

Ipswich School Committee

Tuesday, February 7, 2023
MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
7:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

KE called the meeting to order at 7:06 PM.

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

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

2. Reading of the District Mission Statement

EC read the district mission statement.

3. Announcements

KE asked members to project their voices. It has been difficult to hear.

4. Special Acknowledgements

BB thanked the facilities staff for their work in addressing the flooding at the middle/high school.

5. Citizens' Comments

There were none at this time.

6. Presentations

A. FY24 Budget Presentation

BB began the presentation by thanking the leadership team for their work in preparing the budget, as well as the students for their artwork throughout the budget book/presentation. The budget represents a collaborative effort to meet the current and future needs of our students as well as setting the stage for the future as the ESSER funds are depleted.

In preparing the budget, the leadership team met on two occasions with the Budget Subcommittee to discuss programs, plans, and budget concerns. The budget subcommittee allowed the leadership team to build a budget without “backing into a number”. The leadership team was asked to build a budget that includes all of the items that they will need in the future to meet the needs of students and reach the goals outlined in our various plans. The original budgets presented were at an 8.72% increase. After meeting with the leadership team and either cutting items from the budget or moving them to alternative funding sources, the budget now reflects a much lower increase.

- Vision and Mission Statement:

These two statements were taken directly from the Strategy for District Improvement which was developed by the leadership team and endorsed by the School Committee.

- Framework for Student Success:

In addition to the Strategy for District Improvement, the Framework for Student Success pulls together individual school improvement plans, the Strategy for District Improvement, the Elementary and Secondary Education Program Guides, and the various studies that have been done in the district.

The FY24 budget takes into account the individual school improvement plans and is in line with the Strategy for District Improvement. Connections to the DESE Comprehensive District Review can also be found throughout this budget.

- **School Budget Summary:**

The operating budget shows an increase in 5.79%. This includes the addition of 4.62 FTEs. The projected budget amount at this point is \$37,580,266. The town is scheduled to contribute \$36,617,562. An additional total of \$962,704 will come from the Stabilization Fund.

- **Grand Total:**

At the top of this slide is a snapshot of the total FTE changes. The budget represents an increase of 4.62 FTEs. This year, the district is utilizing many outside sources of funding to help support the budget. BB shared the current balances of each account listed on the slide.

- **Federal and State Grant Funding:**

The total Federal and State grant funding is estimated to be \$1,327,150 for FY24. That number represents a net loss of \$129,165 or 8.9% over FY23. The decrease is due primarily to the loss of ESSER/COVID funding.

- **Choice Funds:**

The current cash balance in the Choice Fund is \$1,597,052. There are currently 57 Choice students enrolled with openings available for the upcoming school year. Planned expenditures for FY24 include \$500,000 towards health insurance and \$60,000 towards district-wide hardware.

- **Circuit Breaker**

The current net cash balance in this fund is \$621,455. The DESE reimbursement rate for FY24 has not been determined yet. For planning purposes, 75% has been budgeted for using year-to-date Special Education costs that are currently eligible.

- **Fixed Costs Excluding Healthcare**

The district has a number of fixed costs which include retirements, Medicare, worker's compensation, unemployment, insurances and sick leave. All fixed costs are seeing significant increases.

- **Health Insurance**

Health insurance expenses show an increase of \$129,753 due to a number of factors such as changes in personnel and the types of plans taken. For FY24, the district is estimating a 7.6% increase to plans.

- **Special Education Expenses (Appropriated Budget)**

There is a significant increase to the Special Education budget in FY24. The Commonwealth has approved a 14% tuition increase that out of district placement may charge. There has been a lot of discussion amongst the state's superintendents to see how they can work with the legislature and Governor to potentially spread the 14% increase out over a few years or include a portion of the increase in the state's budget. That increase, along with other Special Education increases, covers a Special Education budget of \$8,893,739.

- **Compensation for All Staff:**

There is a 4.7% increase in compensation from FY23 to FY24, which amounts to \$1,118,297.

- **Positions Funded Through Other Funding Sources:**

There are a lot of positions in the school budget that are not funded with local appropriations. It is important to consider that in future years, all of the ESSER/Covid funding will no longer be available. Some of the positions that are currently funded through those sources may not continue, while other positions may need to be supported in the budget through other funding sources.

- **Enrollment Total:**

Numbers presented were based on the October 1st enrollment report submitted to DESE. The October 1st enrollment in FY23 was 1,603.

Sarah Goodale-O'Brien, principal of the Doyon School, then presented her school's portion of the budget. The presentation began with her thanking all those who helped contribute to the creation of the budget. She then shared the vision statement for the school, along with the educational goals included as part of Doyon's School Improvement Plan.

- Budget Highlights:
 - Net increase: 9.24%
 - Additional preschool classroom serving a population of students with severe disabilities
 - Additional paraeducator for the new preschool classroom
 - A 1.0 FTE assistant principal
 - An increase in classroom instructional supplies

- Overview of Enrollment:

The district is seeing an increase in younger learners. In FY23, Doyon piloted a combined K/Grade 1 classroom. This additional classroom is projected to stay.

- FY24 Budget Breakdown and Comparison

The slide was reviewed. The Special Education percentage increase was highlighted, as that includes the additional preschool classroom.

- Other Funding Sources

Doyon's budget includes positions and materials funded through other sources including the preschool revolving account, the Burley Fund, ESSER grants, and the IDEA grant.

Winthrop School

Amy Sullivan, principal of Winthrop School, then presented her school's portion of the budget. The presentation began with her thanking all those who helped contribute to the creation of the budget. She then shared the vision statement for the school, along with the educational goals included as part of Winthrop's School Improvement Plan.

- Budget Highlights
 - Net increase: 5.54%
 - Additional paraeducator to support student needs and IEPs in Kindergarten and Grade 1
 - Increase the End of School Year (ESY) budget for the elementary summer program due to increased student need and the population at the preschool level
 - Increase to purchased services to fund contracted therapy services
 - Addition of a 1.0 FTE assistant principal

- Enrollment

The budget includes 4 sections in Grade 2, to follow the 4 sections in Grade 1 offered in FY23. Kindergarten numbers are estimated higher than where they may come in.

- Budget Breakdown

Salaries and stipends have increased due to the newly negotiated contracts. Special Education expenses have also increased, mainly due to contracted services and the additional funding for the ESY program.

- Other Funding Sources

Winthrop's budget includes a number of positions and materials funded through outside sources like the Title 1 grant, the Burley Fund, the IDEA grant, the Special Education revolving account, and ESSER grants.

Ipswich Middle School

Kathy McMahon, principal of the Ipswich Middle School, then presented her school's portion of the budget. The presentation began with her thanking all those who helped contribute to the creation of the budget. She then shared the vision statement for the school, along with the educational goals included as part of the Middle School's School Improvement Plan.

- Budget Highlights
 - Net increase: 5.17%

- Increase to Special Education staff to support an over 30% increase to the Special Education population in FY24
- Decrease in the Math material line, utilizing ESSER funding got FY24
- Increase to project-based learning materials
- Increase in the Art materials line
- Contracted increased for salaries, stipends and co-curricular activities

- Enrollment

Enrollment remains relatively consistent and a good size for the current humanities model. There is a large incoming Grade 6 class.

- Budget Breakdown

The information on the slide was reviewed.

- Other Funding Sources

The Middle School's budget includes positions funded through other sources which include the IDEA grant and the Special Education revolving account.

Ipswich High School

Jonathan Mitchell, principal of the Ipswich High School, then presented his school's portion of the budget. The presentation began with him thanking all those who helped contribute to the creation of the budget. He then shared the vision statement for the school, along with the educational goals which were slightly different from those included in the High School's Improvement Plan.

- Budget Highlights

- The budget reflects an "aggressive tightening of the belt" with a net increase of .60%
- Decrease to the Professional Development substitute line
- An increase to the regular substitute line
- A decrease to the Outside PD Providers line
- An increase to the stipend line in the Fine Arts/Music section
- A reduction of a .4 FTE drama teacher
- An increase to the Textbooks/Library Books line
- An increase to the Professional Salaries in the Health Services section
- An increase to the Professional Salaries in the Guidance section due to step and lane changes
- A reduction in the Guidance Materials lines
- An increase on the Professional Salaries in the Special Education section

- Enrollment

Unlike the other schools, it is difficult to determine exact class sizes because students in various grades could be enrolled in the same classes.

- Budget Breakdown

The slide was reviewed.

- Other Funding Sources

The High School's budget includes positions funded through other sources which include the IDEA grant and ESSER grants. There may be an increase in use of the Athletic Revolving Account. It was decided to change the rotation of new uniforms from every five years to every four years.

District Wide Building Operations

- Budget Highlights

- Net increase: 10.99%
- Increase in utility costs
- Continued major repair needs at all building
- Some utility cost increases are offset by revolving funds

- Escalating costs of goods and services related to the continued repairs in the buildings/systems due to the age of the buildings

Central Office

- Budget Highlights:
 - Net increase: 6.95%
 - CBAs settled & incorporated into the respective budgets
 - Funding for a part-time district-wide parent/student liaison in ESSER III in FY23, moved to appropriated budget
 - Long term subs increased to match actual spending
 - Increase need for professional development for staff
 - Majority of professional development funded through grants: \$178,214
 - Out of District tuitions include 14% OSD rate increase for OOD
 - Increase of 2 FTEs for ELL, one of them driven by number of hours prescribed by state recommendations and 1 position moved from ESSER III to appropriated budget
 - Significant increases for fixed costs
 - Driven by 7.6% increase in health insurance premiums
 - Offset some of the costs with choice funds
 - Pension obligation increased by 19% over FY23
 - HR Department broken out into their own department, originally funded in Superintendent/Finance budget
 - Performing Arts Director in previous budgets hired in FY23

On slide 13 of the presentation, the Special Education expenses are listed as 24% of the budget. GS asked if the 14% increase to out of district placement tuition represents 14% over the FY23 Special Education budget. BB explained that the 14% is for out of district placements, or private placements for students. The 14% is based on what the district knows as placements for FY24. That number can change with students moving in, moving out or aging in or out of the programs. GS again asked what the 14% represents, how meaningful it is and what would happen if the state were to cover it.

Dr. Beverly Hegedus, Director of Pupil Services, explained that the district creates a five year projection that includes current placemats and anticipated placement. A 3% increase in tuition each year is used to determine funding for the budget. This year's increase could be 14%. Also included in the Special Education expenses are preschool costs, particularly with the additional intensive needs classroom. BB added that they can look more closely at what the 14% increase represents and report back at the next meeting.

Looking at the total FY23 operating budget vs. the total FY24 operating budget, the FY24 budget includes the increased Chapter 70 funds. GS asked if those funds would come through the allocated funds through the town and if that number was taken out of the budget, would the increase to the budget actually represent a 7.5% increase? BB said that he would work with the Director of Finance to review the numbers and provide an answer at the next meeting.

The Director of Finance was going to look into the total contribution to the Stabilization Fund for this year.

GS added that the disappointing part of this budget was that it included all "needs" and no "wants". There was not a lot that could be cut from the budget and there is little to be done about the increases in terms of inflation and Special Education.

EC asked if the district considered looking at grant fundings for the increased supplies in some areas. BB and Ms. Mahon added that these types of materials would not be considered innovative, as they are everyday materials needed for particular classrooms/teachers to be successful.

EC then talked about the Mandarin classes at Winthrop Schools. While EC supports a World Language program at the elementary schools, she wonders about the alignment of these courses for students as they enter middle school. EC asked if there was consideration made to transition to a language that better works with the alignment of both elementary schools and the middle school. Ms. Sullivan felt this was a larger discussion. The World Language program at the elementary level, Ms. Sullivan explained, was to expose students to other cultures and languages. French is also offered at the middle school, but is not an option at either elementary school.

Tracy Wagner, Director of Teaching and Learning, talked about how the dyslexia mandate is being paired with a shift in view of early literacy and the science of reaching at the elementary level. Teams have been working to identify students who need additional support in the classroom and then working on ways to embed those supports into the general education curriculum. Ms. Wagner used the Illustrative Math program and the introduction of math coaches as an example of identifying need and bringing in tiered one supports directly to regular curriculum. The plan is to follow a similar coaching model with literacy.

BB addressed the need for two assistant principals and why there was a request for one shared assistant principal last year. BB knew there were budgetary concerns last year and that two assistant principals would not pass. Having one shared position would have been better than no position at all. There is a need for a full time position in each of the elementary schools this year and there was a need last year, as well.

Ms. Goodale-O'Brien said that there were positions at Doyon that were equivalent to the Title 1 funded positions at Winthrop. Those positions included a reading specialist, math specialist, and two paraeducators to support reading and one paraeducator to support math.

Ms. Goodale-O'Brien then spoke about the status of the new playground at Doyon. Phase 1 of the project has been funded and the equipment has been ordered. There is a planned community build scheduled for late April. Many of the structures can be moved if there is a need in the upcoming years.

BB talked about the district's plans to utilize alternative funding sources for some budget items. The funds are being utilized cautiously and any need for outside/alternative funding is evaluated each year as the budget is created.

A question was raised about the projected enrollment numbers at each of the elementary schools and why Winthrop seemed to project more incoming students. Ms. Sullivan said she typically increases projections at particular grades to account for students moving into the district. DF suggested that schools should consider having a uniform way of accounting for additional students.

Mr. Mitchell explained the decrease to the PD Substitute line, stating that it represents more of a clerical change. Professional development is still taking place, but the substitutes are all pulling from the same budget line now.

BB talked about the balancing act with regard to the use of certain funds like Choice and Circuit Breaker. The district could draw down the accounts now and have a lower overall budget increase, but there would be no funds to offset the budget in later years. KE asked what would be considered a good balance in each of these funds. Mr. Markham, Director of Finance, said that districts all approach these funds differently. It was important to have healthy balances in these funds so they can be used when the ESSER funding goes away. BB added that the Choice fund is naturally going to deplete because fewer Choice students are coming to Ipswich each year.

KE talked about the substantial increase in personnel in the buildings over the last five years. While KE understands the need, it was important to be cognizant of the increase in staffing compared to a lower enrollment. BB added that the administrative team was starting to have those conversations and were looking closely at class sizes, the Special Education program, and how best to utilize providers to effectively serve the most amount of students.

The part time District Family Liaison position was discussed. The position has supported students and families in all buildings, connecting them to community resources, translation services, etc. The position has been an asset to the district and is a resource needed above and beyond the proposed assistant principal positions.

GS asked for information on where the ESSER III grant funding was represented in the budget and what the district would be facing when the funding is no longer provided. BB was going to get that specific information for the next meeting. Keith Borgen, Director of Technology, added that a lot of funding has been used for software and services. The technology department is prepared to move those items into the appropriated budget. BB added that the district will need to look at the ESSER funded positions and whether they would continue utilizing other funding sources or potentially absorb the positions into the FY25 appropriated budget.

EC and BB talked about the cohort of "Covid babies" and the additional supports this group needs. There was significant learning loss and socialization loss during the pandemic that has impacted students and will take a longer time to reconcile.

JD mentioned the need for the middle/high school library to offer extended hours beyond the school day. When the issue was discussed at a previous meeting, staffing/funding issues were mentioned as reasons why there were not currently extended hours. JD asked if those issues had been addressed anywhere in the budget. Mr. Mitchell shared that the library is now staffed until 3:30 PM. The high school was also looking at applying for a Paine Grant to support extended coverage of the library and cardio room.

JP asked about what was included in the debt service. BB was going to get that information and present it at the next meeting.

KE asked what percentage of the 5.79% budget increase included fixed costs and wants vs. needs. KE suggested that it was important to show what increases in the budget are out of the control of the district, such as increased health insurance costs and services and materials impacted by inflation. BB added that other districts are seeing similar increases to their budgets. GS said that the increase in the budget is mainly due to Special Education increases and increases to fixed costs and health insurance. Most additional increases are being absorbed by ESSER funding, grants, and other outside funding sources.

BB confirmed the information that he would have prepared for the next meeting.

7. New Business*

The meeting scheduled for Wednesday, March 7th was canceled.

8. Adjournment

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

Meeting adjourned at 9:01 PM

FY24 Budget Presentation