

**Ashland School Committee Minutes
November 17, 2022**

Ashland Town Hall
101 Main Street
Select Board Meeting Room

Hybrid Meeting: In-person, and online

Present: Marc Terry, Vice Chair
 Tina Fitanides, Secretary
 Paul Kendall, Member
 Erin Williams, Member

James Adams, Superintendent
Michael Caira, Assistant Superintendent
Chris Mathieu, Director of Finance
Tom Giglia, Student representative

Absent: Laurie Tosti, Chair

At 6:00 pm, Mr. Terry began the meeting by reading the vision statement of Ashland Public Schools. The meeting was video recorded by Ashland Cable Access.

Agenda Review and adoption

Mr. Terry reviewed the agenda, took roll call and received consensus from the committee.
Ms. Fitanides: Present, approved the agenda.
Ms. Williams: Present, approved the agenda.
Mr. Kendall: Present, approved the agenda.

Mr. Terry offered if there was anyone in attendance from the public, either in-person, or online, that wanted to address the School Committee. There was none.

Boys Varsity Basketball Overnight Travel: Great Barrington, MA, Dec 10-11

Mike Normant, Boys Varsity Basketball Coach, presented a leadership training and team building student travel request for approximately 12 students who will be selected for the Varsity team. There will be theme-based activities and the coaching staff will work with the student athletes to set their goals for the upcoming season.

Mr. Kendall moved to approve the proposed trip as presented. Ms. Fitanides seconded.

Vote:

Mr. Kendall: AYE
Ms. Williams: AYE
Mr. Terry: AYE
Ms. Fitanides: AYE

Ms. Kendall suggested that Coach Normant return to the School Committee after the trip to let them know how it went.

Ashland Youth Softball

Sean Weglege, VP of Ashland Youth Softball, presented a field update proposal for the softball fields at the Warren School. The AYS has raised enough money to be able to fund the replacement of bleachers that are worn out and no longer safe for spectators. They are also interested in installing a second set of bleachers for additional fans. They also want to add helmet cubbies to both dugouts for helmet and water bottle storage during games. Mr. Kendall recommends that Mr. Weglege continue to coordinate this project with Pete Regan, the Warren School Principal and Jon Murray, Director of Facilities. Mr. Kendall moved to approve the field enhancements as presented. Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion.

Vote:

Mr. Kendall: AYE

Ms. Williams: AYE

Mr. Terry: AYE

Ms. Fitanides: AYE

English Learner Education Update

Christy Arnold, Director of the English Learner Education, provided an update on the new department, some highlights and priorities.

In terms of enrollment, currently, there are 277 English language learners in Ashland Public Schools. For the 2022-23 school year, to date we have 450 total new enrollments. Of those students, 228 reported on their Home Language survey that they speak a language other than English at home. Of those 228 students, 95 students are new English learners.

We have 2 new EL teachers at the High School. We now can offer leveled-English courses to better meet the needs of Level 1 and 2 students, as well as Level 3 and 4 students.

Ashland Public Schools has contracted with a new computer-based interpretation service, called Lexikeet. Lexikeet offers a live-person interpreter over the computer or over the phone. Ms. Arnold helped to roll out this new service to the Warren School staff in time to use it for fall parent-teacher conferences. Interpreter services were used for about 50 conferences this month at the Warren School. Ms. Arnold is working to train school nurses, school counselors and others on how to use this service going forward.

Ms. Arnold will be presenting this application to the staff at Mindess and AMS in the first week of December.

Another priority of her department is to create a "Community Connections" team. This team would consist of people in the school community who may speak more than one language who could serve to answer questions and be a resource for families new to Ashland. This initiative is a work in progress, but to date, we have 25 families that have volunteered to help.

Another priority for Ms. Arnold and the ELE department is to update internal procedures and record keeping.

At AHS, there are approximately 19 students who have had interruptions in their education. These students are defined by the MA Department of Education as, "Students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE)".

For example, a student may have finished 6th grade in their home country and now is 16 years old and in high school. They may be in a ninth grade math class, but the student's math level is equivalent to a sixth grade student, not due to a disability, but perhaps due to Covid interruption of school, or another educational interruption. The question is, "What can we do for these students?" There is an immediate need.

Ms. Arnold and Principal St. Coeur visited a SLIFE program at Norwood Public Schools. In January, Ms. Arnold and Principal St. Coeur may put forth a proposal to Chris Mathieu and Superintendent Adams for money for FY 23 for resources for the SLIFE students at the High School.

Mr. Terry asked if there are other current SLIFE students at other schools in the District. Ms. Arnold confirmed that there are, but the current most urgent need are those High School-level students. The state Department of Education offers guidelines around the definition of a "SLIFE" student as well as exit criteria and a path to high school graduation. Research says it takes 5-7 years to become fully proficient in English.

Paul Kendall asked about translations of written docs and suggested working with current staff to determine best practices of translation softwares for different languages. Ms. Arnold agreed that one of her goals is to document what our "standard operating procedures" for translations of documents should be for staff going forward.

Talking Points is another tool that teachers are using for interpretation. Talking Points is a free texting app that allows a teacher to type a message to a parent. The parent can read the message in their native language and respond, and the teacher can see the response translated into English. Other translation tools that staff are currently using, and having success with, are Smore, DeepL, Google Docs and other G Suite tools.

Assistant Superintendent's Update

MCAS Update: Dr. Caira presented a new tool that analyzes MCAS data, called Open Architects. It provides a dashboard for Ashland Public Schools to look at MCAS data since 2017. One can view the data overall, or drill down and look at it by school, and by specific demographic in a visual way. Open Architects provides a visual representation of the "gap" in learning that we are trying to close. It gives teachers specific data on areas that need improvement.

Our goal is at least a 50% student growth percentile each year. Mr. Terry asked to what degree has Dr. Caira was able to share this new tool with subject matter teachers. Dr. Caira has shared it with Principals already. He will review and provide it to curriculum leaders, SPED coordinators and classroom teachers over the next couple of weeks. Currently, this product is free. In the future, there are customization options that are available for a fee.

For the first time, the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) team will be hosting a day dedicated to Wellness at Warren School. Wellness Day will be Tuesday, November 22.

Superintendent's Update

Substitute teacher pay adjustment: Superintendent Adams said that finding substitute teachers has been challenging. Our pay rate has not been competitive in the Metrowest area. According to our Frontline/Aesop database, we have about 43 active substitute teachers daily. Each school day, we average 34 staff vacancies that need coverage across the district. We fill, on average, only 6 vacancies daily.

In 2017, the substitute teacher pay rates were discussed by the School Committee. At that time, the rates were \$75/day for non-degreed staff, \$80/day for degreed staff and \$85/day for retired Ashland staff.

Superintendent Adams proposed that the District increase its substitute teacher rate to \$120/day, which is the going rate locally. This amounts to a \$30 per day increase for Ashland. We are advertising this locally and hope to secure more substitute staffing soon.

Ms. Fitanides moved to approve the increase in substitute teacher pay as presented. Mr. Kendall seconded the motion.

Vote:

Mr. Kendall: AYE

Ms. Williams: AYE

Mr. Terry: AYE

Ms. Fitanides: AYE

School Calendar 2023-2024: Superintendent Adams notified the School Committee members that we may need to make adjustments to the school calendar for next year, including considering a start date after Labor Day, in order to accommodate the building construction schedule and the estimated completion date of the new Mindess School.

Equity Audit presentation: During the December 15 School Committee meeting, the consultant vendor L&P Educational Services will present its Equity Audit of Ashland Public Schools to the public.

Communications

School newsletters, in the new, updated, consistent format using Smore, were emailed to parents from all Principals on Thursday, November 10. Overall, Superintendent Adams is happy with the look and feel of the school newsletters, although he reports that there are still some growing pains.

Warrant Approvals

Paul Kendall reviewed the warrant amounts of \$1,594,325.25 between October 21, 2022 and November 17, 2022.

Gifts and Donations Update

Superintendent Adams reviewed the list of gifts and donations in the amount of \$23,437.58 to the Ashland Public Schools from November 3, 2022.

School Committee Member's Update

Mr. Kendall gave a Mindess Building update. Ms. Williams, along with the other School Committee members attended a conference in Hyannis, MA. Ms. Fitanides attended recent ASHPAC meetings and reported that Brittany Smeltekop, new Director of Student Services, is doing a great job. A big topic of concern at this recent meeting is difficulty to fill several open ESP positions. This has been a challenge for a long time.

Mr. Terry attended the Special Town Meeting this week. He will also be talking with Kelley St. Coeur about the community service graduation requirement at the high school to review its value.

Tom Giglia, Student representative, gave a quick student update. Fall sports are over, high school seniors are submitting their college applications. Next week, AHS will be having a hallway decorating contest and pep rally before Thanksgiving.

The group scheduled a strategic planning workshop for Monday, November 28. Policy reviews and updates will be the focus of the upcoming School Committee meetings.

At 8pm, Mr. Terry made a motion to adjourn, Ms. Williams seconded.

Respectfully submitted,

Tina Fitanides
School Committee Secretary

The next School Committee meeting will be December 1, 2022.

Documents used during the meeting

Item 1 - Boys Basketball, 12/10-12/11 - Overnight and Out of State Travel
Item 2 - Ashland Youth Softball

Item 3 - Substitute Teacher Pay Adjustment

ELE updates 11_17_22

Item 8 - Warrant Approvals NOV 17

Item 10 - G&D FY 23 11.03.2022