Ashland School Committee Minutes
December 11, 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
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: Student Advisory Council
Sophia Warnetski, Sophomore, reported that the high school recently participated in an ALICE safety drill where students practiced barricading classrooms in case of a lockdown. Although some students didn't take it seriously, it was good practice for many student who were unfamiliar with these safety procedures. The National Honor Society had a recent induction ceremony where 63 new students were inducted. That brought the current total number of students in NHS to over 90 total.
Honors Band and Chorus participated in a competition recently – 12 band members and 5 chorus members qualified. In sports, the Girls and Boys Cross-Country team both made it to All-States for the first time in history. Girls Volleyball made it to the Final 8 round of the state tournament. Boys Soccer made it to the Sweet Sixteen round of the state tournament. Girls soccer and field hockey made it to the playoffs as well. Overall 24 student athletes were nominated as League All Stars. Mr. Anderson, the Athletic Director, made new banners in a consistent design, and purchased new record boards for swimming and track and field.

Maximo Gamboa, Junior, addressed the elimination of the French program at Ashland Middle School. He proposed offering a different language, such as Portuguese, which may be easier to staff than French.

Sanya Muthuswami, Sophomore, reported that a recent Red Cross blood drive took place at AHS. Both students and teachers participated. The Harlem Wizards fundraiser took place to benefit the Make-A-Wish club. The fundraiser raised over $17,000 which is enough money to grant two children's wishes. Before Thanksgiving the high school sponsored a hallway decorating competition. The Class of 2027 won with their theme of "Candy Cane".

College visits are happening by college admissions officers through the Guidance Office at Ashland High School. Recently, a West Point cadet and former AHS student held an info session.

CARES Team - Ms. Kelley St. Coeur introduced the two co-presidents of the CARES Team. CARES stands for Clockers for Anti-Racism, Equity, & Social Justice. Genesis Burkina, Senior, and Sophia Silva, Junior, are the co-presidents. It is a group composed of students, faculty, and administrators that aim to educate themselves so that they may educate our community. The group sponsors two book discussions a year and four movie discussions a year that are open to AHS students and Ashland Public School employees. They also work on a variety of action initiatives to help make Ashland High School a more welcoming and accepting environment for all.

Recently, CARES Team representatives attended the Connection Conference, with over 600 people in attendance. The group hosts a Flag Day assembly (once every two years) and movie and book discussions that are held online via Zoom. Contact Ms. Nemeth for more information and for the discussion group schedule.

Unified Basketball - Coach Ethan Ritterbusch, and Noah George, AHS student athlete, presented an update about the recent Unified Basketball season. Unified Basketball is a sports program that combines athletes with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. The program is based on the idea that training and playing together can help people understand each other and break down stereotypes.

This was Coach Ritterbusch's first year coaching, taking over duties from Special Education teacher Holly LeBlanc. Ms. Ritterbusch talked about the benefits of the program – it's inclusive, not super-competitive, and has a great culture. Noah George offered that the Unified Basketball and Track and Field programs have made him a better person in life. He hopes that School Committee members can come support their games in the future.

Mr. Ritterbush shared that the Unified Basketball team won a sportsmanship award, nominated by the Town of Hopkinton. The Metrowest Daily News also featured the team in a recent article.

Field Trip Proposal: April 2026 Greece and the Islands
Mr. McGann is planning to host a trip, run through EF Tours, to Greece and the Islands over April break, 2026. The trip will last 10 days, and will have 4 days in Athens and 6 days in the islands. The trip will accommodate about 36-40 students. Mr. McGann will stagger the sign-ups to offer priority to rising seniors who have not had an opportunity to travel on an AHS trip, then rising juniors, then rising sophomores, etc. He will then open sign-up opportunities to students who have been able to travel on previous trips. He hosts an info session well in advance, so interested students can plan how to pay for the cost of the trip. A deposit of $95 is required for the cost of the trip. There are automatic payment options available, or manual option payments.

Mr. Terry asked how Mr. McGann manages travel and student safety. Mr. McGann reports that EF provides him with a tour director that stays with them for the entirety of the trip. They are available for any contingency or emergency and are very responsive. He also breaks the group down into smaller groups of three. Every chaperone has a group of 5-7 kids and the group is encouraged to use What'sApp to communicate with each other while on the trip.

Ms. Kendall moved to approve the trip as presented. Mr. Terry seconded the motion. Vote:
Ms. Culverwell: AYE
Ms. Fitanides: AYE
Mr. Kendall: AYE
Mr. Terry: AYE
Ms. Tosti: AYE

ELE Report - Christy Arnold, Director
Christy Arnold presented an overview of recent data and progress of the English language learners in Ashland Public Schools. In Ashland, we currently have 926 multilingual learners. Of those students, there are 225 that are currently English-language learners. EL students take a WIDA Access test every year in January (or February) that evaluates students' listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities. The test is offered mostly online and scores children from 1 to a 6. 1 being a newcomer and 5-6 being proficient in English.

The time for attainment of English proficiency varies from student to student and can depend on the student's current level of English, their current grade-level and how long they have been in US schools. Kindergarten is where we have the largest number of EL students, at 48 students.

Ms. Arnold then reviewed student progress data at a school-level.

AHS has recently created two new Math and Science EL classes that are co-taught by a Math teacher and an EL teacher. They have also created a "bridge support" class to help those students who are close to English proficiency get the support they need. Many of the EL students at the high school are newcomers, i.e. students who have just arrived in the US in the past couple of years. Last week, an EL student was inducted into the National Honor Society – it was a proud moment for many.

AMS – The numbers of EL students have decreased recently at the middle school level.

Mindess – Teachers and students are utilizing a new tool, Flashlight 360, a speaking and writing progress monitoring tool. Flashlight 360 offers students an opportunity for more individual speaking practice.

Warren School - EL students in grades K-2 showed the highest progress percentage of all schools in Ashland. This could be attributed to the fact that early elementary school is a language rich environment.

Ms. Arnold finished her presentation with a sample of a Mindess student voice recording from the Flashlight 360 website.

Warrant Approvals
Between November 14, 2024 and December 11, 2024, Paul Kendall, authorized by his signature payables in the amount of $ 679,279.29. This includes General Fund expenses of $ 230,166.20, Revolving expenses of $ 440,095.22, Grants expenses of $ 8,935.27, and Meals Tax expenses of $ 82.60.

Superintendent's Report: Superintendent James Adams
The first Budget Workshop is scheduled for Saturday, December 14. Superintendent Adams anticipates there may be the need for three Budget meetings this year. Mr. Adams has been meeting with individual principals and Directors to go over their individual school and departmental budgets for FY 2026 and get an overview of needs for the initial budget. The Budget Workshop will be 8am-12pm at Mindess in the Music Room.

Assistant Superintendent's Update: Dr. Michael Caira, Jr.
Dr. Caira attended a Council of Administrators of Compensatory Education (CACE) Title 1 conference last week for Title I leaders across the state. Christy Arnold, Kate Altman and Erica Linares were able to attend the conference, too.

The Science teachers had a curriculum meeting yesterday, and they reviewed info from the new co-taught class of EL students offered at the high school. Data team meetings are continuing at Warren School. The second educator evaluation committee team meeting took place today. They are reviewing current evaluation rubrics and will possibly be making substantial changes to the current rubric.

Dr. Caira recently coordinated an ALICE drill across all schools to practice barricading classrooms in case of an emergency. The drill was coordinated with the Ashland Fire and Police departments. The drills took about 10 minutes at each school.

Chris Mathieu has been working with the Superintendent to review the Student Activity stipends for teachers who supervise clubs at the high school and middle schools. Most of these stipend amounts have not been updated in about 16 years.

Chesterton Academy of the Immaculata: Catholic School proposal in Ashland
Natalie Calvo, Head of the Board, is requesting approval from the Ashland School Committee to open a new private Catholic High School in Ashland at the St. Cecelia's parish on Esty Street. The goal is to open during the Fall of 2025. There are currently 60 Chesterton Schools across the country, with the closest school located in Rhode Island. She is anticipating that they will draw students from Framingham, Ashland, Natick, and Marlboro. Mr. Adams reported that the curriculum proposal and the facility proposal meets all state requirements.
Mr. Terry moves to approve the school proposal as presented. Mr. Kendall seconded the motion.
Vote:
Ms. Culverwell: AYE
Ms. Fitanides: AYE
Mr. Kendall: AYE
Mr. Terry: AYE
Ms. Tosti: AYE

Policies
JJIF-R Athletic Concussion Regulations

Mr. Terry moves to approve the policy as presented, Mr. Kendall seconded the motion. Vote:
Ms. Culverwell: AYE
Ms. Fitanides: AYE
Mr. Kendall: AYE
Mr. Terry: AYE
Ms. Tosti: AYE

AD-Vision and Mission Statement
Mr. Terry moves to approve the policy as presented, Mr. Kendall seconded the motion. Vote:
Ms. Culverwell: AYE
Ms. Fitanides: AYE
Mr. Kendall: AYE
Mr. Terry: AYE
Ms. Tosti: AYE

EBCFA - Face Coverings
Mr. Terry moved to rescind this policy from the manual. Mr. Kendall seconded the motion. Vote:
Ms. Culverwell: AYE
Ms. Fitanides: AYE
Mr. Kendall: AYE
Mr. Terry: AYE
Ms. Tosti: AYE

DJ - Purchasing
Mr. Terry moves to approve the policy as presented, Mr. Kendall seconded the motion. Vote:
Ms. Culverwell: AYE
Ms. Fitanides: AYE
Mr. Kendall: AYE
Mr. Terry: AYE
Ms. Tosti: AYE

First read of policies:
School Committee members had a first read of the following policies:

- DJA - Purchasing Authority – includes a small change, and adoption from the MASC.
- DJE - Bidding Requirements
- BHE - Use of Electronic Messaging by School Committee Members – MASC updates.

Consent Agenda
The committee reviewed the Consent Agenda, and made an update to the Gifts and Donations log. The Girls Hockey program was donated new uniforms, not the funds to purchase new uniforms.
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
Ms. Culverwell reported that the Middle School Site Council meeting is for tomorrow.

Ms. Fitanides attended a recent ASHPAC meeting. Attendees of this meeting were interested to know about the status of the budget for FY 2026. A couple of parents whose students are in a sub-separate setting shared their concerns about the scheduled community service day this past fall. The students did not have an assignment to participate in a service project, and their teacher was supervising other students, so a few students missed a day of school. The parents and Brittany Hawkins discussed some alternative ideas for next year to address this issue. Ms. Fitanides attended a recent AHS holiday band concert, and reported that there were about 300 attendees.
Mr. Kendall attended the recent Harlem Wizards fundraising basketball game and shared that the Unified Basketball team was able to play at half-time.
Mr. Terry attended a High School Site Council meeting. The main topic of discussion was weighted grades. World Language teachers shred their concerns. The next step is to talk to other high schools in the area that have recently moved away from a weighted grade system. Holliston, Needham and Wayland have done some of this work recently.
Ms. Tosti was also able to attend the Harlem Wizards event, she reported that it was a fun night and was very successful as a fundraiser. The Warren Site Council had their first meeting of the year, and the focus was on data collection at Warren.

Mr. Adams reported that before Thanksgiving, the LAUNCH program invited him and Dr. Caira to have lunch together with the teachers and young adult students.

Ms. Tosti moved to go into Executive Session under Mass General Law, and not to return to public session. Mr. Terry seconded the motion.
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
Field Trip Form - Greece 2026
English Language Education December 2024
Warrant Approvals - DECEMBER 11, 2024
LBC - RELATIONS WITH NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS
Application for Approval of Private School in Ashland, MA
IRS Tax Exempt Letter Friends of Chesterton-merged
ChestertonArticlesofIncorporation-merged
Fire Inspection Report

Certificate of Inspection
CSN_Book List 2024-25_STUDENTS_FINAL
CSN_Course Catalog 2024-25_FINAL
Clean Copy JJIF-R - ATHLETIC CONCUSSION REGULATIONS
RedLine Version AD - VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT
EBCFA - FACE COVERINGS
Red Line DJ - PURCHASING
Red Line - DJA - PURCHASING AUTHORITY
Redl-Line DJE - BIDDING REQUIREMENTS
RedLine BHE - USE OF ELECTRONIC MESSAGING BY SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBERS
12/11/24 School Commitee G&D Acceptance Log
December 11, 2024 SC Meeting Grant Funds
Minutes - November 13, 2024