

Ashland School Committee Minutes  
February 2, 2023

Ashland Town Hall  
101 Main Street  
Select Board Meeting Room

Hybrid Meeting: In-person, and online

Present: Laurie Tosti, Chair, *attended remotely*  
Marc Terry, Vice Chair  
Tina Fitanides, Secretary  
Paul Kendall, Member  
Erin Williams, Member  
  
James Adams, Superintendent, *attended remotely*  
Michael Caira, Assistant Superintendent  
Chris Mathieu, Director of Finance

Absent: Tom Giglia, Student representative

At 6:02 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.

Ms. Tosti: 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.

**Student Advisory Council Presentations**

Students provided updates to the School Committee members on the recent activities and events at the High School.

April Wang, 12th grade: Many students are receiving acceptance letters to colleges. Students are now focused on applying for scholarships. Some notable recent student events are: Game Show Night, hosted by Student Council. AHS Drama department will be performing Mamma Mia in March. This is significant, as it's the first musical the high school has been able to produce since the Covid interruption.

Rugved Rane, 11th grade: Mid-term exams were last week. The second annual Flag Day was February 3, hosted by the AHS Cultural Student Union. Flag Day is a school-wide assembly where students can represent a flag to which they have a connection. Junior seminars are happening where information on college applications and standardized testing is reviewed and discussed.

Adam Rosoff, 11 grade: Winter sports seasons are coming to an end soon. One track athlete and several swim athletes qualified to advance to the state tournament. The wrestling team won the Tri-Valley League showcase. The Clocker Club is hosting a pancake breakfast on February 12.

**Approval of therapy dog at AHS: Ms. Davina McNaney**

Davina McNaney is a School Psychologist at AHS. She owns Bam, a 5 lb. chihuahua, and brought the dog to the meeting to introduce her to the School Committee members. Ms. McNaney is in the process of submitting all the paperwork and insurance and is proposing that Bam be a new therapy dog at the high school. Sarah Finn, a Special Education teacher, is available to care for the dog if Davina is not available. Bam is ready to start coming to the school after the insurance is approved, hopefully in the next couple of weeks. If a student comes to see Ms. McNaney for services and is not comfortable with the dog, Ms. McNaney will keep Bam in a crate near her desk. In order to comply with School Committee policy around therapy dogs, Ms. McNaney will notify all families that she works with that she will have a therapy dog available.

**Community Service Presentation: Kelley St. Coeur**

Currently, there is a requirement for all seniors to serve 25 hours of community service over four years in order to graduate from Ashland High School. This requirement was waived by the school committee in 2020 and 2021 due to Covid interruptions. During and subsequent to the pandemic, an increase of students who were unable to complete the requirement grew substantially. More and more students did not have access to service opportunities. The Principal and administrators were seeing more and more students who could not meet the service hour commitment due to commitments at home. It became apparent that the current community service requirement to graduate was creating a barrier to graduation for many students. In addition, for those students who were submitting documentation of hours served, there was a question of the integrity of the hours served, and questions about the accuracy of reports of hours actually served. Site council members at the high school formed a sub-committee in 2021 to investigate this issue further.

It has been the expectation that students find service opportunities to earn community service hours on their own. Fortunately, AHS has many clubs and organizations that offer service related opportunities. The Red Cross Club sponsors blood drives at the high school. The Environmental Club does tree planting across town. Most recently, the CARES team presented an Empathy program to fifth grade students.

Some alternative incentives to service (instead of it being a requirement for graduation) were proposed. Students could earn course credit for hours served. Some schools in the metro-west area host a community service day for each grade level of students as a school-wide event. Currently, the AHS seniors do a community service day during Senior Week in May before graduation.

Paul Kendall is in favor of pausing the requirement for the next two graduating classes (Class of 2023 and Class of 2024). Laurie Tosti agrees that the current graduation requirement around community service is problematic, and is in favor of eliminating the requirement.

Marc supports doing away with the graduation requirement, at least temporarily. He thinks the class-wide service project is a good idea. Erin Williams is in agreement with removing the requirement, and possibly changing it for incoming 9th graders. Tina Fitanides is comfortable with eliminating the current graduation requirement, and likes the idea of a class-wide service day or service project. The committee did not make a decision on this issue tonight, but will reconvene during the next meeting to review and vote.

#### **Assistant Superintendent's Update: Mid-year Update on Reading Data**

Peter Regan, Kate Altman and Kathy Ferrecchia, Literacy Specialist attended the School Committee meeting to present data on how our youngest learners are doing with learning to read and write. They presented data on Middle of Year Assessments (MOY) and the Dynamic Indicator of Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), an assessment/screening tool for dyslexia.

Non-English speaking students were not included in the assessment numbers. In addition, if a student was out of the country for several weeks and may have missed the assessment dates, they are not included in the data.

#### **5 Year Capital Plan: Chris Mathieu**

Chris Mathieu, Director of Finance and Operations and Jonathan Murray, Director of Facilities, presented the priorities for capital expenditures for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024. Every year Chris and Jon review a 5 year expenditure plan. Town Hall requests this information for all departments within the town. Essentially, there is \$500K for which town departments are advocating. The current capital plan consists of \$3.7 million of expenses across the schools. This represents a snapshot of where we would like to be in five years, in an ideal funding situation. Primary expenditures budgeted are for roofing and turf.

#### **Mid-cycle Update on Superintendent's Goals**

Superintendent Adams reviewed his progress on the goals he presented during the October 6, 2022 School Committee meeting. Ms. Tosti requested that if School Committee members have any feedback on Superintendent Adam's progress on actual listed goals, they should email her by next week. If a member has any questions, concerns, or, if they feel he is on track, please confirm with her via email.

#### **ACCEPT Collaborative: Vote to include Wayland Public Schools**

Mr. Kendall moved to approve the addition of Wayland Public Schools into the ACCEPT Collaborative. Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion. Vote:

Mr. Kendall: AYE

Ms. Fitanides: AYE

Ms. Williams: AYE

Mr. Terry: AYE

Ms. Tosti: AYE

### **Warrant Approvals**

Between January 6, 2023 and February 2, 2023, I, Paul Kendall, authorized by my signature payables in the amount of \$900,057.49. This includes General Fund expenses of \$540,578.69, Revolving expenses of \$310,707.79, Grants expenses of \$48,691.99, and Meals Tax expenses of \$79.02. I also signed off on \$ 3,739,628.94 of payroll.

### **Minutes from January 5, 2023**

Ms. Williams moved to approve the Minutes of January 5, 2023 as presented. Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion. Vote:

Mr. Kendall: AYE

Ms. Fitanides: AYE

Ms. Williams: AYE

Mr. Terry: AYE

Ms. Tosti: AYE

### **Gifts and Donations**

Superintendent Adams reviewed the gifts and donations in the amount of \$2366.81.

Ms. Williams moved to approve the receipt of the gifts and donations as presented. Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion. Vote:

Mr. Kendall: AYE

Ms. Fitanides: AYE

Ms. Williams: AYE

Mr. Terry: AYE

Ms. Tosti: AYE

### **Member Updates**

Mr. Kendall saw a youth theater production of Mary Poppins, Jr. that starred several Ashland students, and they did an amazing job. The next site walk of the Mindess School is scheduled for Saturday, Feb 4 at 9am. At the Mindess project, the technology contract has been awarded, furniture bids are due next week. Paint colors have been chosen.

Ms. Williams volunteered at the recent Mindess Kids Night Out. Kudos to the PTO for sponsoring this event.

Mr. Terry attended a recent AHS Site Council meeting. Members of the Site Council were sharing lots of gratitude for the new on-demand translation service, Lexikeet. It has been working really well to help communicate with families. In addition, the Site Council members discussed additional elective courses proposed at AHS, including additional business offerings.

Ms. Fitanides attended a recent ASHPAC meeting where they discussed the continued challenge of hiring ESPs in the district. Brittany Smeltekop, Director of Student Services, talked about how she is trying to fill those vacancies, but also how she is trying to solve coverage for those vacancies in the short-term.

**Superintendent's Update**

Superintendent Adams is having lunch with Senate President Spilka in his office on Friday, February 10 with three other Superintendents from local Districts to discuss their collective concerns around state education funding.

**Action Items**

School Committee members will review the community service graduation requirement issue and the proposed changes.

They will follow up with Ms. Tosti on any feedback to the Superintendent and his progress on goals.

At 9:08pm, Ms. Williams made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Fitanides seconded.

Respectfully submitted,

Tina Fitanides  
School Committee Secretary

*The School Committee meeting scheduled for February 16, 2023 will be canceled. The next School Committee meeting will be Thursday, March 2, 2023.*

**Documents used during the meeting**

Item 2 - ATD Application BAM.mcnaney 1.23

Item 3 - AHS Community Service

Item 4 - FY24-FY28 Capital Plan

Mid-Cycle Review 2022-23 (2)

Item 7 - 2.2.23 Warren Reading Data

Item 8 - FEB 02

Item 9 - Minutes - January 5, 2023

Item 10 - G&D FY 23 02.2.23