

Ipswich School Committee
MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
Thursday, February 2, 2023
7:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

KM called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

Members Present: G. Stevens (GS) K. Eliot (KE)
 J. Donahue (JD) D. Freehan (DF)
 J. Poirier (JP) E. Cannon (EC)

Also Present: B. Blake, Superintendent of Schools (BB)
 T. Markham, Director of Finance and Operations (TM)
 J. Bornstein, High School Student Representative (JB)

2. Reading of the District Mission Statement

JB read the mission statement.

3. Announcements

- The School Committee will have meetings on the following dates next week:
 - Tuesday, February 7th at 7:00 PM
 - Wednesday, February 8th at 7:00 PM
 - Thursday, February 9th at 7:00 PM
- The FY24 Superintendent's Budget will be presented on Tuesday and Wednesday. A budget hearing will take place on Thursday.
- The Policy Subcommittee is meeting remotely on Wednesday, February 8th at 6:00 PM.
- The Communications Subcommittee will meet remotely on Monday, February 13th at 4:00 PM.

4. Special Acknowledgements

There were no special acknowledgements.

5. Citizen' Comments

There were comments from the public.

6. High School Student Representative Report

JB discussed a new policy implemented at the high school that states all students must use school-issued devices during the school days. Students are no longer allowed to use their personal computers or tablets during the school day. JB cited issues with the policy and felt the high school should be able to find a middle ground that allows students to continue to use their own devices. It was JB's understanding that the policy was implemented for safety reasons. JB also talked about the difficulty some students have had to have their school devices repaired.

7. Presentations

A. IEA Snapshot Presentation: Collaborations with Scientists Across Continents

Lori Lafrance, high school science teacher, shared two examples of ways that her classes were able to collaborate with people from around the world. Her first story talked about the collaboration between John Wigglesworth, an Ipswich resident who was with a team of scientists doing research in the North Pole. Students were able to connect with the team and ask questions/collaborate from afar a few times per week. Once Mr. Wigglesworth reached the North Pole, he took boats that were created by the students and attached GPS tracking to them. Students were then able to track the boats as the ice melted.

Ms. Lafrance then discussed a recent trip to the Equator and its connection to her students. After receiving an award allocating \$2,500 to be used for professional development, Ms. Lafrance traveled with 15 teachers to the Galapagos to work with the Charles Darwin Research Foundation. A scientist from the foundation created a system to catalog microplastics and showed the group of teachers how to use the system. Ms. Lafrance then brought that system back to her students and piloted a program to catalog microplastics at Pavillion Beach. Ms. Lafrance's AP students will continue to use this system in a less sheltered environment and share their information with the scientists in the Galapagos. That shared information will be used to help refine protocols used in the data collection process.

B. Honors Society Service Day Proposal

Members of the National Honors Society presented a proposal for a Service Day on May 16th at the High School. Groups would be divided by their advisory block and be assigned to a certain organization or place to participate in a community service project for the day. A teacher and National Honors Society member would be assigned to each group. The president of the National Honors Society explained that community service is important to the club and it was important to the club to strengthen the act of service throughout the school. This project would immerse students into the community and give them an opportunity to give back to local business and get students involved in activities bigger than themselves.

Students will meet in their advisory groups at the beginning of the day and then travel to each project in groups. Students will then return to school by 3:00 PM. Sophomores will be participating in MCAS during this day and will not be participating in the event. Students who do not wish to travel will be assigned a service project at the high school. All students who need a lunch will be provided with one. These community service projects will count towards the community service requirement at the high school.

The group then outlined potential projects and organizations they have already scheduled a project with.

*C. Motion to support the National Honors Society Service Day proposal was made by GS and seconded by EC. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

D. Review of School Committee Norms

With new leadership and the ongoing difficult conversations the School Committee was having, KE felt it was a good idea to review and recommit to the School Committee norms. These norms are included with the information new members receive and are also available on the district website under the School Committee tab.

EC then read the norms:

The School Committee, in our role as advocates for The Public Schools of Ipswich, agrees to abide by the following operating norms:

- 1. We acknowledge that a School Committee meeting is a meeting of the School Committee that is held in public and we will make every effort to ensure that Committee meetings are effective and efficient.*
- 2. We will strive to reach decisions by consensus and recognize that a member's authority is derived only through a majority decision of the committee acting as a whole during an open, public meeting. Once the School Committee has taken action, members will support the official position of the School Committee.*
- 3. We agree to debate the issues not each other and all members will contribute to maintaining an open meeting environment where each member is encouraged to freely express opinions, concerns and ideas.*
- 4. We will strive to have no surprises for the committee or superintendent. All members will receive the same information on all topics in a timely manner.*
- 5. It is our responsibility to set the tone for the entire school system, and we will make every effort to promote a positive image for our school system. We will operate transparently and respectfully, maintain confidentiality, and respect the Open Meeting laws.*
- 6. We recognize the importance of professional growth and development, and agree to participate in formal training and experiences designed to further our knowledge and understanding. All new School Committee members will participate in an orientation session, and if desired, a School Committee mentor will be assigned.*

EC then reviewed the origins of the norms. They were adopted in 2020 as a way to bring the School Committee to a place where business could be done more productively and less confrontationally. EC suggested that the School Committee continue to review them annually.

GS added that these norms are a helpful reminder to the committee. GS felt that the most important norm talked about not having surprises.

The norms will continue to be posted to the district website.

E. Assistant Principal Position Overview

Ahead of the FY24 budget presentations schedule for next week, BB thought it would be helpful to present additional information on the two elementary assistant principal positions included in the proposed budget. While there have been previous discussions on the positions, there are still questions about the need and what these positions would do to support the elementary schools.

The principals at both the Paul F. Doyon Memorial School and Winthrop School have included an 1.0 FTE Assistant Principal in their FY24 budgets. The intent of this position is to support:

- The supervision and evaluation of staff
- Daily management and operations of the school building
- Safety and security
- Students and families
- Teaching and learning

BB then addressed why the district was moving forward with this request now. For years, the district has asked for assistant principals at the elementary level and each year the positions are cut from the proposed budget or they never made it into the proposed budget. All principals have the same or similar responsibilities, but the secondary principals are able to share/split those responsibilities with their assistant principals. Additional reasons for the addition of these two positions include:

- Increase in evaluations
- Increase in student/family needs
- Increase the ability to provide instructional leadership
- Support students and teachers in need throughout the day
- Increased mandates from DESE such as the new dyslexia guidelines, mandates and communication of action plans to parents/guardians
- Tiered supports for learning
- Timely communication and response to staff, students, and families
- All principals have the same amount of vast responsibilities- overseeing school councils, attending night events, planning staff meetings, connecting with students, staff and families, responding to emergencies, etc. Without another administrator to share the responsibilities, it impacts how quickly, timely and efficiently they can execute all of these duties

BB then shared some typical moments in an assistant principal's day, created by current assistant principals Leanne Collura and Sean Fitzgerald. The list highlights a lot of things that often go unnoticed and a lot of things that still happen at the elementary level without the additional support from an assistant principal. The list includes:

- Counseling a student who needs emotional learning support
- Meeting with a parent who needs immediate help
- Collaborating with a teacher who has requested support with a student's behavior
- Supervising and assuring safety during recess
- Monitoring lunch and checking in with students
- Facilitating faculty meetings
- Investigating a disciplinary issue
- Scheduling upcoming school events
- Circulating through grade level teacher meetings
- Conducting a home visit for a student with absenteeism challenges
- Observing a teacher and giving feedback
- Meeting with student leaders to create equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives
- Conflict resolution between students and conflict resolution between staff
- Repairing harm over behavioral infractions
- Tracking student attendance
- Creating and implementing progressive disciplinary measures

Information was then shared by school about the number of staff who required evaluations and the time commitment for each evaluation. The data shows that all schools take significant time to evaluate staff; however the number of staff evaluations by one person is less at the secondary levels with the help of the assistant principals.

BB then shared a list of area school districts, both large and small, that have assistant principals in their elementary schools.

BB gave a sample of the job responsibilities of these new assistant principals. Their job descriptions could include, but are not limited to:

- Promote open and reflective school-parent relationships.
- Provide leadership in student development, including orientation, attendance, counseling, discipline, and academic progress.
- Organize and direct student supervision (including lunches and before/after school dismissal).
- Participate in the hiring, supervision and evaluation of school personnel.
- Assume responsibility for implementing discipline procedures as stated in the Student Handbook.
- Supervise and evaluate teaching staff and other building employees in accordance with the school district's evaluation plan, and make recommendations regarding goals, areas needing improvement, and continued employment.
- Maintain consistency of safety and security.
- Collaborate towards alignment across grades and schools.
- Be a presence and support as an additional school leader with an administrative license.
- Facilitate data-driven analysis and discussions with instructional staff regarding student performance
- Develop innovative strategies, preventative approaches, and proactive plans for students who exhibit at-risk behaviors.
- Collaborate with the Principal on supporting a positive culture and climate within the building.

Lastly, BB shared that the demands in schools/society have changed drastically post-Covid. Schools are dealing with more now and the need for these assistant principals positions is stronger than ever before.

KE highlighted the need for additional support for conflict resolution, noting that some situations are more than just a phone call. There are unanticipated issues that arise that take significant time to resolve and can include multiple calls, meetings, and time away from other daily responsibilities.

JP added that there were a lot of reasons that these positions make sense for the upcoming school year. The additional information presented this year allows the School Committee to see the need beyond just assisting with evaluations. Last year the request was for one assistant principal to be split between the two elementary schools. JP asked for clarification on why there was an additional position added this year.

BB acknowledged that he recommended asking for a split position last year because he was not confident that two positions would pass. The need for two positions was still there last year, but BB knew that would not be supported. Ultimately, BB thought one split position would be better than no assistant principal at all.

JP felt that the principals could now better understand how these assistant principals could be used in their buildings because they have been in their respective positions for a full year. JP then asked how these positions compare to a position that did not make it into the budget that could be seen as better serving and closer to students. BB felt that now is the right time to bring in these positions. Another staff member working directly with students may only impact a small group of students. These assistant principal positions have school-wide implications. KE added that these positions are very student-facing. These positions would also allow for the principals to be more student-facing.

EC found the information to be helpful and agreed with JP that it makes more sense for these positions to come forward in the FY24 budget after the principals have had a full year under them. She noted that there were concerns raised in the recent DESE District Review about a reading specialist, however, that issue is being addressed in other ways.

BB added that the district plans to write a Paine Enhancement Grant to support the beginning phase of a literacy coaching model. The new model will be similar to the math coaching model, which has proven successful and was praised in the DESE District Review. While the initial thought was to hire a reading specialist, it was determined that position would only work with a small group of students. Implementing a coaching model will assist classroom teachers in supporting their entire class.

JD wanted to ensure that the assistant principal positions would not be glorified lunchroom monitors. BB added that he also does not want or anticipate that these positions become lunchroom monitors.

JD then asked what would happen to the four administrator positions should the two elementary schools combine as the building project moves forward. Looking at the comparisons provided from other districts, Georgetown currently has one large elementary school with one principal and one assistant principal. BB said without knowing the size or configuration of a potential new school, he could not definitively answer what the staffing would be.

GS talked about the proposed FY24 budget and how it represents need and not a lot of “wants”. While there is only a small addition of new staff being added, fixed costs and Special Education numbers have increased significantly. The administrators have done a good job looking at creative solutions to balance the budget, while also addressing the needs of the students.

It was clarified that the assistant principal positions would be yearlong positions and would be hired within the \$90,000 range. All qualified applicants are encouraged to apply, including current staff.

F. Elementary School Building Update: SOI Update, Status of Ballot Questions

KE began the update by stating that the SOI submission will be an ongoing agenda item. The deadline to submit the SOIs to the MSBA is April 14, 2023. At this point, information is being gathered to include in the two SOIs. Two votes will also need to take place and be included with the SOI submission. One vote requires School Committee support of the SOIs and the other vote requires support from the Select Board. KE is working on dates for these votes and will determine if the Select Board will need to see the completed SOIs before taking a vote.

KE then presented a draft of potential ballot questions that were reviewed by town counsel. The structure of the questions, suggested by town counsel, outlines the options for a building project and then asks voters to identify choices. This would be considered a workaround for ranked choice voting.

EC asked if there could be some disclaimer added to the questions to note that there is no ability to estimate costs associated with the project. EC also asked if the group should consider adding information about potential configurations or just the structure.

DF felt that the questions could be narrowed down to two options- one project or two projects. Other members felt there were enough differences in the projects to keep the options.

JP said he was in favor of using the ballot questions and commended town counsel for their ability to simplify the questions. JP felt that the options should remain because they highlight geographic benefits. The questions show that there are town-wide configurations that will address all students, regardless of where they live.

Even though town counsel was able to simplify the ballot questions, BB worried about the wordiness of the questions. BB asked what supplemental information would need to be provided to the community ahead of time so all voters could make an informed decision.

The conversation continued around the formatting of the questions and how to present the information so it encompasses all options, while also making the options clear and easy to understand. JD expressed concern over some wording that may appear to be subjective. There was concern that the timing of the projects was not clearly conveyed. Voters may assume that two schools could be built simultaneously or right after one another. GS wondered how to explain that there could be significant time in between two projects.

With this style of questioning, there was an inherent risk of voters choosing the same option for each question. It was suggested that the wording on the questions could be edited to ask for preference.

KE asked members if they were in favor of moving forward with the ballot questions. KE was originally in favor and felt that creating potential questions was a good exercise. The level of information gathered from the ballot questions is not needed for the SOI submissions and the SOI will be submitted well before the ballot questions go to voters. The questions are dense and lack information about cost and timing. KE felt that the questions could seem cumbersome and confusing to voters and she was not sure information gathered would guide much of the early phases of the project. KE expressed concern that the information could “muddy the waters”.

The discussion continued with BB and members about the ballot questions vs. another community survey. Most agreed that another survey would produce a low yield, similar to the last survey. DF expressed strong opposition to a ballot vote.

At some point, the School Committee will need to get a sense of what the community will support, JP said. If the ballot questions are not presented to voters this spring, the next opportunity to get community feedback may not be until the School Committee is looking to fund a feasibility study. The discussion continued around the potential timing of a ballot vote and whether there would be another opportunity. It was suggested that there could be a ballot vote with elections in the fall. What, KE wondered, would change by that time? BB suggested that it would give the committee more time to work on the questions.

DF agreed that it was important to get the community to support a project, but felt that there was not enough information yet that would allow the community to make informed decisions. DF stressed the importance of continuing to create messaging around the need for a project. The feasibility study would then provide enough information for the community to weigh in on how to move forward.

EC liked the idea of getting information out now and starting the discussions in the community. EC did not want the community to think the project was going in one direction and that the School Committee then changed it. Public opinion has changed and the status of the buildings have changed. EC said it was important to see how people feel.

The Town Clerk had also reviewed the potential questions and shared concerns about the length of the questions and the cost of printing.

The discussion continued about the purpose of the questions. While most members felt that the non-binding questions could serve as a useful data point moving forward, DF thought there would be flaws in the system and questioned how the data would be analyzed. GS felt this one was just another piece to the puzzle. If the data is not usable, GS said, the School Committee will not use it.

It was ultimately decided that the School Committee would continue to work on the questions and discuss them at the next meeting.

- *Motion to support a version of the ballot questions to be reviewed at the next School Committee meeting, was made by EC and seconded by GS. **The motion passed with 5 in favor and 1 not in favor.***

G. Preschool Update

BB acknowledged that the preschool population continues to increase. This year, an additional classroom was added and a specialized classroom is budgeted for FY24. The district, however, needs additional space for this growing population. At this time, BB and the Director of Finance are looking at different options throughout Ipswich to be used as either a centralized location for the preschool program or to house some of the classrooms. A meeting between the Director of Pupil Services and the elementary principals also took place to discuss space needs and the addition of the specialized classroom. If the district cannot find an affordable and available space in town to meet the needs of the program, a consideration would be made to use modular classrooms at Doyon. The modular unit would be used as office space to free up space for a classroom within the school.

EC suggested that it would be beneficial to have input from preschool staff when looking at additional spaces.

There was a question about whether all sections of preschool would be moved to one location. BB said all options were being considered at this point. Knowing that the preschool population continues to grow, the district may be looking at space that could serve as a longer term solution.

8. Superintendent's Administrative Report

Dr. Blake reviewed his schedule from the time since the last School Committee meeting. His report included:

- An Ipswich Education Foundation meeting
- Administrator team meetings
- A meeting with the Director of Finance and Operations to discuss potential preschool locations
- Several subcommittee meetings
- An Ipswich Aware meeting

- Participation in the M.A.S.S. Mid- Winter Conference
- A North Shore Superintendents Roundtable meeting to discuss the increase to out-of-district placement tuitions
- A CREST Collaborative Board of Directors meeting
- Meetings with Human Resources to discuss personal and legal issues
- Ipswich Education Foundation meeting
- A meeting with the former Climate Resiliency Director who recently resigned.
- A DEI Team meeting to discuss the the No Place for Hate initiatives at the schools

9. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- Communications Subcommittee: The group outlined content for the upcoming newsletter. DF is looking at the district's social media presence and how other district's are doing it. The group is thinking about better ways to share information and increase engagement.
- Policy Subcommittee: The group discussed the attendance policy. The High School Council is going to review the policy in the handbook. The group also heard a presentation from students who would like condoms to be available at the middle/high school.
- Mutual Concerns Subcommittee: The group talked about elementary report cards, professional development and the status of substitute teachers in the district.
- Ipswich Education Foundation: The group discussed a new proposal regarding maintaining the Carolyn Davis Fund. A drum set was purchased for the high school and is now in use. The group also approved funding for the purchase of team jackets for the swim team, as well as lacrosse team equipment. There was also a discussion about the grant application process.

10. New Business*

No new business was presented.

11. Vouchers and Bills

All were reviewed and signed.

12. Consent Agenda

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

13. Adjournment

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

Meeting adjourned at 9:03 PM