

**Ashland School Committee Minutes  
November 13, 2024**

Ashland Town Hall  
101 Main Street  
Select Board Meeting Room

Hybrid meeting: recorded on Zoom

Present: Laurie Tosti, Chair  
Marc Terry, Vice Chair  
Tina Fitanides, Secretary  
Paul Kendall, Member  
Marcy Culverwell, Member - *attended remotely*  
James Adams, Superintendent  
Michael Caira, Assistant Superintendent  
Chris Mathieu, Director of Finance  
Abhishek Karthik, student representative, Ashland High School

**Agenda Review and adoption**

Ms. Tosti reviewed the agenda items for the meeting. She took roll call and asked the School Committee members to approve the agenda as presented.

Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: Present and AYE

Ms. Fitanides: Present and AYE

Mr. Kendall: Present and AYE

Mr. Terry: Present and AYE

Ms. Tosti: Present and AYE

**Public Comment**

None

**Student Presentations: AMS Middle School Band**

Mr. Brian Koning and a small group of 7th grade and 8th grade students performed for the School Committee members. Luke Caparole, Margaret Musoke, Ben Deibler, Sam Apostola, and Jonah Bloom played the french horn, trombone, clarinet, and the bassoon. They have a middle school band concert scheduled for the following night at the high school.

**AMS Update: Erin Lachapelle, Principal**

Safety has been a focus at the start of the school year – both in the building with students, and how to be safe and appropriate online, how to make good choices with social media. Ms. Lachapelle is observing during the first few months on the job. Getting feedback from faculty and staff as to what’s working at AMS, and what needs to be improved. She submitted a survey to staff this fall about things to keep and things to change.

It’s likely that there will be a schedule change at AMS for next year. She has years of experience creating a master school schedule, and was fortunate to be part of the DESE scheduling co-hort last year.

Morale at the middle school is good amongst teachers and students. Ms. Lachapelle would like to maintain that by sponsoring frequent “spirit days” and adding more fun activities for students, such as socials, etc.

### **MCAS Accountability Data**

Dr. Caira presented the MCAS result data from spring 2024. He began by reviewing the student biographical statistics of who took the MCAS in Ashland. For MCAS Assessment trends he reports that Ashland students scored 14% above the Massachusetts state average on the English/Language Arts assessment. Ashland students scored 18% above the state average in Math, and 16% above the state average in Science.

Dr. Caira reviewed the results of each testing area (ELA, Math and Science) by school and by grade level. Students start taking the MCAS in Grade 3 and take it annually through Grade 8, and then take it again in Grade 10 at the high school.

The School Committee members asked lots of questions to better understand the areas where students need improvement. For example, an area of growth in grades 3, 4 and 5 is with writing and idea development. Similarly, an area of growth for grades 6, 7, and 8 is narrative writing.

All students met the target for chronic absenteeism. The overall classification for Ashland Public Schools is not requiring intervention.

### **Superintendent’s Update**

Last week a group of School Committee members and Mr. Adams attended the MASC/MASS Joint conference. Chris Mathieu, Director of Finance and Operations and Mr. Adams presented a financial session at the conference that was well attended.

We are in the process of revamping our district’s website. The vendor that currently hosts the website has been sold. We are targeting a roll-out with FinalSite, our new website vendor by July 1, 2025.

Our Unified Basketball team at the high school was recently awarded an MIAA Sportsmanship Award. They are a model for inclusivity and teamwork.

MCAS as a graduation requirement: Ballot Question 2 was passed by voters, which means receiving a qualifying score on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System will no longer be a graduation requirement.

According to the Secretary of the Commonwealth, the earliest the law would take effect is December 5, 2024.

High school students will still need to earn a CD (Competency Determination) to graduate. Since 2003, the CD has been based on achieving qualifying scores on relevant MCAS tests. When the new law takes effect, the CD will be based on “satisfactorily completing coursework that has been certified by the student’s district” as written in the ballot question.

Students who have already achieved the qualifying MCAS scores in math, ELA, and science by the effective date have earned their CD and are eligible to earn a high school diploma provided they meet their local graduation requirements.

As of the date the new law takes effect, students who have not yet earned the CD would be eligible to do so through “satisfactorily completing coursework that has been certified by the student’s district.”

### **Assistant Superintendent's Update**

Dr. Caira coordinated a professional development day recently on November 5, 2024. At each building faculty and staff reviewed ALICE safety protocols and did a “barricade” drill without students in preparation for an upcoming drill to be scheduled with students.

### **School Calendar for 2025-2026**

Mr. Adams presented two options for the school calendar for next school year. Option 1 includes a vacation day on January 2, 2026, and has the tentative last day of school on June 18, 2026. Option 2 would have students and staff return to school on January 2, 2026, and the tentative last day of school would be June 17.

After discussion of the pros and cons of each option, Mr. Terry moved to approve Option 1 of the school year calendar, including a vacation day of January 2, 2026. Mr. Kendall seconded the motion. Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: AYE

Ms. Fitanides: AYE

Mr. Kendall: AYE

Mr. Terry: AYE

Ms. Tosti: AYE

The Superintendent will email the 2025-2026 school year calendar to families, and it will be posted to the District’s website for reference.

### **Warrant Approvals**

Between October 24, 2024 and November 13, 2024, Paul Kendall, authorized by his signature payables in the amount of \$ 900,488.98. This includes General Fund expenses of \$ 469,155.66, Revolving expenses of \$ 403,161.20, and Grants expenses of \$ 28,172.12.

### **Policies**

#### **First read of policies: JJIF-R Athletic Concussion Regulations**

The nurses have made changes to the procedure to streamline it, and to remove unnecessary branding. Our current policy is more conservative with “return to play” timeline recommendations.

#### **AD-Vision and Mission Statement**

This was last updated in 2011. The School Committee will review and publish the statement on an annual basis going forward.

#### **EBCFA - Face Coverings**

The Committee agrees to remove this policy from the policy manual.

#### **Second read of policies: AC - Non-Discrimination Including Harassment and Retaliation**

Mr. Terry moved to approve this policy as presented. Mr. Kendall seconded the motion. Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: AYE

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

### **AC-R - Non-Discrimination Including Harassment and Retaliation**

Our legal team recommends that this policy can be removed, as the previous policy covers all the elements. Mr. Terry moved to rescind this policy, Mr. Kendall seconded the motion. Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: AYE  
Ms. Fitanides: AYE  
Mr. Kendall: AYE  
Mr. Terry: AYE  
Ms. Tosti: AYE

### **Consent Agenda: Approval of Gifts and Donations**

Mr. Terry moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Mr. Kendall seconded the motion. Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: AYE  
Ms. Fitanides: AYE  
Mr. Kendall: AYE  
Mr. Terry: AYE  
Ms. Tosti: AYE

### **Reports of School Committee Members**

Dr. Caira attended the Make-A-Wish trip to the Give Kids the World trip in Orlando, along with Laurie Tosti as a chaperone, Ms. Pavia Sheils and 35 Ashland High School students last week. The Give Kids the World Village is a non-profit group that provides critically ill children and their families with week-long wish vacations at no cost. He reports that it was a great experience, Ms. Sheils organized it very well. The students showed great empathy, care and had a powerful experience helping families.

Ms. Fitanides attended the MASC/MASS conference, and reported that the keynote speaker on Thursday morning was excellent. Timothy Shriver, Eunice Shriver's son, presented the Dignity Index. The idea of treating others with dignity and recognizing people's humanity.

Mr. Kendall also attended the MASC/MASS conference and also enjoyed the same speaker. He also reports that the Mindess Building Committee has submitted an file for incentive rebates for sustainability projects for the Mindess Building for a rebate of \$2.3 M. The rebate is due within 45 days, or roughly, by January 23, 2025.

Mr. Terry attended the MASC/MASS conference, too.

Ms. Tosti attended the Make a Wish trip as a chaperone. She reported that the students had great behavior. They were mature, compassionate, hard-working, and represented Ashland well.

At 8:21 pm, Ms. Tosti moved to go into Executive Session under Mass General Law, and not to return to public session.

Vote:  
Ms. Culverwell: AYE

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

Respectfully submitted,

Gretchen King  
Executive Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent

**Documents used during the meeting**

3C - MCAS/Accountability Presentation: 11.13.24

3D - School Calendar 2025-2026

Warrant Approvals - NOVEMBER 13, 2024

Red-line JJIF-R Athletic Concussion Regulations

EBCFA - FACE COVERINGS

4Bi - AC Policy - Non-Discrimination Policy Including Harassment and Retaliation

4Bii - AC-R - NONDISCRIMINATION POLICY, INCLUDING HARASSMENT AND RETALIATION

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