

Ashford Board of Education  
**Regular Meeting Minutes – February 7, 2019**  
**7:00 pm**  
**Ashford School Library/Media Center**

*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 7:05 pm. Present were members Jane Urban, John Calarese, Kay Warren, Marian Matthews and Shannon Gamache (7:42 pm) Also in attendance were Superintendent James Longo, Business Manager Lisa Dyer and recording secretary Jen Barsaleau. Unable to attend was board member Lisa Donegan. Present in the audience were residents Kim Kouatly, Brian Specyalski and Maureen Caye. Also present were teachers Jennifer Lindsay, Carly Imhoff and Kate Craven.

**Communications**

The board acknowledged receipt of a \$700 field trip grant from Target and a \$500 donation in the name of Maureen Caye through her employer, United Healthcare Group.

A letter from resident Jesse Burnham was read aloud citing his concern about planning for the number of 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms for the 2019-2020 school year. An email from Meghan Champagne concerning the number of 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms planned for next year was also read.

**Approval of Minutes: 01/17/19, 01/31/2019, 01/31/2019**

- **Motion made by Jane Urban to approve the minutes of 01/17/19. Motion seconded by John Calarese and carried with one abstention (Kay Warren).**
- **Motion made by John Calarese to approve the special meeting minutes of 01/31/19.**  
Discussion followed and one grammatical edit was noted and the meeting time on the document header should read 5:00 pm. **Motion to approve the special meeting minutes as amended was seconded by Jane Urban and carried with two abstentions (Kay Warren, Marian Matthews).**
- **Motion made by Marian Matthews to approve the regular meeting minutes of 01/31/19. Motion seconded by Jane Urban and carried with one abstention (Kay Warren).**

**Authorization for Travel: National Geographic Early Career Grant**

Teachers Carly Imhoff and Kate Craven presented information about a brand new grant opportunity that has been awarded to Ashford School. They shared a PowerPoint entitled “Engineering for Endemic Species.” This opportunity aligns with the United Nations sustainable development goals of the district and if approved by the Board, will take place in Bermuda in May of this year. A description and itinerary was distributed. Discussion followed concerning the application process for student participation.

**Motion made by Marian Matthews to approve student travel to Bermuda to participate in the National Geographic grant as presented. Motion seconded by Jane Urban and carried unanimously.**

**Opportunity for Public Comment**

- Brian Specyalski introduced himself as a long time resident, former Ashford School student and the owner of Brialee Campground. Mr. Specyalski spoke for several minutes asking Ms. Imhoff and Mrs. Craven if there were other causes closer to home? He took exception to Dr. Longo’s most recent Ashford Citizen article, standardized test score results and expressed his opinion he is a poor leader of the district and should be held accountable for test scores. He expressed that he did not want a part time health teacher in the budget as he doesn’t want anyone “teaching his children about transgenders” in school and wants more core instruction. He noted that Ashford has become known for its special education services and therefore those numbers are up. He read an email communication between him and Dr. Longo that he felt contained an offensive statement.
- Kim Kouatly reiterated a request that the board consider offering childcare on meeting nights to increase parent attendance. She expressed a preference in covering math intervention from within so as to not lose a classroom teacher position. She also was in favor of having three teachers per grade saying it would be detrimental to students to reduce the number of classroom teachers.

- Maureen Caye addressed the first speaker noting appreciation for his passion. She has great admiration for her children's teachers and her experiences overall have been positive. She expressed great appreciation to Mrs. Craven and the STRIVE program and how beneficial it has been for her son. She noted the effort of everyone involved in the budget process and knows it is difficult. She also advocated for three teachers per classroom. She would like to see what the board's plans are to achieve a 0%, 1%, 2% and 3% budget if so directed by the Board of Finance.

### **FY 20 Budget Worksession**

Lisa Dyer distributed draft "C" of the Superintendent's FY 20 Ashford School budget. Dr. Longo addressed the grade 5 and 6 classroom instruction and the addition of a half -time math interventionist that is planned for next year's budget. A question was asked about the retiree health benefit line in the budget. Dr. Longo and Mrs. Dyer explained that retired teachers are allowed by statute to obtain benefits for themselves through the board of education until they are 65 years old. Lengthy discussion followed including but not limited to transportation, technology equipment, iReady software, parent outreach by staff for students that may be struggling, review of the Region 19 budget, tax increases to residents and formula errors in the budget document. The next regular meeting is Feb. 21<sup>st</sup>. The board requested the following items be discussed at the next meeting:

- Information obtained from other districts about student transportation
- iReady information and presentation
- How and when are parents contacted if their child is struggling with academic subjects
- A comprehensive plan for staffing and instruction in Grades 5 and 6 for next school year

### **Second Opportunity for Public Comment**

- Mr. Specyalski would like have children's bus drivers introduced to parents, and feels a reminder to parents that instruction is the responsibility of parents as well as the school. He shared a strong opinion that the town has been unwilling to allow businesses to root in Ashford that would generate tax revenue.
- Mrs. Lindsay spoke as a middle school teacher to the outreach to parent comments earlier in the meeting. She reported there is a weekly communication from the middle school to parents and there is access to a Parent Portal in PowerSchool.
- Mrs. Caye stated there was great dialogue tonight and would like more information about the Grade 5 and 6 structure for next year and a plan of action should the board of finance say no to any budget increase.
- Mrs. Kouatly would like more information on Grade 5 and 6 and iReady testing. She does not feel that standardized test scores are telling and are only as good as the information they reflect. There are "outlying" students, and a lot of special education students, and that affects the scores. She again stated she feels there is too much emphasis on project based learning and it is a lot of work for the students and their families. We offer a lot of extras and the teachers are trying to keep up with the pace.

### **Superintendent Evaluation (Executive Session)**

Tabled

**Motion made by Marian Matthews to adjourn the meeting at 9:45 pm. Motion seconded by Jane Urban and carried unanimously.**

Recorded by:

Jennifer Barsaleau  
Recording Secretary