

Ipswich School Committee

Thursday, October 17, 2024

MS/HS Ensemble Room

134 High Street, Ipswich

7:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

DF called the order at 7:01 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)

2. Reading of the District Mission Statement

KE read the mission statement.

3. Announcements

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, November 7th at 7:00 PM in the MS/HS Ensemble Room
- The Special Town Meeting will be held in the Performing Arts Center in the Ipswich Middle/High School on Tuesday, October 22nd at 7:00 PM.
- Negotiations with the AFSCME Food Services Unit will be held on Thursday, October 24th at 4:30 PM in the MS/HS Guidance Conference Room.

4. Special Acknowledgements

In the wake the recent tragedy at the high school, the following people were acknowledged:

- MS/HS Counseling staff/administrators
- Teachers for their flexibility during this time to meet needs of students and supporting each other
- All those reached out to offer support and kind words
- Dr. Blake for his compassion and guidance over the next few weeks

5. Public Comments¹

DF read the statement on public comments. She shared that the appropriate way to contact School Committee members is through public comment or the email addresses located on the district website.

- **Pavica Kneedler, Cortland Way:** Emphasized the importance of a modern education facility and provided context on the history of the building project. Expressed concern over rising construction costs, noting that continued debate would only increase expenses. Stated that Ipswich cannot afford two schools and urged unity to build one new school.
- **Pete Buletza, Argilla Road:** Read a statement on behalf of another community member, Isaac Garcia-Dale, supporting a small in-town school.
- **Jamie Norton, Linden Street:** With 25 years in education and 15 years in school administration, shared experience with a large middle school in Beverly, which faced overcrowding and rising enrollment challenges. Supported building a new Doyon School first and delaying Winthrop, stressing that the quality of teaching matters most.

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.

- **Shawn Cashman, Summer Street:** Voiced strong support for maintaining two schools, highlighting community values of equity and local identity. Criticized actions to recuse board members as a disservice to the town and suggested that either all members recuse themselves or none.
- **Ingrid Miles:** Expressed concern about the timing of this debate and supported two schools to preserve neighborhood identity and community spirit. Noted the potential impact on economic development if families must travel out of town for school, stressing that Ipswich's character is central to its value and attractiveness.

6. High School Student Representative Report

No report was presented.

7. Presentations

A. Overnight Field Trip Request: Washington, D.C./Philadelphia

Middle School Principal, Peter Ginolfi, presented his request for the Grade 8 trip to Washington, DC. scheduled for June 4 through June 6, 2024. The cost of the trip is \$1,229 per student and it is anticipated that up to 125 students will attend. In past years, students and staff traveled by bus, however, they plan to fly directly to Washington this year pending enough interest. Scholarships are available to students who may need assistance with the cost of the trip.

- Motion to support the Middle School Washington, DC overnight field trip request as presented was made by SS and seconded by JD. *The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

B. Overnight Field Trip Request: Ecology School

Middle School Principal, Peter Ginolfi, shared that Grade 6 students will attend Ecology School at Riverbend Farm in Maine from April 29 through May 2, 2024. The cost of the trip is \$399 per student and it is anticipated that approximately 108 students will attend. The trip is deeply tied to the sustainability/ecology curriculum in the 6th grade.

- Motion to support the Ecology School overnight field trip request as presented was made by SS and seconded by JD. *The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

C. MCAS/Accountability Data Presentation

Tracy Wagner, Director of Teaching and Learning, presented the MCAS scores for the 2023-2024 school year. Her presentation included:

- MCAS Overview
- What State Standards the MCAS assess
- New competency requirements for the class of 2026
- Things to consider when looking at the scores
- MCAS data and trends by grade, school and test subject
- A review of the accountability data and trends across the district
- A review of how Ipswich uses MCAS and other data
- A review of the Curriculum Review Cycle
- Where to find more information on the MCAS

Dr. Wagner then addressed comments and questions from committee members around how the test is administered, additional assessments, competency scores, and student growth percentiles.

D. Vote on Ipswich Educators Association Unit A, ESP, and Paraeducator Collective Bargaining Agreements

The School Committee reviewed the Ipswich Educators' Association (IEA) Memorandums of Agreement (MOA) for Unit A, ESP, and Paraeducators during an executive session held last meeting. Once the MOAs have been ratified by each party, the changes will be integrated into the respective collective bargaining agreement.

- Motion to ratify the Ipswich Educators' Association Unit A collective bargaining agreement as presented in executive session was made by JD and seconded by HR. *The motion passed unanimously in favor.*
- Motion to ratify the Ipswich Educators' Association ESP collective bargaining agreement as presented in executive session was made by KE and seconded by HR. *The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

- Motion to ratify the Ipswich Educators' Association Paraeducator collective bargaining agreement as presented in executive session was made by HR and seconded by JD. *The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

E. Discussion and Vote on a Position for a Future Elementary Building Project

Prior to the start of the discussion, JD recused herself and stepped out of the meeting room.

It was confirmed at the School Committee workshop on September 19th, that the School Committee would take a position on the Elementary School Building Project. After recapping the discussion at the last meeting, DF asked that each member share their position and/or statement prior to taking a vote.

SS: Highlighted past engagement with the community and noted the elementary educational plan, and how to meet the needs of current students while considering flexibility for future students. Emphasized community support for a single-school model as the best and most viable option for future students.

MP: Acknowledged the long-standing debate, pointing out the high cost of maintaining the current Winthrop building. Emphasized the town's need for a politically and economically viable project. MP said he is ultimately supporting a single school at Doyon to avoid a "do nothing" outcome.

HR: Agreed with a consolidated school plan. Highlighted the need for a unified approach and community collaboration to address concerns and build consensus.

JC: Shared new analysis on model school costs that indicated potential cost savings with MSBA funding. JC suggested a reconsideration of the vote timing and the need for additional community engagement sessions.

DF: Clarified that the information JC provided was her own analysis and the numbers presented were not vetted by the School Committee.

KE: Discussed the School Committee's effort to collect data, weigh options, and be thorough and transparent with the community through the process. A combined school minimizes risks by requiring only one MSBA-approved project, which reduces the need for multiple votes and increases efficiency. It also offers flexibility, sustainability, and cost savings, which is essential for taxpayers. Members see it as their responsibility to provide the best learning environment, meet educational goals, and complete the project effectively, as part of a moral obligation to support all students and the community.

DF: Acknowledged the community's concerns and the impact of the project on everyone. Shared that extensive research and listening have informed their position, with the recent workshop being particularly helpful. Emphasized that inaction would negatively impact education, as students and staff need improved learning environments. Encouraged continued dialogue as the project progresses.

BB: As Superintendent, supports the board's direction and personally advocates for a single school at the Doyon site. Emphasized that the current buildings are outdated and cannot meet modern educational needs. The Superintendent expressed doubt that there would be sufficient community support or funding to build two schools in the future, especially with other significant town expenses expected. The vote is intended to signal to the MSBA the district's preferred direction, not to finalize a project. BB believes one school is the best option for educational, financial, and equity reasons.

TM: highlighted that equity is the strongest argument for a single-school model, emphasizing the operational benefits a single building would provide to both students and the community. A single campus would result in significant cost savings over time in areas such as educational resources, food services, and maintenance. TM noted that if the district is invited into the MSBA process, reimbursement would be provided only for a single-school option, not for two separate schools.

JC made a motion to postpone the vote on the direction of the school building, however there was no second and therefore no vote was taken.

- Motion to take the position to support a single building project that creates a unified community school for all Ipswich elementary students at the site of the current Paul F. Doyon Memorial School was made by SS and seconded by HR. *The motion passed with 5 in favor, 1 opposed.*

KE suggested organizing a visit to a school, such as Swampscott, and possibly inviting community members to join, as it may provide valuable insights. SS noted that previous tours were highly informative. KE proposed inviting individuals who may not support the recent decision, to foster broader understanding.

The Elementary School Building Project Working Group will meet to discuss cost and what to share with the Strategic Planning Committee. The Communications Subcommittee will meet to discuss how to share the information around this vote with the community and MSBA.

JD rejoined the meeting at the conclusion of this agenda item.

F. Vote to Dispose of School Owned-Property: Wheelchair Accessible Van

A school-owned van, with 260,000 miles, has been in disrepair in recent years. A mechanic evaluated it over the summer and recommended discontinuing its use due to mechanical and safety concerns. There is a request to declare the van a surplus asset and to allow for disposal, as another vehicle has already been swapped in for use. There is no recommendation to replace the van at this time.

- Motion that the School Committee declare the district's 2008 Ford Econoline Van as surplus and beyond repair and authorize the Director of Finance and Operations to effect the disposition of this asset consistent with state law and town procedure was made by KE and seconded by JD. *The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

G. Policy Update

DF presented the latest draft of a proposed sustainability policy for feedback. The plan is to gather feedback from the School Committee and then share the draft policy with relevant groups and schedule a vote later in the fall.

Members discussed the policy and made some recommendations. There was a discussion on how the policy would be implemented and the potential to create a task force that oversees the implementation of the policy.

H. Finance Update

TM shared the newly created Noresco policy. The draft policy outlines broad guidelines for how the town would repay the cost of the Noresco project. The repayment is expected to take up to 20 years.

JC inquired about evaluating cost savings, and KE mentioned an investment-grade audit available on the town website. SS suggested that the School Committee should be involved in discussions affecting the four public school buildings. TM agreed that this could be considered in future discussions. KE noted that the TM is comfortable with the policy as it stands.

8. Superintendent's Administrative Report

Recent activities included updates from the Tech Department, the YMCA stakeholder group, and athletic programs, as well as participation in a school violence prevention webinar. Additionally, BB participated in an IEF meeting and a stakeholder discussion regarding the Middle School extended day program. At Winthrop School, ongoing odor issues required the relocation of a classroom to the art room. An update on playground drainage issues was also provided.

9. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- **Communications Subcommittee:** Two documents were discussed- 1. October newsletter and 2. An open letter to the MSBA notifying them of the ongoing work of the School Committee and the most recent vote.
- **Operations Subcommittee:** School Committee goals will be presented at the next meeting.
- **Feoffee Policy Working Group:** Decided there are a lot of areas to tackle within the policy. The plan is to start with the process. The process then informs the policy.
- **Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board:** JC attended her first meeting, talked about intersections/crosswalks that were dangerous and discussed upcoming grants.

- **Student Advisory Council:** The students had an emotional meeting, but felt supported. They are reflecting thoughtfully on the rest of the school year and ways to remember students throughout the year.
- **Ipswich Education Foundation:** Met and reviewed several grant proposals that were approved.

10. New Business*

No new business was presented.

11. Consent Agenda

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

12. Adjournment

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

Meeting adjourned at 9:48 PM