 23% are special ed; 30% of the benefits are special ed; and 22% of salary and instructional increases are special ed.
- John Lippert said this might be a year when we lean a little bit on behalf of people in town who may have had a difficult year.
- Jane Urban asked, if we did not keep the paraprofessional who was hired with the COVID funds, would there be an increase in unemployment? Martha Guidry said for every employee laid off, about \$16,000 of that saved salary goes towards unemployment.
- Jane Urban asked about the substitute line item increasing almost \$20,000. Last year, that line item that was cut at the 11th hour. This year, the run rate is much higher than what was budgeted for.
- Jane Urban asked about the use for desktop computers in plan A, B, and D. Those are for the media center lab and are used primarily for primary students. They are also used for testing. John Lippert hopes that the idea is developed in concert with library media specialist. Discussion about cost difference between desktops and laptops. Scott Waddell said they do purchase AppleCare on the devices that are mobile.
- Dr. Longo said at the next board meeting, the board will give administration a number to work with.
- Busing is listed in a manner that would consider all students being back with no pandemic.
- Martha Guidry said it would be nice to have all questions compiled and presented to her at once. She will ask Jen Barsaleau to show them the run rates for the past 3 years. Board members were asked to email Jen Barsaleau budget-related questions and copy John Lippert as well.
- Martha Guidry said it is important to look at items they did not include in the budget, i.e. curriculum writing, security/backup, new library books.

c. Approval of Therapy Dog Policy

- **MOTION by Jane Urban to approve the Therapy Dog Policy for Ashford School. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone.** Kim Kouatly mentioned policy including service animals and specifically service horses. Cindy Ford said our board attorney added service animals in there also to be an encompassing policy. **Motion carried unanimously.**

Other Old Business

- Jane Urban brought up the question from Carl Pfaltzgraf about computers mentioned in the 12/17/2020 meeting. Dr. Longo spoke with Scott Waddell regarding this. Ashford was not designated as a high-need community. They were Chromebooks as opposed to MacBooks, and there were other strings attached. Jane Urban questioned Mansfield being a higher need community than Ashford and said we should be prepared for quite a bit of pushback from the Board of Finance. Dr. Longo said UCONN residents make Mansfield look high need on paper. Dr. Longo will talk more with Scott about providing a solid answer.
- Tess Grous asked about the administration helping out in the cafeteria and if there were any union regulations in conflict with that. This is not an issue since they are volunteering to help in the cafeteria.

New Business

- a. Revisit/Re-approval of Existing Board of Education Bylaws
 - This was John Lippert's homework, and he has not done it yet. This will be moved to next meeting.
- b. Approval of Technical Policy Revisions from Counsel
 - ***MOTION by Marian Matthews to approve technical policy revisions from counsel. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone. Motion carried unanimously.***
- c. FY 20 Audit Update
 - Martha Guidry said they passed with an exception letter about Student Activities account.
- d. Discussion of Committee Break Out Time Options
 - Instead of break out times for next meeting, both capital and budget will be put on the agenda for the whole board to discuss. Kim Kouatly asked about current capital list. Dr. Longo will make sure she has the most current one. Al Maccarone asked if we could narrow the agenda for the next meeting to focus on budget? John Lippert proposed that we include Administrative Reports in the agenda but not ask each administrator to give reports, just time for specific questions to be answered. Troy Hopkins would like to still have the student presentation, estimated to be 10 minutes. Marian Matthews asked if teachers wanted to talk about the student presentation. Troy will check on that.

Opportunity for Public Comment

- Carolyn Trotta: She loves the idea of expanding the civics curriculum. Maybe we could get a constitutional law professor to come in and present to the 7th and 8th graders. She knows of 15 students in Ashford that home school for various reasons, including religious reasons, bullying issues, and curriculum not being challenging enough for their particular students. There are four opportunity zones in the town of Mansfield. They do use the UCONN students, which brings it down to the poverty line. They are very creative.
- Tess Grous said Martha Guidry mentioned there being nothing in the budget for new library books. Do the teachers have a wish list for classroom books? Troy Hopkins said the PTO is working on a version of book fair that would be more distant. There are a couple of very enthusiastic teachers who have written grants and gotten them to offer books. In the future, they can report on a fuller picture of literature available to students.

Next Meeting Date/Agenda Items

- Update Capital Projects list.
- Administration encouraged to report brief information they feel necessary, to include 7th grade class size/social distancing concerns.
- Personnel Search Committee will meet at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, 01/14/2021. Marian Matthews said maybe CABE could offer the workshop as soon as next week. Al Maccarone will check with them.

Adjournment

MOTION by Marian Matthews to adjourn the meeting (9:34 p.m.). Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.

Sara Wilson
Recording Secretary

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