

FIVE DAY forecast
1/15/26

THURSDAY
33/22



FRIDAY
41/30



SATURDAY
40/20



SUNDAY
33/18



MONDAY
35/19



CAVERNA BOARD OF EDUCATION Superintendent's Contract Renewed, Concerns Expressed For Teacher Raises

BY **KATRINA ENGLAND**
FREELANCE CONTRIBUTOR

On Thursday, January 8, 2026, the Caverna Board of Education met in regular session to address a packed room of community members and staff. In a powerful display of solidarity, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to renew the contract of Superintendent Amanda Abell for another four-year term. The approved contract will begin July 1, 2026, and expire on June 30, 2030. Abell has led Caverna Schools for the past four years, following her tenure as Assistant Superintendent.

Before a standing-room-only crowd, Board Chairperson Jennifer Briggs opened the first meeting of the year by reflecting on recent discussions with Superintendent Abell regarding community engagement and the Board's future trajectory.

"We want everyone to feel welcome here," said Briggs, who spoke of her desire to see Caverna thrive in abundance.

Public Comment

Public comment was a central focus of the evening. Seven individuals addressed the Board: three regarding staff compensation and four specifically in support of Superintendent Abell's continued leadership.

Librarian Genny VanMeter spoke first regarding the importance of teacher raises.

"Raises help retain strong educators, and that matters because students need stability," she said. "Raises don't reward us for what we do, it allows us to continue doing it."

Art Teacher Marla England, now in her 23rd year of teaching, echoed the need for competitive pay.

"A raise is not a reward. It is a recognition of reality," she said. "We are professional educators, many of us with multiple degrees. We deserve to be able to provide for our family without having to get a second or third job."

The conversation then turned to the renewal of the Superintendent's contract. CES Principal Twana Hayes addressed the Board on behalf of herself and the staff at her school.

"We are on the course of a marathon race here at Caverna, not a race that is rewarded by speed, but a race that's measured by distance," Hayes explained. "Mrs. Abell has poured her heart, soul, finances, and beliefs into the school system. Can she lead us to the finish line? Yes. If you look around this room, you'll find people who have faith and belief in her leadership. She is a mirror of our students and families."

Athletic Coach and 1993 Caverna graduate Trevent Hayes spoke next, emphasizing Abell's unwavering presence at student events, even in distant locations.

"When we took a trip to Fulton County, the first person I saw was Mrs. Abell," said Hayes. "When we (went) to Danville, we had 7 fans there: 3 cheerleaders, 2 parents, a manager, and Mrs. Abell. (At) state playoffs, we had 9 fans, and Mrs. Abell was there."

Mielle Distefano, a retired Caverna educator, shared her perspective based on a career spanning five districts and nine different



▲ PHOTO | KATRINA ENGLAND
Art Teacher Marla England highlighted extra duties taken on by teachers, and stressed the importance of adequate compensation.

superintendents.

"Abell leads with integrity," Distefano said. "I am grateful to have the opportunity to work. I wish it would have been earlier. I offer her my full support. Mrs. Abell is great."

While Angela Briggs addressed the Board regarding community concerns and the importance of listening to all constituents whether in person or anonymous, Athletic Director and Coach Peter DeStefano spoke to the difficulty of leadership and the importance of Abell's resilience.

"Being in charge, you easily make people mad," said Distefano. "People can talk about leadership all they want. They can talk about it, lie about it, cause drama (but) Amanda has met that head on... Amanda is someone the employees want to work for... That's what our people want. We want to work for her."

Following a closed session, the Board officially approved the four-year contract extension. The decision was met with immediate applause from the audience.

Other Business

In her Superintendent Report, Abell provided updates on the near-completion of the softball bathrooms and ongoing HVAC work. She also mentioned the employment of the new School Resource Officer, Officer Courtway, and noted that a recent drug dog sweep of the school was completed with no findings.

The Board also handled organizational duties, electing Jennifer Briggs as Board Chairperson, Jennifer Ballard as Vice Chairperson, and Amanda Abell as Board Secretary.

Recognitions

The meeting concluded by celebrating the heart of the district—its people.

Students of the Month were Ashton Carver for Caverna Elementary School, Faith Strain for Caverna Middle School, and Kierra Burris for Caverna High School, as well as Jaycion Graves as Athlete of the Month. Steven Prybylla and Melissa Tobin were recognized with Core Value Awards, and WLOC Clothes for Kids was presented with the Community Partner Recognition.

In a press release following the meeting, the district noted that the 5-0 vote served as an affirmation of "strong confidence" in Abell's leadership and the district's continued direction, bolstered by the "outpouring of support" from the Caverna community.



▲ PHOTO | KATRINA ENGLAND
Librarian Ginny Vanmeter explained to the board that "Raises don't reward us for what we do, it allows us to continue doing it."



▲ PHOTO | KATRINA ENGLAND
Caverna Middle School received the monthly attendance award.



▲ PHOTO | KATRINA ENGLAND
Dewayne Forbes accepted the Community Partner Award for WLOC's Clothes for Kids Campaign.



▲ PHOTO | KATRINA ENGLAND
Melissa Tobin was presented with a Core Value Award.



▲ PHOTO | KATRINA ENGLAND
Steven Prybylla was recognized with a Core Value Award.



▲ PHOTO | KATRINA ENGLAND
Middle School Principal Twana Hayes spoke in support of renewing Amanda Abell's contract as Superintendent of Caverna Schools..

MURDER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

which was the daughter of Corey and Mindy, was airlifted to Norton Children's Hospital, where she stayed until she succumbed to her injuries on July 5.

Bowles was arrested four days after the child's death for related charges of first-degree assault, first-degree

wanton endangerment, and fourth-degree assault.

An open records request filed by Jobe Publishing last year confirmed that a Hart County indictment alleged that Bowles ingested heroin and fentanyl before colliding into the parked car.

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