

Ipswich School Committee
Wednesday, February 5, 2025
MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
7:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

DF called the meeting to order at 7:09 PM

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

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

2. Reading of the District Mission Statement

CQ read the district mission statement.

3. Announcements and Special Acknowledgements

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, February 6th at 7:00 PM in the MS/HS Ensemble Room.
- JC acknowledged CQ for his time on the High School swim team.

4. Public Comments¹

DF read the statement on public comment.

K. Mavroides, Poplar Street: representing a few members of the School Council and some elementary school families, addressed the budget and the proposed elimination of the world language program at the elementary schools. The program is highly valued by families and students. She expressed concern over how quickly an academic program can be removed, especially one that impacts almost all elementary students. The removal of the world language program was seen as alarming due to the short timeline and the lack of clear procedures or guardrails to prevent such deletions. Ms. Mavroides asked what the process is for allowing input on program changes and emphasized that there wasn't enough time given for input before removing a program. She also inquired whether there is a policy in place for facilitating the removal of academic programs.

5. Presentations

A. FY26 Budget Presentation

BB began the presentation by reviewing the timeline for the FY26 budget and the steps leading up to the final budget presentation. The budget presented tonight represents a 4.29% increase over the FY25 budget. The FY26 proposed budget totals \$41,557,607. That total comes from an anticipated town contribution of \$39,835,417 and a request from the School Stabilization Fund in the amount of \$1,722,190.

BB reviewed the total staff FTEs which came to 332.89. He then reviewed the outside sources that will be used to supplement the budget. The budget presentation continued and included:

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.

- Massachusetts school district profile from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Prior year, current, and projected enrollment totals district-wide
- Federal and state grant funding.
 - BB noted that at the time of the presentation, the district was not aware of the total amount of funding that would be awarded to the district.
- School Choice funds including revenue and expenses
- Circuit Breaker funds including revenue and expenses
- Fixed costs expenses, excluding health insurance
- Health insurance expenses
 - BB noted that the district has planned for an anticipated increase of 15% to health insurance, however that number may actually be closer to 19%.
- Special Education expenses included in the appropriated budget
- Total compensation for all staff
 - This slide includes all FY26 negotiated increases and step/lane changes

Comments/Questions:

TM shared that the health insurance increases are being offset by School Choice funds, as well as other otherside funding. Special Education costs are also being offset by outside funds, as the district is trying to be mindful about what is being appropriated in the budget.

BB shared additional information on the review process for health insurance plans. Right now, Ipswich is seeing a higher insurance usage rate which is leading to higher insurance rates. TM confirmed that all town/school collective bargaining units are included in the PEC Committee that oversees the review of insurance plans. Votes are weighted based on participation, which means that the Ipswich Educators Association has a strong voice at the table.

BB talked about the step/lane changes, noting that staff must notify Central Office of their anticipated category changes by January 15th. The district is seeing an increase in the number of staff taking graduate level courses.

Student Services

Director of Student Services, Eric Oxford, presented an overview of the Student Services department. His presentation included:

- Strategic Planning Process
 - Strategic Priorities for FY26-FY30
 - Redefining & Rebranding the Department
 - Efficiency & Calibration of Resources
 - Ensuring Authentic Opportunities for All Students
 - Align Practices For Special Education Services and Decisions
 - FY26 Budget Planning Priorities
 - Maximize alignment and efficiency with district-wide department budget needs
 - Create new programmatic structures to establish equity; maximize inclusion
 - Analyze current and projected out-of-district costs (tuition & transportation) to prioritize fiscal responsibility
- Budget Priority #1: Maximize Alignment & Efficiency of Resources
 - Improved Efficiency & Resource Allocation: Streamlining budget processes ensures resources are directed where they have the greatest impact.
 - Enhanced Service Delivery: Consolidating services to the central budget minimizes redundancies and increases efficiency across schools.
- Budget Priority #1 Action Items:
 - Move OT and PT positions to central budget
 - Move ESY services line to central budget
 - Move contracted services to central budget

- Move most assessment supplies to central budget
- Budget Priority #2: Create New Programmatic Structures
 - Expanded Therapeutic Supports
 - Addition of therapeutic clinician at Ipswich Middle School
 - Addition of therapeutic teacher at Ipswich High School
 - Addition of school adjustment counselors: Doyon & Winthrop
 - Investment in Early Childhood Coordinator
 - Provide leadership, oversight, and PD/training for EC staff
 - Oversight of PreK/K screenings, special education mandates; MTSS/Dyslexia mandates & goals for early intervention.
 - Liaison between with Early Intervention agencies and private preschools to support smooth transitions
- Budget Priority #2 Action Items:
 - Enhanced emotional and behavioral support
 - Stronger tiered systems of supports
 - Investment in our youngest learners
 - Stabilization of out-of-district referrals
- Budget Priority #3: Prioritize stabilization of out-of-district costs

Comments/Questions:

Dr. Oxford was asked to further explain the additional therapeutic specialist positions. He clarified that four new positions have been added across the district, however all are not new budget items- some positions are just being reallocated. KE asked for clarification about the district moving to a model that focused on retaining more students. It was explained that by hiring these additional therapeutic positions, the district will see short-term costs that will lead to long-term savings. Dr. Oxford discussed building up support structures and expertise to better support students. The goal, he shared, was to first address current student needs and then potentially bring back some outplaced students. Dr. Oxford also addressed questions about contracted service providers, stating that contracted rates are typically higher than in-district staff. Lastly, Dr. Oxford discussed the Early Childhood Coordinator position, explaining that there are currently a lot of people doing that work leading to inefficiencies.

Paul F. Doyon Memorial School

Principal Adam Mullen reviewed Doyon's educational goals, budget highlights, projected enrollment, and salary and services comparisons.

Budget highlights included:

- Net Budget Increase: \$143,488
- Percentage Budget Increase: 2.61%
- Increase of 0.5 Literacy Coach (Presently Grant Funded)
- Increase of 0.5 Health Teacher (New Position)
- Decrease of 0.5 World Language Teacher (Elementary District-Wide Position)
- Transfer of 1 Paraeducator to Support Social-Emotional Learning/Offer Tier 2/3 Intervention for Students
- Development of "CARES Connection" Learning Space/Student Support Center
- Development of Building-Based Furniture Replacement Program
- Reading Materials - Supports the implementation of Wit and Wisdom programming, providing teachers and students with appropriate materials for year two of implementation.
- Social Studies Materials- Supports printing and binding of textbooks for students engaging in Massachusetts Social Studies curriculum.
- Science Materials - Shifting to ensure funding for Mystery Science application.
- Preschool Materials-Create equitable supply funding to grade-level colleagues.
- Centralization of special education funding sources and transference of technological applications that assist in student learning. These items are present in the Central Office budget.

Comments/Questions:

Mr. Mullen first answered questions about the proposed health teacher and how the health standards would be included in the elementary schedule. After an extensive review of the new MA Comprehensive Health Standards last year, it became clear that the additional standards could not fit into current instruction. A compass committee was formed to unpack the standards and present recommendations on how to incorporate these into the curriculum. It was determined that a .5 position at each elementary school was necessary. The Compass Committee and administrative team are still assessing the schedule.

Mr. Mullen and the Director of Teaching and Learning, Tracy Wager, talked about the increases to materials for the new ELA curriculum Wit and Wisdom. Dr. Wagner explained that some costs were predicted. It was recommended that each student have their own books which became an increased expense. Some consumables are workbooks that will need to be purchased annually.

HR asked how Doyon is building a sense of belonging for students and how these supports are being incorporated into the classroom. Mr. Mullen talked about Responsive Classroom and the Student Support Center.

TM and Mr. Mullen clarified where the staffing changes were reflected in the budget book.

KE talked about the purchase of furniture and expressed concerns in long term investments in furniture when there is the potential for a new school in upcoming years.

Winthrop School

Principal Amy Sullivan reviewed Winthrop's educational goals, budget highlights, projected enrollment, and salary and services comparisons.

Budget highlights included:

- Total Net Budget Increase: \$62,540
- Percentage of Budget Increase: 1.13%
- Increases
 - .5 Comprehensive Health Teacher
 - 1.0 Reading Specialist
 - 1.0 School Adjustment Counselor
- Reallocations
 - 1.0 Special Education Teacher to 1.0 Interventionist
- Reductions
 - 1.0 Grant Funded Special Education Teacher
 - .5 World Language Teacher
 - .5 School Psychologist
 - .67 Library Assistant
 - 2.0 Reading Paraeducators
- More centralized budget for:
 - Special Education- Extended School Year, Contracted Services, OT/PT
 - Technology- Instructional software for Reading and Math
- Increase in ELA Budget for Consumables for Second Year of New Literacy Program

Comments/Questions:

Ms. Sullivan talked about the preschool numbers, explaining that the projected total enrollment of 45 was that target number of students for the program. The preschool program has a model where some students attend two days per week, some 4-5 per week based on need. Ideally, class sizes remain around 15 students. Currently, seven students are on IEPs while 8 are role model peers.

Ms. Sullivan talked about the World Language position, noting that without a financial crisis, the program could be reimaged to prevent cuts. Due to scheduling constraints, there is a limited amount of time that can be allotted to this program. Financial stability of the program has been an issue. Balancing this program with other student needs has been difficult. Ms. Sullivan discussed the incorporation of the new health standards as also being difficult with the current funding. These health standards are a directive from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, rather than an innovative program that came through a Paine Grant. Dr. Wagner added that state standards dictate what content areas are taught. Locally, a curriculum review cycle is used to review standards. The World Language program was brought into the schools through a Paine Grant and followed a different path

compared to state mandates.

Ipswich Middle School

Principal Peter Ginolfi reviewed the high school's educational goals, budget highlights, projected enrollment, and salary and services comparisons.

Budget highlights included:

- Net Budget Increase: \$ 175,641
- Percentage Budget Increase: 3.19%
- Development of a specialized program designed to support high-needs Special Education students by providing individualized services tailored to their unique needs. This program ensures that students receive the necessary support to access a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) within our school community.
- Addition of an RBT and a paraprofessional to meet the needs of students in the program.
- Purchase of a Health Curriculum for grades 6,7,8 as a result of the new DESE Comprehensive Health Standards.

Comments/Questions:

Mr. Ginolfi explained that the new health teacher was not replacing the D.A.R.E program. He also explained the .2 FTE in music. This is a current teacher who teaches .8 at the High School and .2 at the Middle School. The High School was originally carrying the full FTE.

Ipswich High School

Principal Jonathan Mitchell reviewed the high school's educational goals, budget highlights, projected enrollment, and salary and services comparisons.

Budget highlights included:

- Net Budget Increase: \$78,530
- Net Budget Percent Increase: 1.00% Net
- Online Learning Purchased Services- 50 Virtual High School Seats +\$8,250
- Professional Salaries- Reduction of 1.0 FTE -\$72,430
- Professional Salaries- Reduction of .2 FTE for VHS teacher -\$20,681
- Purchased Services- Additional 32 seats, Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship +\$3,000
- Professional Salaries- Middle School picked up .2 FTE -\$20,192
- Instructional Materials for 3D Printing +\$3,000
- Supplies for Tech/Engineering (wood, metal, etc.) +\$5,000
- Eliminate stipend for dual enrollment -\$5,590
- Increase 1.0 FTE for Theater Arts/Dance/PE Teacher +\$67,091
- ESY Program Moved to Central Special Education Budget -\$50,820
- Increase .5 FTE for teacher returning from sabbatical +\$49,485

Comments/Questions:

Mr. Mitchell shared that the average ELA class size would increase by 1 student with the reduction of an ELA teacher. Asked whether there would be a loss of ELA electives, Mr. Mitchell said that "Intro to Psych" may be affected. Final course offerings are dependent on student requests, and some may be shifted to other teachers if there is interest.

Mr. Mitchell talked about the dance position, explaining that standards for dance have existed, but courses have not been offered due to staffing limitations. Mr. Mitchell anticipates that this new position could assist with after-school drama productions.

District Wide Building Operations

Budget highlights included:

- Net Budget Decrease: (\$47,761)
- Net Percentage Budget Decrease: - 2.09%
- Leveling utility costs, except for 7% increase in Water & Sewer
- Includes cost of wage increases for Custodian AFSCME CBA FY25-27
- Building maintenance reductions expected due to new school roofs, and current investments in school boiler and HVAC systems

- Continued needed repairs level funded at all of the buildings, school kitchens
- Utility cost increases are offset by revolving funds (EDP and SFS)
- Reduced salary share with Town due to Facilities Department reorganization

District Wide and Central Office

Budget highlights included:

- Net Budget Increase: \$527,704
- Net Percentage Budget Increase: 3.38%
- All CBAs settled and incorporated into the FY25 and FY26 budgets
4.0% Teacher's COLA, 4.5% ESPs COLA, average 6.8% Paraprofessionals COLA, 2.5% Custodian COLA, 2.0% Clerical COLA, 2.5% Café Workers COLA plus \$794,555 in cost of advancement through the salary/wage scales (all groups)
- Student Services/Special Education Dept. re-organization to better align staffing with both unique and shared student need, and to provide in-district programming
- Funding for a part-time shared with Town positions, Climate Resiliency Manager and DPW Facilities Director
- Increase in IT/Technology budget reflect loss of final ESSER funds, and enhanced technology for curriculum, assessment and classroom needs
- Increase need for professional development for staff
 - Majority of professional development funded through grants: level funding expected
- Although reductions in placements overall, Out of District tuitions include rate increase for OOD and greater service requirement, including mandated transportation
- Increase of 1.0 FTEs for Literacy Coach, driven by ELA curriculum needs currently supported by a Paine Grant moved to appropriated budget
- Significant increases for fixed costs
 - Driven by 15% increase in health insurance premiums
 - Offset the increased cost with Choice funds (approx. \$395,000)
 - Pension obligation increasing by 6.25% over FY25
- Cost for Short Term Debt Service for school roof projects
- School Bus transportation contract to be extended (expires June 30, 2026)

Comments/Questions:

TM clarified that the Climate Resiliency Manager will continue to be split with the Town. SS asked about the additional FTE in the Special Education Secretary/Therapist lines. TM clarified that the therapist is already an employee and adding hours. There is an additional secretary added to Student Services to support the Early Childhood Coordinator work and support one of the schools. Dr. Oxford added that the BCBA is net neutral and is an essential role.

TM continued the presentation by reviewing upcoming dates relevant to the FY26 budget. He also discussed the district's continued reliance on revolving funds and other outside funding sources.

SS asked that TM and BB be prepared to discuss the revolving account balances, updated capital expenses, and the override calculator at the next School Committee meeting.

6. New Business*

- DF announced that the next School Committee meeting has been postponed to Wednesday, February 12, 2025 at 7:00 PM.
- CQ asked the School Committee to review his Town Meeting pamphlet.

7. Adjournment

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

Meeting adjourned at 10:52 PM