

Ipswich School Committee

Thursday, October 3, 2024
MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
6:30 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

DF called the meeting to order at 6:34 PM.

Present: Kate Eliot (KE) Mat Perry (MP)
 Sasha Sopic (SS) Dianna Freehan (DF)
 Jen Donahue (JD) Jenny Connolly (JC)
 Haley Rist (HR)

Also Present: Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools (BB)
 Tom Markham, Director of Finance and Operations (TM)
 Charlie Quimby, High School Student Representative (CQ)

2. Executive Session:

Motion and vote to meet in executive session pursuant to M.G.L. chapter 30A, sec. 21(a) for the following purpose: (3) To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Ipswich Educators' Association

- Motion to meet in executive session pursuant to M.G.L. chapter 30A, sec. 21(a) for the following purpose: (3) To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Ipswich Educators' Association was made by SS and seconded by JD.

Roll Call

Motion passed unanimously

3. Return to Open Session

The School Committee returned to open session at 7:09 PM and took a brief recess. The meeting resumed at 7:17 PM.

4. Reading of the District Mission Statement

CQ read the mission statement.

5. Announcements

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, October 17th at 7:00 PM in the MS/HS Ensemble Room
- The Communications Subcommittee will meet on Wednesday, October 9th at 6:30 PM in the MS/HS Guidance Conference Room.
- The Policy Subcommittee will meet on Tuesday, October 15th at 6:30 PM in the MS/HS Guidance Conference Room.
- The Feoffees Policy Working Group will meet on Wednesday, October 16th at 6:30 PM in the MS/HS Guidance Conference Room.
- Schools and district offices will be closed on Monday, October 14th in observance of Indigenous Peoples' Day.
- Schools will be closed to students on Tuesday, October 15th for Professional Development Day.
- There is an informational session scheduled for October 9th at Town Hall regarding the NORESCO project.
- The Doyon Spooky Walk will be held this upcoming weekend.
- Whittier Tech has a new website to share information on their collaboration with Northern Essex Community College.

6. Special Acknowledgements

The Ipswich High School Cross Country Team and the Golf Team were acknowledged for their recent success.

7. Public Comments¹

Katie Henry, 28 Water Street: Expressed concern that the lived experience of students in school is missing from the school project discussions. Raised concerns about the size of the schools, bus schedules, the community feel of the schools, and the cost of transportation. Highlighted the issue of moving students away from the downtown area, which currently allows them independence.

Kayla O., County Road: Raised concerns about the football team, noting there is no JV team, declining participation, and low enthusiasm. Mentioned the likelihood of having no football team next year due to these issues. Frustration expressed as the team consistently loses, calling for action regarding the coach or athletic director. Highlighted that there is only one freshman on the team and shared concerns from kids who do not support a merger with Triton.

8. High School Student Representative Report

- The Student Advisory Committee will meet next Friday.
- There were concerns raised about the roughness of the recent football game, with worries expressed by both athletes and parents regarding safety.
- The draft Wellness Policy has caused concern among students, particularly regarding its impact on extracurricular activities. A part of the Wellness Policy would prevent the sale of baked goods, which students believe is important for fundraising and fostering entrepreneurship. A petition was signed in support of bake sales.

9. Presentations

A. Presentation and Potential Vote on Updates to the High School Softball Field

John Hubbard - Spiller Lane/Softball Boosters/Softball Travel:

- The current high school softball field is underutilized due to inadequate backstops.
- The softball program has grown significantly and now requires two fields; currently, only Bialek Field is available.
- A plan has been proposed to upgrade the high school field to accommodate both JV and varsity teams.
- IEF has donated money, and boosters/travel softball will provide the remaining funds. School Committee (SC) approval is needed to begin the work.

Discussion:

- BB: Supportive of the improvements, with the only concern being the field's proximity to the road. Adequate netting is needed around home plate. Once approved by the SC, work can begin. Inspected work near the field house—no issues.
- SS: Supportive, but raised a question about ongoing maintenance.
- BB: The school would handle maintenance; this is just a relocation.
- JC: Highlighted the high level of interest and the importance of promoting participation.
- KE: Appreciated the funding efforts and emphasized keeping students on school property.
- DF: Inquired about the project timeline.

Hubbard: Aiming for project completion before winter and ready by spring.

- Motion to approve the updates to the high school softball field by the Softball Boosters organization was made by Ss and seconded by JD. *The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

B. Presentation and Potential Vote on Shed at Doyon

Beth Gillander - Farley Ave/Doyon FRIES:

- FRIES would like to fund and build a movable shed at Doyon School for storage, as there is limited space currently. The shed would store supplies for FRIES events.

¹ Public comment is not a discussion, debate, or dialogue between individuals and the School Committee. It is an individual's opportunity to express an opinion on issues within the School Committee's authority. While the Committee and/or administrators will not typically respond during Public Comment, the Chair, as presiding officer of the meeting, may choose to if s/he seems it expeditious. Further, should the Chair believe that an issue falls outside the purview of the School Committee, s/he may request that citizens direct it to the appropriate person or body so that the matter is given proper consideration. Public comment is limited to three (3) minutes per person and a total of 15 minutes, overall.

Discussion:

- BB: FRIES has a large amount of supplies currently stored in members' homes. The shed will be built by the construction program at Medford High School, where a FRIES member works. Several locations were considered, and it will be placed at the back of the preschool playground, away from students, but conveniently close to everything. The shed will be locked for security. Shared the dimensions of the shed.
- Motion to support the building of a shed by FRIES at the Paul F. Doyon Memorial School was made by JD and seconded by HR. *The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

C. Discussion and Vote on the Ipswich Educators' Association Collective Bargaining Agreements for Unit A, ESP, and Paraeducators

The School Committee (SC) has reached tentative agreements with Ipswich Educators' Association (IEA) bargaining units. The IEA units will meet next week to vote on ratifying the contracts. Once ratified by the IEA, the SC will also ratify the agreements. The topic was discussed in executive sessions, but no vote has been taken at this time. The matter is tabled until the next School Committee meeting on October 17th.

D. School Committee Workshop Recap (on the future of an elementary school building project)

The committee met to discuss the future elementary school project at their workshop on September 19th, reviewing a slideshow covering the context, approach, and workshop goals. The primary decision the School Committee discussed involves whether to build a single school or two separate schools. The analysis of such a decision focused on educational planning, project costs and timelines, and town sentiment. Scenarios were shared that compared MSBA data on single community schools versus two separate schools, one MSBA-funded and one not, or both funded by MSBA. The data revealed that building two schools is significantly more expensive—124% more in one scenario and 76% more in another, based on MSBA data from 31 schools. KE inquired whether the costs were adjusted for 2024 inflation, which SS confirmed with a 4% yearly inflation rate. In response to EQ's question about cost per square foot, SS noted that comparisons were made based on schools with 300-500 and 700-900 students, similar to Ipswich, but there were too many variables to focus solely on square footage.

The committee discussed the benefits and considerations of using model schools for the upcoming elementary school project. Model schools, designed based on templates of previously built schools, offer the advantage of speeding up the design process by an average of 85 days. SS explained that these are not prefabricated buildings but adaptable designs that can be tailored to meet the needs of the town. While only one model school has been built since 2016, there was a significant rise in their use between 2011 and 2014 when MSBA offered incentive points, a program that ended in 2016. Despite the decline in participation since then, the committee agreed that it would be worthwhile to explore the model school option in partnership with MSBA as part of the feasibility study phase.

The committee reviewed information on town sentiment regarding the future elementary school project, sharing data from the slide presentation used during the workshop. The focus was on strategies for community engagement, exploring how to better understand what the town wants and how to gather more input from residents. The committee emphasized the importance of continuing to share information with the community and included all the sources used to collect the presented data in the presentation.

SS acknowledged that there were a lot of variables to consider as a project(s) moves forward, but shared that the Elementary Working Group/School Committee were trying to be judicious in what decisions were made and when.

E. Discussion on Special Town Meeting Warrant Articles 4 and 5

During the discussion on Special Town Meeting Warrant Articles 4 and 5, DF raised the question of whether the School Committee should take a position ahead of the Special Town Meeting or wait for the meeting (RATM). SS expressed support for addressing the articles, citing their impact on the tax base and the school budget. JC inquired about the process for voting early versus RATM, with DF explaining that they could not vote immediately, but could place the issue on the next meeting's agenda or wait for the town meeting to take a position. Ultimately, all participants agreed to RATM for both articles.

F. Policy Update and Approval

The committee discussed the development of a new Wellness Policy. BB provided background on the formation of the Wellness Committee at the end of last year and the review of existing policies from other districts and the Massachusetts Association of

School Committees (MASC). A draft policy was presented for review, with plans for a second reading at the October 17th meeting. BB shared that the district has been accepted into a wellness policy review program with Fitchburg State University, which will help refine the policy over the next year. DF emphasized that having a wellness policy is required by state law, particularly regarding nutrition standards.

Several concerns were raised. KE asked whether the policy had been reviewed by food service staff, teachers, and principals, and BB confirmed that the food service director was on the committee and the policy had been shared with the administration team, though no formal conversations had occurred. EQ noted that no teachers were part of the committee, which raised concerns given a petition against the policy signed by teachers.

Concerns about the impact on fundraising, particularly bake sales, were also raised by JC and JD, noting the importance of such activities for community building and funding. DF clarified that while the policy would regulate fundraising during school hours, adjustments could be made to address these concerns. BB suggested that stricter guidelines may be necessary, stating that if the district knows better, it must do better. EQ also raised concerns about whether the policy would apply to teachers and staff offering candy in classrooms.

The committee agreed to revisit the policy in a subcommittee, address concerns, and explore compromises, particularly regarding bake sales and teacher involvement. KE volunteered to research how other districts balance wellness policies with practical considerations like fundraising. The overall goal remains to promote student wellness while ensuring the policy is practical and supported by all stakeholders.

DF then shared the following policies for review and approval:

- AC: Non-Discrimination
- AC-R: Non-Discrimination Policy Including Harassment and Retaliation
- ACA: Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex
- ACAB: Sexual and Sex-Based Harassment and Retaliation
- ACA-R: Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex Under Title IX Including Sex-Based Harassment
- ACGA: Civil Rights Grievance Procedure
- ACGB: Title IX Sexual Discrimination Grievance Procedure

➤ Motion to approve policies from section A as revised and presented was made by KE and seconded by HR. *The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

10. Superintendent's Administrative Report

BB shared the meetings and scheduled events he participated in between meetings, including the REDI Workshop, discussions on addressing odor issues at Winthrop with a state representative, and tentative agreements with IEA units. He attended meetings with the administrative team. Additional engagements included the CREST Board of Directors meeting, a training session on crisis response, a North Shore Superintendents Roundtable meeting, time spent in buildings, a meeting about the Safe Routes to School program, various subcommittee meetings, and participation in the DEI and IEF groups, as well as discussions on the re-keying project at the elementary schools.

11. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Report

- **Budget Committee:** Met on Tuesday; chair vote deferred. Reviewed preliminary FY26 budget calendar. Next meeting scheduled for October 30 to ensure alignment with the town.
- **Operations Committee:** Plans to review goals at the October 17 meeting.
- **Fee Policy Working Group:** Met on September 18; discussed action plan for the year.
- **Bicycle Advisory Board:** JC read the group's purpose statement. Exploring grant funding opportunities.
- **Turf Field Project:** In the last phase; \$140,000 from the Paine Grant needs to be spent by next year. Group plans to update the School Committee in November.
- **Paine Grant Committee:** Working on a timeline for the spring grant cycle application process.
- **Strategic Planning:** Met last night; continuing to revise the planning model based on various scenarios. Awaiting final numbers from the School Committee regarding feasibility studies and MSBA reimbursement percentages. Existing debt data incorporated into the model, with a goal to complete the plan by the end of the year.

12. New Business*

No new business was presented.

13. Vouchers and Bills

All reviewed and signed.

14. Consent Agenda

- Motion to approve the consent agenda as presented was made by DF and seconded by KE. *The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

15. Adjournment

- Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by JC and seconded by JD. *The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

Meeting adjourned at 8:59 PM