

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

Ashland Town Hall
101 Main Street
Select Board Meeting Room

Hybrid meeting: recorded on Zoom

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

Absent: Paul Kendall, Member

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. She noted that Mr. Terry will be arriving a few minutes late to the meeting, but they have a quorum, so they can get started.

Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: Present and AYE

Ms. Fitandes: Present and AYE

Ms. Tosti: Present and AYE

Athletics Winter Update: Kevin Anderson, Athletic Director

Mr. Anderson introduced the winter 2024-2025 Tri-Valley League All Stars to the school committee. Many of the recognized students were able to attend the meeting in person. Cauan Amaral, Wrestling, Lauren Bosworth, Girls Hockey, Brynn Carroll, Cheer, Will Child, Boys Indoor Track and Field, Molly Connors, Girls Swimming, Logan Costello, Wrestling, Isabella Delgado, Cheer, Luca Domestico, Boys Indoor Track and Field, Keshawn Graham, Boys Indoor Track and Field, Adrian Guzman, Wrestling, Oli Lareau, Boys Hockey, Cole Lewis, Boys Indoor Track and Field, Hunter Meigs, Boys Indoor Track and Field, Natalia Melnick, Girls Indoor Track and Field, Kevin Ozulumba, Wrestling, Anton Puhach, Wrestling, Mandy Reid, Girls Swimming, Ava Vitti, Girls Basketball.

Mr. Anderson reported that there have been 36 TVL all stars from Ashland this year thus far.

Ms. Tosti thanked the student athletes for their commitment to their sport and for representing Ashland so well. She thanked the students and their parents for coming to the meeting.

Public Comment

None

Superintendent's Report: James Adams

Mr. Adams is continuing to work on the FY 2026 budget. The current proposed school budget for FY '26 is \$44,624,213 which represents a 6.6% increase over the previous year. The town is requesting that the school budget only increase at a rate of 3.75% over last year. This represents a delta of \$1,194,937.

There is another Tri-Board meeting schedule for April 5, 2025. The Public Budget Hearing for the school committee is scheduled during the scheduled School Committee meeting on April 9, 2025.

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

Science teachers attended professional development recently. There is a new MCAS Science test being released by the state. Students take two days of Science MCAS, one day will be with the current test, the second day will contain the new test. The Science leadership team is reviewing our current Science curriculum at the elementary level and are considering piloting new programs for next year. Middle school science teachers moved to Amplify Science last year. The program has been met with mixed reviews, however, it should be effective to prepare students for the new Science MCAS test.

Revising the Educator Evaluation rubric – this was one of the Superintendent's goals for this school year. Dr. Caira reports that the goal of revising the Educator Evaluations by June 2025 will not be met. The conversations in the meetings have been thoughtful and productive, but the review process has been slower than anticipated. Mr. Terry asked when the group might be able to finish this project. Dr. Caira reported that he would have a better idea after the group's next meeting. They have currently reviewed 3 standards of the Educator Evaluation rubric.

Professional development is scheduled for teachers on Friday, March 14, and student's will have an early release day. Building-based professional development will take place. Teachers at each school will practice ALICE safety drills and will walk to their off-site reunification spot, where students and teachers would go in case of an emergency where they need to evacuate the building.

Dr. Caira wanted to thank the AEFI for hosting Casino Night, and for hosting a fundraiser that supports the Ashland Public Schools. Dr. Caria and Mr. Adams were both attending a conference out-of-state, so they were unable to attend the event.

Competency Determination: Principal Kelley St. Coeur

Ms. St. Coeur presented a proposal to add an amendment to the Student Handbook a definition of Competency Determination as one of the requirements to earn a high school diploma. For students in the Class of 2025, any students who have satisfactorily completed Grade 10 English, Mathematics and Science will earn a Competency Determination. There are approximately 20 students in English, 20 students in Math and about 7 or 8 students in Science who fall within the "Partially Meeting" category of MCAS. These students are currently enrolled in courses that will meet the requirements to graduate. As long as the students pass their current courses, they will meet the Competency Determination requirement. There are approximately 2-3 students in the Class of 2025 in both English and Math who have not yet passed the MCAS test. They are, however, currently enrolled in classes that will meet the 10th grade standards, and are passing these classes.

Ms. Fitanides asked if the school board should specify which courses students need to pass in order to earn the Competency Determination. Mr. Adams said that he would prefer to retain the

flexibility and principal's discretion to determine if a student will receive a diploma. He is waiting until the state of Massachusetts can offer some more clear guidelines for the future Classes of 2026 and 2027. Ms. Fitanides responded that she is thinking, in particular, of Special Education students and English-language learners who may be struggling to meet these requirements in order to graduate. Ms. Fitanides also wanted to confirm that the Competency Determination is part of a larger graduation requirement of a required course load (4 credits of English, 3 credits of Math, 3 credits of Science and 3 credits of Social Studies). Ms. St. Coeur confirmed that is correct.

Mr. Terry moved to amend the Competency Determination language in the Student Handbook as presented. Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion. Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: AYE

Ms. Fitanides: AYE

Mr. Terry: AYE

Ms. Tosti: AYE

Ashland Middle School Schedule Change for School Year 2025-2026

Mr. Adams gave an overview of the topic. Ms. Lachapelle has recently given a presentation to the board as to the reason we are looking to modify the AMS schedule. These proposed changes will introduce new curriculum changes, and the board will need to vote on these curriculum changes. The new courses are not defined completely at this time, but Ms. Lachapelle would like to give an overview of the proposed courses to be added for 2025-2026.

Ms. Lachapelle reported that Grade 6 will have a Reading comprehension class in addition to a Grammar and Writing class. The English Language Arts teachers are still developing a scope and sequence for these courses.

Grade 7 will have 2 teachers teaching Science and Technology standards. They are working on creating an end project goal for this course.

Grade 8 will have a Spanish I curriculum. Middle School Spanish teachers will be meeting with High School Spanish teachers to work on vertical alignment.

Mr. Terry reported that the board has been discussing the possibility of making a change to the AMS schedule for about five years now, and he feels good about this change. He offered congratulations to the principal and staff for their work.

Abishek asked, regarding the English and Engineering courses, if the principal had talked to Ms. Eagan, English Department Head, at the high school. Ms. Lachapelle, answered, yes, in fact Ms. Eagan came to the most recent ELA department meeting at the middle school to assist with recommendations about level and placement for rising 9th graders, and about the new courses to be added for Grade 6 at the middle school.

Ms. Fitanides noted that this schedule change will address some long-term issues with the schedule and will help the ability to pin-point needs of our students. Ms. Culverwell noted that her family will be a test case, as she has a current sixth grader, and a rising sixth grader.

Mr. Terry moved to approve the curriculum changes at Ashland Middle School as presented. Ms. Fitanides seconded the motion. Vote:

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

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget - Tri-Board meeting follow up

The school department and general government are still working towards balancing the FY'25-26 budget. As of today, we are looking at a \$2.5 million deficit. This number includes about \$1.1 million specifically related to the schools after an already allocated increase of 3.75%. The school committee will participate in another Tri-Board meeting on April 5 to discuss how we will close the gap further.

Mr. Adams noted that we are not adding staff at the Middle School to support the schedule change for next year. We will be moving a middle school teacher up to the High School to fill a spot opening up by retirement.

Ms. Tosti asked what is the goal for the next Tri-Board meeting? Ms. Culverwell requested that she would like to review the slidedeck that Michael Hebert presented at the last Tri-Board meeting. She would like to know more about the Town's fixed costs, including bond payments, utility bills, and their rate of increase.

Ms. Fitanides would like to have a better understanding of the one-time funds that the Town of Ashland has available.

Mr. Adams has scheduled the Public Hearing for the School Department Budget for April 9, 2025. Last year, for reference, the School Committee reviewed and voted on the budget on April 2, 2024.

Consent Agenda

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

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

Reports of School Committee Members

Abishek Karthik reported that MCAS testing will begin soon for sophomores. Teacher development day will take place on Friday, 3/14.

Ms. Fitanides attended a recent ASHPAC meeting last week. Parents had questions about the FY'26 budget update.

At 6:50pm, Ms. Fitanides made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Terry seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Gretchen King

Executive Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent

Documents used during the meeting

2024-25 Winter TVL All-Stars Updated

AHS Competency Determination 2025

AMS Schedule Update-SC Meeting 3.12.25

03.12.25 G&D School Committee Acceptance Log.docx

Minutes - February 26, 2025