

Ipswich School Committee
MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
Thursday, August 24, 2023
7:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

KE called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM.

Present: K. Eliot (KE) D. Freehan (DF)
 J. Poirier (JP) S. Sopic (SS)
 J. Donahue (JD) J. Connolly (JC)

Also Present: B. Blake, Superintendent of Schools (BB)
 T. Markham, Director of Finance and Operations (TM)

2. Reading of the District Mission Statement

JD read the mission statement.

3. Announcements

- The next Ipswich School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, September 7th at 7:00 PM in the MS/HS Ensemble Room.
- The first day of school for all staff is Monday, August 28th.
- The first day of school for all students in grades 1-12 will be Wednesday, August 30th.
- The first day of school for kindergarten students will be Tuesday, September 5th.
- There is no school scheduled for Friday, September 1st or Monday, September 4th.

4. Special Acknowledgements

BB acknowledged the state of the schools and thanked the custodial staff for their work this summer.

5. Citizens' Comments

There were none.

6. Presentations

A. School Committee Reorganization: Vote on Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary (Taken out of order)

KE explained that per School Committee policy, the committee typically holds a re-organizational meeting in July to vote on the Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary positions. Those votes were pushed to tonight's meeting. KE has been Chair since January 2023 when Greg Stevens stepped down from the position and JP has been Vice Chair since May when Emily Cannon's term ended. Both are willing to continue in those positions.

A discussion took place regarding consideration of continuity and whether members that are up for re-election in the spring could and/or should be nominated as Chair and Vice Chair. Both KE and JP will be up for re-election in the spring and have yet to publicly announce if they will be running for re-election. KE clarified that if she chose not to run, she would give the School Committee ample time to put a new Chair in place. JP added that it is too early to know what his or KE's plans are for the spring, but like KE, he would give ample notice to the School Committee should he decide not to run.

There was agreement that the cycle of the Chair stepping down mid-year was difficult and should be re-evaluated. The timing of the Chair/Vice Chair turnover should be a point of discussion during this year. It was suggested that the School Committee and/or the Policy Subcommittee look at other districts policies, as they may also be in similar situations.

- *A motion to nominate KE as Chair of the School Committee was made by DF and seconded by JD. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***
- *A motion to nominate JP as Vice Chair of the School Committee was made by JD and seconded by MP. **The motion passed with 6 in favor and 1 abstention.***
- *A motion to nominate BB as Secretary of the School Committee was made by KE and seconded by JP. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

B. Overnight Field Trip Request: Entrepreneurship Class

This agenda was not discussed.

C. Elementary Handbook Approval (Taken out of order)

Elementary principals, Amy Sullivan and Peter Holtz, along with their assistant principals, Nicki Amisson and Adam Mullen, worked together to review and update the existing Elementary School Handbook. Amy Sullivan and Peter Holtz reviewed the changes which included:

- Alphabetizing the sections
- Uniform formatting
- Updating language that looked “out of date”
- Reworded sections to be more “asset based”
- Included language directly from the IPS Policy Manual, Massachusetts General Law or Special Education policy.
- Staff lists and new School Committee members
- Core values, vision and mission statements for each school
- Detailed arrival and dismissal plans
- Added behavior expectations for bus transportation and school that included more encouraged behaviors as opposed to discouraged behaviors
- Bullying policy and reporting information
- Updated the clothing suggestions
- Updated the communication plan to include the use of electronic newsletters
- Added a “Who to Call” list/communication guide
- Updated lost and found policy
- Updated the school meals information to mention that school lunches are now free
- Added the Digital Use Policy
- Updated safety plan information
- Outlined the student transfer language
- Shared kindergarten registration information
- Update the visitor and school safety information

Once approved, the new handbook will be distributed electronically to families on the first day of school. Hard copies can be requested and efforts will be made to translate copies should they be needed.

Members highlighted some grammatical errors that will be corrected before the distribution of the handbooks. Discussion also included a suggestion to include information of the costs of the music program and transportation, aligning the schools vision and mission statements, as well as more clearly advertising the CORI process. There were several positive comments on the inclusion of the communication table.

- *Motion to approve the revised version of the Elementary Student and Parent Handbook as presented was made by KE and seconded by JC. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

D. Special Town Meeting Warrant Articles Discussion and Vote

Article	Title	Motion	Vote
1	FY24 Municipal Budget (State Aid)	Motion to Recommend the School Committee Support, JP, Second, KE	6 in favor, 1 abstention
2	FY24 School Budget (State Aid)	Motion to Recommend the School Committee Support, KE, Second JD	7-0
3	FY24 Municipal Budget	No position	
4	Appropriation to Essex Tech	RATM	
5	Transfer funds for Opioid Remediation Purposes	Motion to Recommend the School Committee Support, DF, Second SS	7-0
6	Water Department Infrastructure Improvements (Dow Dam)	No position	
	Public Safety Facility Bid Contingency Funds	No position	
	Amend Town Government Study Committee Bylaw	RATM	
	Adoption of Stretch Energy Code	RATM	
	Drive-through Facilities	No position	
	Miscellaneous Change to Nonconforming Height Restrictions	No position	
	Miscellaneous Change to Fence Height Regulations	No position	
	Authorize Conservation Commission to Enter into Lease of Farm Fields at 275 Linebrook Road	No position	
	Amending Town Charter to Give Select Board Exclusive Authority to Appoint Members of Planning Board	No position	

Prior to discussing the warrant article looking to “Amend Town Government Study Bylaw”, Gary Champion, member of the Town Government Study Committee, spoke to the article and explained its purpose.

E. School Committee Retreat Recap

The School Committee held a retreat in July that included an executive session to discuss the safety and security audit. The committee also discussed the superintendent evaluation process, School Committee goals and scheduling meetings/agenda planning for the upcoming school year. T

F. FY24 School Committee Goals

Draft goals were created by several subcommittee groups. Each goal was reviewed and discussed.

Communications: Goals included increasing the number of newsletters distributed through the year, broadening social media and community relationships, and fostering DEI initiatives in the district. There was a discussion on how to measure the goals around broadening community relationships and fostering DEI initiatives. What could be deliverable to determine if the School Committee is meeting those goals? JP added that there had been a discussion within the subcommittee about putting parameters around Citizens’ Comment so that the same rules apply whether there is one person looking to speak or a room full of people. It should be a focus for the School Committee to be transparent and create a more accessible environment for the public to participate/communicate. Other suggestions included having agendas available at each meeting and including more information on the agendas. The Communications Subcommittee will review the goals again and fine tune the goals.

Facilities: Goals included addressing the elementary schools, monitoring maintenance schedules/changes to buildings across the district and safety and security. KE expressed concern that many of the goals were not within the purview of the School Committee because they were considered operational. The goals would be to oversee the superintendent and ensure that BB is completing projects and maintenance as needed within the district. SS added that these goals would help ensure district facilities are in good standing. The safety and security goal is to ensure that the repairs and upgrades recommended by the audit are being implemented.

Budget: The Budget Subcommittee will discuss goals at their upcoming meeting. A focus will be around working closely with the superintendent to develop the budget, address the expiring ESSER funds, and long term funding plans.

Elementary Building Project: Goals should include things that the School Committee can do to keep the discussion moving forward around this project(s). There was a discussion about rolling these goals into the School Facilities goals and possibly into Communications goals.

Feoffee Policy Review: This goal would center on completing the revision to the Feoffees Distribution Policy.

Goals will be discussed again and voted on in September.

G. FY24 Superintendent Goals

BB will bring his draft goals to the Operations Subcommittee meeting schedule for next week to discuss. His goals will most likely center around

- The integration of the new administrators in the district, supporting them through the supervision and evaluation process
- Developing a fiscally sound budget moving forward that take into consideration upcoming negotiations, the funding “cliff”, unanticipated increases, as well as the communication strategies with the public around the budget
- The implementation of the Strategy for District Improvement with a focus on student performance
- Looking at the Blue Ribbon School program

H. School Facilities Update: Building Inspections; Elementary Boiler, Roofs; MSBA Phone Call

BB shared the following as it related to the state of the school facilities:

- Boiler #1 at Winthrop School had seven cracked interior sections that were able to be repaired. This past winter/spring, Boiler #2 was found to be leaking due to multiple cracked sections and solidified mineral buildup in the piping, thus rendering the boiler useless. Replacement parts are no longer available for this boiler. The Facilities Department considered two solutions- rent a boiler for roughly \$85-\$95,000 for the year not including the cost to maintain, operate, and fuel it or replace the boiler with a new boiler costing the district \$153,000. The new boiler would have a lifespan of roughly 15 years and would take approximately 6-8 weeks to order and install. Option two, purchasing a new boiler, was chosen and is expected to be installed ahead of the heating season.
- Bids are out for the roofing projects at the middle school, high school, and elementary schools. Once final bids are received in the upcoming weeks, the schedule will be set for installation. Installation will take place while school is in session and should be completed by the end of the calendar year, weather dependent. There will be noise and disruptions during this project, however, no roof can wait another year to be repaired.
- There was a need for another bathroom for students at Doyon with the addition of the intensive needs preschool. The cost of this project came in higher due to additional work needed for ADA compliance. It is anticipated that the project will be completed prior to the start of school.
- Several upgrades have been made to five science classrooms at the high school as part of a Paine Grant. The project is roughly 98% complete.

There was a discussion on the timing of the roof projects, as some thought the project would have been completed over the summer. BB explained that the funding for the project was approved at Town Meeting in May. The Facilities Department could not move forward with architects and the bid specs until the funding for the project was confirmed. At this time, there is no plan on what order the roofs will be completed. That information will not be available until the bids are in.

Members discussed their building inspections at the middle school, high school, and the Paul F. Doyon Memorial School.

Paul F. Doyon Memorial School:

- JD was excited to meet the new principal and assistant principal. JD discussed the school security upgrades which included a badging system, additional cameras, and an upgraded security screening system. Interior locks will be upgraded during a school break. The building looked ready for the start of school. KE added how passionate Peter Holtz was about security, pushing for a culture of “all in this together”.

Middle/High Schools

- JP discussed the security upgrades made to the building which included additional, upgraded cameras. Although there were a couple of longer term projects still being completed, the overall building looked good. JP discussed some unexpected issues with drainage, but those were being addressed. The building is ready for students.

Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA Call)

Two weeks ago, the MSBA reached out to schedule a call with the Town Manager, Superintendent, Chair of the Select Board, KE and JP, as well as several members of the MSBA. The reason for the call was to discuss where Ipswich is in terms of supporting a building project(s) and offering some suggestions.

At this point in the process, the MSBA does not need any additional information from the district. The call is a step between the submission of the Statement of Interests (SOIs) and the decision. This call is not an indication of whether Ipswich will be accepted. KE shared that there are 63 applications for the Core Program this year. The MSBA is familiar with Ipswich and will not require a site visit prior to making a decision.

The biggest question from the MSBA was what was different and what has changed in Ipswich from 2014 to now. The group shared that Ipswich has developed a Strategic Plan, leading to a more cohesive sense of what needs to be done in the town and in what sequence. Issues around athletic fields from the last time had subsided and the public safety building had passed using a different parcel of land. KE informed the MSBA on the work the School Committee did last year in terms of listening sessions, surveys, workshops, demographic studies, and the non-binding ballot vote. The Chair of the Select Board shared that the town boards were working together and more cohesively. KE felt the response from the MSBA was positive.

The MSBA did say that they have never approved two Core Projects at the same time in a district, but have in subsequent years for communities that are larger and have more elementary schools. Advice from the MSBA was to spend time as a community to determine what is right for Ipswich and not just want the MSBA will approve. It is important to the MSBA to help communities implement what the town or city specifically wants/is best for them.

The MSBA did not identify this call as the “readiness call”, but BB felt that it was that. The MSBA was checking on what was different. Acceptance will be based on what shape the schools are in vs. the needs of other communities.

JP added that he was impressed with how much they knew about Ipswich and the flaws from last time. The MSBA shared that the SOIs were well written and complete. The MSBA suggested touring the schools that matched the values of Ipswich.

DF asked if other town boards had access to the SOIs and whether it would be beneficial to circulate them to the Select Board and Finance Committee, as well as new members.

I. Security Update

BB reviewed the list of safety and security updates that were made over the summer. His list included the following:

- Installed new or upgraded cameras at both elementary schools
- Additional badging access points at elementary schools
- Repaired loud speaker system at elementary school
- Removed problematic signage at Doyon
- Trimmed/removed overgrown landscaping
- Doors shaved down
- Purchased the Raptor Visitor Management system (waiting for install date)
- Established training and drill dates with police and fire department that include the ALICE course for all staff with time available during first week of schools, presentations to staff and students, drills completed by first week of October
- Updated BeSafe documents online and in all emergency manuals

- Walk throughs with fire and police chiefs
- Replaced front doorbell and camera systems at all schools to be more high resolution
- Installed cameras and entry system at central office
- Added magnetic door strips for all interior doors in the district
- Working on drop down curtains for all interior windows
- Working on templates for emergency communication and messaging to parents.

The list of upgrades were all identified as priority items by the Administrative team and were recommended through the safety and security audit. There are other upgrades that will be completed throughout the year.

J. School Committee Calendar/Budget Calendar

The School Committee calendar was reviewed and will be posted to the district website. The budget calendar will be reviewed during the upcoming Budget Subcommittee meeting.

7. Superintendent's Administrative Report

BB reported on the work he has done over the course of the summer. His report included:

- Participation in a Crisis Management webinar
- Meeting with the Town Manager to discuss town/school relations
- Attendance at the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents Conference
- Administrative Team retreat
- The School Committee workshop
- An Ipswich Education Foundation meeting
- Educator Evaluation training with the Administrative Team
- Several subcommittee meeting
- New Hire Orientation
- The hiring of a new Extended Day Program Director
- A meeting with the Fire/Police Chiefs
- A team building activity with the Administrative Team
- Preparation for Opening Day on August 28th

8. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- **Communication Subcommittee:**
 - The newsletter will go out on Monday, August 28th. The plan is to shift to a Monday release.
 - There are plans to release Ipswich School Committee accounts on Facebook and Instagram, sharing information that mirrors the information in the newsletters.
 - The School Committee Disclosure Statement was created utilizing similar language from other districts with school committee social media accounts. The statement will be posted in the "About" section of each account.
 - The Social Media Norms Addendum identifies how the School Committee would run their social media accounts.
 - It was agreed that the Communications Subcommittee should move forward with the social media accounts and then discuss further at the next School Committee meeting.
- **School Facilities Working Group:** Topics were discussed as part of earlier agenda items.

9. New Business*

No new business was discussed.

10. Vouchers and Bills

All were reviewed and signed.

11. Consent Agenda

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

12. Adjournment

➤ *Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by JP and seconded by DF. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

Meeting adjourned at 10:26 PM