

ASHLAND SCHOOL BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Ashland Elementary School – Heffernan Media Center
Tuesday, June 3, 2025
5:45 p.m. Policy Review Committee
6:00 p.m. Regular School Board Meeting

MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Heath called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. RECORD ROLL

Members Present:

Mr. Stephen Heath, Chair
Mrs. Sandra Coleman, Vice-Chair
Mr. Stephen Felton
Mrs. Jennifer Foote

Administrators Present:

Mrs. Mary Moriarty, Superintendent
Mrs. Ashley Dolloff, Business Administrator
Mr. Guy Donnelly, AES Principal
Mrs. Lisa Holiday, Student Service Coordinator (Remote)

Members Absent:

Mr. Jesse Farris (with notice)

Others Present:

Ms. Jamie King, AES Teacher
Mrs. Rachel Soney, AES Special Education Teacher
Mrs. Teresa Merrifield, AES Teacher
Mr. David Ruell, Press

IV. NONPUBLIC SESSION

A. Nonpublic Session

R.S.A. 91-A:3, II(c): This includes matters which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person, other than a member of this Board, unless such a person requests an open meeting. **RSA 91-A:3, II(b):** The hiring of any person as a public employee.

Mrs. Foote moved, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to enter Non-Public Session at 6:08 p.m. Mr. Heath called the roll.

YES: Mr. Heath, Mrs. Coleman, Mr. Felton, Mr. Farris, Mrs. Foote
NO: --

The motion passed unanimously. The Board entered Non-Public Session at 6:08 p.m.

B. Public Session

Mrs. Foote moved, seconded by Mr. Felton, to re-enter Public Session at 6:30 p.m. Mr. Heath called the roll.

YES: Mr. Heath, Mrs. Coleman, Mr. Felton, Mrs. Foote
NO: --

The motion passed unanimously. The Board re-entered Public Session at 6:30 p.m.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT – *Opened at 6:07 p.m.*

VI. MINUTES

A. Regular School Board Meeting of May 6, 2025

Mrs. Foote moved, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to approve the minutes of the Regular School Board meeting May 6, 2025.

The motion carried 3 – 0 – 1. (*Mr. Felton abstained*)

B. Non-Public School Board Meeting of May 15, 2025

Mrs. Coleman moved, seconded by Mr. Felton, to approve the minutes of the non-public School Board meeting May 15, 2025.

The motion carried 4 – 0.

VII. ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

A. Enrollment/Principal's Report

Mr. Donnelly presented the enrollment report to the School Board, noting that Ashland's enrollment has remained steady. He highlighted several recent school events and accomplishments.

The school is preparing for its final assembly of the year to celebrate the completion of the *Year of the Book* initiative. Mr. Donnelly commended Mr. Steer and the students for an outstanding spring concert, which featured a wide range of performances. A new intermission was introduced this year, allowing families with younger children to depart before the older students performed. This change significantly reduced movement during the event and will be implemented in future concerts.

Field trips are nearing completion. Mr. Donnelly had the opportunity to attend one with Ms. King, while younger students recently enjoyed a performance of Charlotte's Web in Concord. Additional trips are scheduled for next week, including a visit to Boston for the 8th grade.

Spring sports have officially concluded. Both the baseball and softball teams celebrated the season with a pizza party and a kickball game. Mr. Donnelly highlighted two exciting wins to close the season; baseball defeated Plymouth with two outs and a walk-off home run in the bottom of the 7th inning, and the softball team secured a victory in Tamworth.

8th grade students are currently preparing for their promotion ceremony, which will take place next Thursday evening at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Donnelly shared that the Ashland Robotics Program finished 5th out of 12 middle school teams in a competition held this past Saturday. He was especially proud to share that the students won the top prize – *the Gracious Professionalism* award.

"Gracious Professionalism is a way of doing things that encourages high quality work, emphasizes the value of others, respects individuals, and their community. With Gracious Professionalism, fierce competition and mutual gain are not separate notions. Gracious professionals learn and compete like crazy but treat one another with respect and kindness in the process."

Mr. Donnelly noted that winning this award is just as important to the school as winning a state championship. Congratulations to the Ashland Robotics Program.

B. Year-to-Date Financial Report

Mrs. Dolloff presented the updated year-to-date financial report, noting that less than 1% of the total budget remains available. She then opened the floor for questions; however, no questions were asked.

VIII. CURRENT BILLS PAYABLE

A. General Operating Expenses

Mrs. Dolloff presented Manifest #2015 to the School Board, discussion ensued.

Mrs. Coleman inquired about the remaining balance, asking, "Monetarily, how much will we have left?" Mrs. Dolloff responded that approximately \$30,000 remains.

Mrs. Coleman then asked if that amount would be returned to the town. Mrs. Dolloff explained that this would be addressed later in the meeting during the End-of-Year Fund Balance discussion. She noted that the district is currently projecting to return \$5,000, as was committed during the budgeting process, an amount significantly lower than in previous years. She added that efforts were made to meet this target.

Mrs. Coleman asked whether the \$5,000 could instead be used by the school. Discussion ensued that the School Board could decide to not return the \$5,000, however, that is what was presented during the budget process.

Mr. Felton moved, seconded by Mrs. Foote, to approve the payment of bills, manifest #2015.

The motion carried 4 – 0.

IX. OLD BUSINESS

A. Preschool Feasibility Study

Mrs. Moriarty began by expressing her sincere gratitude to Mrs. Soney, Special Education Teacher, for her dedication, the connections she has helped establish, and all of the behind-the-scenes work that contributed to this initiative. She also extended her thanks to Ms. Hess, Special Education Teacher; Mr. Donnelly, Principal; and Mrs. Holiday, Student Services Coordinator, for their support and involvement.

This experience has been valuable in allowing us to explore potential opportunities for serving three- and four-year-old children—a population that is near and dear to all of us. While there is interest in pursuing this further, Mrs. Moriarty noted that the initial cost estimate may come in higher than anticipated. Given current financial constraints and other pressing needs within the building, particularly in terms of staffing and support for existing programming, this may not be the ideal time to move forward with implementation.

That said, there are still meaningful steps we can take to begin building relationships with families of three- and four-year-olds. Mrs. Holiday has already begun considering ideas, such as hosting literacy afternoons or evening events, and exploring ways to integrate Title I programming to create early engagement opportunities. While it is unfortunate that Head Start is not currently located in Ashland, there may be opportunities to strengthen our connection with the existing program in Plymouth.

The intention this evening was not to review the full study, but rather to provide an overview and reflect on where we currently stand. With the addition of a third Special Education Teacher next year, our focus will remain on supporting K–8 students. Expanding programming for younger children will remain a goal to revisit in the future, but it is not something we are positioned to pursue immediately.

Mr. Donnelly noted that the process was valuable in gaining a clearer understanding of the Ashland community and the specific needs of preschool-aged students. As a result, the district now has a solid grasp of what such a program would entail, as well as the associated costs of operating a preschool program within the school district.

Mrs. Holiday expressed that there are still manageable steps the district can take to lay the groundwork for a potential preschool program in the future. She suggested opportunities such as organizing reading groups, developing community partnerships, and offering weekend activities aimed at engaging local preschool-aged children and their families. Increasing access to and communication with the preschool community will provide valuable insights and help strengthen the district's ability to make well-informed decisions.

B. CMF Kids Program

Mrs. Moriarty stated that one of the key benefits of conducting the preschool feasibility study has been the resulting opportunity to receive a generous donation.

An anonymous donor has offered to contribute \$50,000 to the Ashland School District, specifically designated for early childhood initiatives.

While the donation cannot be used to fund a staff position, it can support staff training, the purchase of equipment, and the development of early learning activities. For instance, it could fund materials for a "Literacy Saturday" event, where three- and four-year-olds and their families participate in engaging activities and leave with books and games to help reinforce early literacy skills at home.

Mrs. Moriarty requested that the Board consider accepting this generous donation to further support the district's early childhood efforts.

Mrs. Coleman moved, seconded by Mr. Felton, to approve the CMF Kids Program generous donation with gratitude.

The motion carried 4 – 0.

Mrs. Moriarty wanted to say to Mrs. Soney that we will be missing you, but we certainly would not be accepting a \$50,000 donation this evening if it weren't for the initiative she took. That's a legacy she's leaving behind, and it will have a lasting impact on the district and our early childhood efforts.

X. NEW BUSINESS

A. New Hampshire School Board Association 2025 Call for Resolutions

Mrs. Moriarty presented the 2025 Call for Resolutions from the New Hampshire School Boards Association (NHSBA) to the School Board. She noted that this is the time of year when Boards may submit proposed resolutions for consideration. She commended the Board for its collaborative approach in past years when deciding which resolutions to support, oppose, or abstain from, and explained that this is the stage where such resolutions are drafted.

As an example, Mrs. Moriarty mentioned that some Boards submit resolutions advocating for initiatives such as free school meals for all students. The number and type of resolutions vary by district, with some submitting several each year. She encouraged the Board to consider whether they would like to propose any resolutions for 2025. Although the official deadline is in early August, she noted that the NHSBA has granted extensions in the past and offered to request one to allow discussion at the August School Board meeting.

The Board reached consensus to revisit the topic at the August meeting, and Mrs. Moriarty will move forward with requesting an extension.

B. Planning for the 2025/2026 School Year

Mr. Donnelly addressed the School Board, noting that during the previous meeting,

the groundwork was laid for a discussion regarding proposed grading policy changes for students in grades 6 through 8 for the upcoming school year.

Since that time, he has collaborated with middle-tier educators, including English, Social Studies, and Math teachers, to determine what grading practices would best support our students as they transition to Plymouth Regional High School.

Mr. Donnelly explained that the current grading system is not aligned with what students will experience at the high school level. He, along with the middle-tier team and subject specialists, believes that aligning our grading practices with those of Plymouth High School will better prepare students for future academic success.

As such, the recommendation is to adopt Plymouth Regional High School's grading scale beginning next year.

Ms. King noted that the middle-tier staff is fully supportive of this proposed change. She shared that each year, around this time, students express concerns about the transition to high school. Removing the pressure of grades during this period would alleviate a significant burden for many of them.

Mr. Felton moved, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to approve and adapt the Plymouth High School grading system for grades 6-8.

The motion carried 4 – 0.

C. Permission to Hire/Accept Resignation

Mr. Felton moved, seconded by Mrs. Foote, to approve the Superintendent of School to accept resignations contingent upon finding a replacement and to hire candidates prior to the August School Board meeting.

The motion carried 4 – 0.

D. Anticipated End-of-Year Fund Balance and Proposed Encumbrances

Mrs. Dolloff presented the End-of-Year Fund Balance Report to the School Board and opened the floor for questions. There were no questions.

Mr. Felton moved, seconded by Mrs. Foote, to approve the end-of-year fund balance and proposed encumbrances as presented.

The motion carried 4 – 0.

E. School Meal Pricing

Mrs. Dolloff presented information regarding school meal pricing for the upcoming school year. She explained that, traditionally, the School Board approves meal prices at this time; however, the Paid Lunch Equity tool, which is used to determine

appropriate pricing, has not yet been released by the Federal Government. Although guidance has been issued, the specific tool required for calculation is still pending.

Mrs. Dolloff requested the Board's authorization for the Superintendent to establish the meal prices once the tool becomes available.

Mrs. Moriarty expressed the importance of setting the prices as soon as the tool is released, rather than waiting until August, in order to provide families with timely information for budgeting purposes.

Mrs. Dolloff agreed and added that early pricing will also allow time to prepare and distribute the required notifications to families. She confirmed that an update will be brought to the School Board meeting in August.

Mrs. Foote moved, seconded by Mr. Felton, to approve the Superintendent to set the School Meal Pricing for the 2025-2026 school year based on the paid lunch equity tool guidance.

The motion carried 4 – 0.

F. Facilities Assessment

Mr. Donnelly presented three facilities assessment estimates to the School Board. After careful review, the Facilities Committee believes that The H.L. Turner Group, Inc. offers the most comprehensive assessment and recommends moving forward with them as the preferred vendor.

Mr. Felton moved, seconded by Mrs. Foote, to approve The H.L. Turner Group, Inc. as the facilities assessment vendor as presented.

The motion carried 4 – 0.

Mrs. Moriarty expressed her appreciation to Mrs. Dolloff, Mr. Donnelly, and Mr. Paquette for their efforts in obtaining the quotes. She noted that this information will be instrumental in helping us budget effectively and make meaningful progress in key areas of need.

G. Nomination

Mrs. Foote moved, seconded by Mr. Felton, to approve the nomination as presented pending endorsement.

The motion carried 4 – 0.

XI. DONATION

A. Donation in the amount of \$13,500 from Bryant Paving for the purpose of repairing and replacing the paving on the playground basketball court at Ashland Elementary School.

Mrs. Moriarty expressed her sincere gratitude to Mrs. Merrifield and Mr. Donnelly for their efforts in securing this generous donation. Mr. Donnelly acknowledged that the credit primarily belongs to Mrs. Merrifield and the Student Council members, noting that the students have also raised funds toward the purchase of new goals.

Mrs. Foote moved, seconded by Mr. Felton, to accept the donation as presented with gratitude.

The motion carried 4 – 0.

XII. Public Comment – *Closed at 7:08 p.m.*

XIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Tuesday, August, 5, 2025

Ashland School Board @ Ashland Elementary School – Heffernan Media Center

- Policy Review Committee – **5:30 p.m.**
- Ashland School Board Regular Meeting – **6:00 p.m.**

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

Mrs. Foote moved, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to adjourn meeting at 7:09 p.m.

The motion carried 4 – 0.

The meeting adjourned at 7:09 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,
Sarah Briggs, Recording Secretary*