

**Ashland School Committee Minutes
February 12, 2025**

Ashland Town Hall
101 Main Street
Select Board Meeting Room

Hybrid meeting: recorded on Zoom

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

Absent: Laurie Tosti, Chair

Agenda Review and adoption

Mr. Terry reviewed the agenda items for the meeting. He took roll call and asked the School Committee members to approve the agenda as presented. Mr. Adams noted that an additional agenda item had been posted to the agenda on Monday – A proposed student trip for overnight travel for the Wrestling team to attend the upcoming state and All-State tournaments. All agreed to the addition of this item.

Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: Present and AYE
Ms. Fitanides: Present and AYE
Mr. Kendall: Present and AYE
Mr. Terry: Present and AYE

At the beginning of the meeting, Mr. Terry moved to enter into Executive Session to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel (Superintendent Jim Adams) with the intent of returning to Public Session. Mr. Terry expected the Executive Session to last approximately 15-30 minutes.

Vote:

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

Meeting returned to Public Session at 7:09pm.

Public Comment

None

Student Advisory Presentation: AHS

Vanessa Thompson, Senior, reported on Winter Sports. The winter athletic season is wrapping up. Boys Wrestling won dual champions for Division III, The Boys Cop-Op Hockey team of Holliston/Ashland are due to make the playoffs for Division III. Girls and Boys Basketball are scheduled to have their final games this Friday versus Hopkinton. Spring sports registration has begun. Seniors are making decisions about plans for next year, several students have committed to a college for the fall of 2025.

Sanya Muthuswami reported that the NHS will host a Talent Show in March as a fundraising event. Clocker Idol took place in December, also as a fundraising event and a current Senior won the first prize. The Make-a-Wish Club hosted a Jump for Joy fundraising event in early February. The guidance counselors hosted a Sophomore Seminar where students were given career aptitude tests and did some career exploration and development. Course recommendations for next year are open, and students can start to choose their elective courses for next year.

Abhishek Karthik reported that Class Meetings happened recently, where underclassmen could start to think about their courses for next year. The SATs are scheduled for March.

Ashland High School Wrestling Team: Overnight Travel, MIAA Tournaments

Coach Pete Zachilli reported that the boys wrestling team will be participating in two upcoming state tournaments – one in Foxborough and the other in Methuen. The tournaments run from Friday through Saturday, and student athletes usually finish late Friday night, and are called for a weigh-in at 8am Saturday morning. The plan is for the student athletes and coaches to spend the night in a local hotel.

Mr. Kendall asked if the cost is a difficulty to student athletes, and if so, how are we making access equitable? Coach Zachilli reported that the wrestling sub-account (which is funded by fundraisers) would be paying the cost for hotel rooms at the state tournament. The Athletic Department would be paying the cost of the hotel rooms at All-State tournament, as fewer athletes qualify to attend this event. The cost to students would be only for concessions during the day.

Ms. Fitanides asked about available chaperones. Coach Zachilli reported that he would be chaperoning, along with Assistant Coach Mike Copabianco, and Coach Zachilli's father, Nick Zacchilli. All have been CORI-cleared. The group will be using the Laborer's Training van for transportation to Foxborough.

Mr. Kendall moves to approve the travel proposal as presented. Ms. Fitanides seconds. Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: Present and AYE

Ms. Fitanides: Present and AYE

Mr. Kendall: Present and AYE

Mr. Terry: Present and AYE

AMS Schedule Update and Student Presentations

Cole Williams, Grade 8, president of Student Council, Grady Clark, Grade 8, Phoebe Smith and

Angela Palermo, Grade 8 presented on behalf of the middle school student council and presented proposals on school improvement ideas.

Grady Clark is also serving as the Project 351 Ambassador. Project 351 is a state-run program that selects one eighth grade student from every school district in Massachusetts to participate in a service project. Grady was able to attend a training session at the JFK Library where students helped to prepare care packages for those in need. Grady will be working on a spring service project to collect donations for Cradles to Crayons at AMS.

Members of the AMS Drama Club also came to present to the School Committee. Jay Barbato, Grade 8, reported that the drama club offers a safe space for students. It is inclusive, and a welcoming atmosphere that offers students the opportunity to gain confidence. They reviewed the most recent productions directed by Eric Langmeyer, Drama Teacher. The next show will be in the middle of May at AMS.

New Schedule for SY 2025-2026

Erin Lachapelle, Principal of AMS, presented an update on the Middle School schedule for next school year. Mr. Adams gave an overview of the background. When he hired Ms. Lachapelle, he asked her to review the current Middle School schedule with an eye towards equitable opportunities for students. She has worked with the faculty and staff at AMS and hopes to have a draft of the revised schedule by March or April, to begin the scheduling process for the next school year.

Is "Discovery" block being used effectively? Not always. Some teachers use it for instruction, others use it as a study hall. Ms. Lachapelle has gathered input from faculty and staff through surveys. Her recommendation is to replace the current Discovery block with a core content course at each grade level.

Grade 6 - Writing and Reading

Grade 7 - Engineering (STEM standards)

Grade 8 - Spanish

The current Unified Arts scheduling "wheel" makes for inconsistent weekly meeting times for teachers and students.

The recommendation will be to add a course to make 5 core courses. Students will take 7 classes a day – 5 courses plus Wellness plus a unified arts course. Currently the World Language teachers are not "on team".

Ms. Lachapelle looked at eight different models of scheduling. She is recommending a schedule of 7 blocks a day with a 7 day rotation. Wellness will meet during alternating terms (Q1 and Q3 or Q2 and Q4).

Wellness/UA will meet every day for a full term. Band and Chorus will meet every day all year long. Currently, Band students meet only 3 times a rotation, all year long. Chorus students currently meet only 2 or 3x a rotation, during the second semester only.

Students will have Advisory mid-morning, which offers a short break/snack time. Students will stay with their second block teacher for Advisory to eliminate another unnecessary transition time.

Ms. Fitanides asked when would students be scheduled for support? During which period? 1 block of their classes – either push in, or pull out services. This will enable us to level and group students who need reading support.

Ms. Culverwell commended Ms. Lachapelle for this work, and appreciated how methodical and transparent she has been. As next steps, the School Committee will review and approve course changes and curriculum updates for the new courses to be added at each grade level. Ms. Fitanides noted that at ASHPAC meetings, parents may have questions about how services will be delivered for the upcoming school year. Heidi Mathei, Team Chair at Mindess for rising sixth grade students will be reviewing student's IEPs during meetings in order to plan for service delivery for the upcoming school year. Keira Knox, Team Chair at AMS will also be working with our rising 7th and 8th grade students to help schedule them. Ms. Lachapelle's strategy is to schedule students who have the highest needs first.

Superintendent's Mid-Cycle Review

Mid-year review opportunity for Mr. Adams – he reviewed his progress towards his seven goals for the year. The school department recently put a request for a bid out for an SOI for Pittaway/Warren School, and have had about 20 inquiries come in to Chris Mathieu. Mr. Terry requested that if any school committee member had feedback for Mr. Adams to let him know. The members appreciated the update provided.

Warrant Approvals

Between January 23, 2025 and February 12, 2025, Paul Kendall authorized by his signature payables in the amount of \$ 792,655.65. This includes General Fund expenses of \$ 398,503.69, Revolving expenses of \$ 389,218.77, Grants expenses of \$ 4,870.00, and Meals Tax expenses of \$ 63.19.

Superintendent's Report: Superintendent James Adams

Mr. Adams reports that he is still working through the FY 2026 budget numbers. The overall requested budget is still at a deficit, but he is hopeful by March the school department's budget will be ready for public presentation.

Assistant Superintendent's Update: Dr. Michael Caira, Jr.

Winter iReady diagnostics are complete – the due date was January 31, 2025. Data analysis is ongoing. Term 2 Report Cards were released for AMS and AHS last week. There is discussion beginning about improving the Report Cards at the elementary level to better deliver the right information at the right time to parents.

Evaluation updates for teachers in the first three years of teaching – all have received a formative assessment. Dr. Caira recently attended a Decisions at Every Turn (DAET) meeting recently. The group looks at issues such as substance abuse, healthy relationships. Ms. Fitanides asked what the status is of the data team meetings at Mindess. Dr. Caira praised Kate Altman at Mindess for continuity from Warren to Mindess around the format and scheduling of these meetings.

Policies

BDB - School Committee Officers

Mr. Kendall moved to approve the updated policy as presented. Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion. Vote: 4-0, all AYE.

BDFA - School Councils

Mr. Kendall moved to approve the updated policy as presented. Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion. Vote: 4-0, all AYE.

EFD - School Nutrition Program Charge Policy

Mr. Kendall moved to approve the updated policy as presented. Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion. Vote: 4-0, all AYE.

GBEE - Personnel Use of Technology

Mr. Kendall moved to approve the updated policy as presented. Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion. Vote: 4-0, all AYE.

IJND - Access to Digital Resources

Mr. Kendall moved to approve the updated policy as presented. Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion. Vote: 4-0, all AYE.

IJNDB - Use of Technology in Instruction

Mr. Kendall moved to approve the updated policy as presented. Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion. Vote: 4-0, all AYE.

IJNDC- Acceptable Use of Digital Resources

Mr. Kendall moved to approve the updated policy as presented. Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion. Vote: 4-0, all AYE.

Consent Agenda

Mr. Kendall moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented, Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion. Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: AYE

Ms. Fitanides: AYE

Mr. Kendall: AYE

Mr. Terry: AYE

Reports of School Committee Members

Ms. Fitanides attended the recent CARES Club panel discussion, run through the high school. The topic was to build bridges of understanding, and offered a panel discussion around LGBTQ people and allyship. Members of the community and several students joined, and it was well done.

Mr. Kendall attended a recent college informational session put on by the high school guidance counselors. He reported that it was very well done.

Mr. Terry attended a recent High School Site Council meeting where the discussion around weighted grading continued. The group discussed forming a sub-committee and including guidance counselors. They also discussed getting feedback from Needham schools, as Needham High School recently made a similar change to their grading calculations. If the Site Council members will recommend a change in the future or not is still to be determined. Any proposed changes would take effect for incoming 9th graders in the fall, not current high school students.

At 8:29pm, Ms. Kendall made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Gretchen King
Executive Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent

Documents used during the meeting

2024-25 Wrestling - Overnight Travel MIAA Tournaments
Copy of MS Student Council Student Presentation
Copy of Drama Club
Copy of AMS Schedule Update-SC Meeting 2.12.25
Superintendent's Contract
Redline Version BDB - SCHOOL COMMITTEE OFFICERS
Redline Version BDFA - SCHOOL COUNCILS
Redline Version EFD-School Nutrition Program Charge Policy
Redline Version GBEE - Personnel Use of Technology
Redline - IJND Access to Digital Resources
Redline Version IJNDB- Use of Technology Instruction
Redline Version IJNDC- Acceptable Use of Digital Resources