

Ipswich School Committee
MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
Thursday, May 4, 2023
7:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

KE called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

Members Present: K. Eliot (KE) J. Poirier (JP)
 J. Donahue (JD) D. Freehan (DF)
 P. Kneedler (PK) 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 district mission statement.

3. Announcements

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, May 18th at 7:00pm in the MS/HS Ensemble Room
- Town Meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 9th at 7:00pm in the Dolan Performing Arts Center
- Town elections are on Tuesday, May 16th
- The district is hosting a School Safety and Security Forum on Wednesday, May 10th from 6-7pm in the Dolan Performing Arts Center. A form was sent by email to the school community to submit questions ahead of time.

4. Special Acknowledgements

BB acknowledged the parents and community members that spent the weekend building the playground at the Paul F. Doyon Memorial School.

This was EC, GS, and PK's last meeting. Members were thanked for their years of service and acknowledged for the work they have accomplished while on the committee.

5. Citizens' Comments

Chub Whitten, Argilla Road: thanked departing members for their years of service to the town. He also thanked Ms. McMahon for her work bringing kindness and joy to the Middle School as principal.

Nat Pulsifer, Waldingfield Road: here to answer any questions about the Feoffees should they come up.

Chris Collier, Pleasant Street: asked if there have been discussions about safety plans in the schools. He was looking for guidance on how to move a safety plan forward, as well as feedback on what action steps he can take to help. He suggested the formation of a safety committee outside of the schools.

KE suggested that Mr. Collier reach out to the School Committee through email and also attend the upcoming safety forum.

Becky Slawson, IEA President: wanted to acknowledge the many discussions the committee has had over the past year regarding the preschool program. The IEA is aware how essential it is for the town and district to educate the youngest learners in Ipswich. The IEA is also aware that meeting the needs of the smallest kids is unique and different than other work done in other schools. There are growing concerns in the preschool program and teachers are not feeling like their concerns are being addressed. At an earlier meeting, Alicia Thomas, was able to provide feedback from preschool staff. At that time, Ms. Thomas requested an

opportunity to set up a meeting with educators, administrators, and other stakeholders to have a conversation about the future of the preschool program. The IEA is aware that the School Committee and town are working towards a long term solution for the buildings, but that is not happening tomorrow. The IEA is still waiting on a response for a meeting. Tonight, Ms. Slawson was again asking for a meeting with district leadership to talk about how to create a safe and effective program moving forward.

6. High School Student Representative Report

JB expressed administration for the AP students and the work they have put into their classroom and preparation for exams.

7. Presentations

A. High School Robotics Team Presentation

Members of the High School Robotics Team, along with their mentor Scott Jewell, discussed their success in competition this season. Their presentation highlighted their team membership, which includes several 8th grade students, how competitions are run, and an overview of their success this season. The team stands out for being student-led. All students participate in the design, build, and programming of the robot, fundraising, and registering for events. Participation on the robotics team offers students real world experience not only in engineering, but also in a collaborative approach to problem-solving.

B. Dyslexia Mandate Presentation

Tracy Wagner, Director of Teaching and Learning, presented information on the Massachusetts Dyslexia Screening Mandate. Before reviewing the updated guidelines, Ms. Wager read the state's definition of Dyslexia. The presentation then reviewed the updated Massachusetts General Law (MGL) that will go into effect in July 2023. The law states:

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education issues guidelines that support district development of screening procedures for students demonstrating potential signs of a neurological learning disability including, but not limited to, dyslexia. The Guidelines are intended to assist district administrators, all educators, and families to make decisions that will result in the best possible outcomes for students.

The new legislation states that Massachusetts schools need to screen children in grades 1-3 two times a year using a state approved screener. These guidelines serve three purposes:

1. To provide a set of **screening guidelines** for all students, including students demonstrating one or more potential signs of a neurological learning disability including, but not limited to, dyslexia;
2. To provide a **framework of intervention** for students at risk of dyslexia and other learning difficulties that is timely and responsive;
3. To provide a **comprehensive resource** of evidence-based practices aimed at all educators to support students at risk of dyslexia and those identified as having dyslexia, consistent with and linked to other guidance from DESE.

Ms. Wagner noted that some of the language in the guidelines is general, so the district reached out to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for clarification around what is required regarding parent communication. The district is striving to balance transparency of results without unduly alarming families.

Compliance is already in place within the district. During the 2021-2022 school year, educators participated in Dyslexia workshops with Melissa Orkin. In 2022-2023, a planning team consisting of principals, reading specialists, the Director of Pupil Services, the Director of Teaching and Learning, and the Digital Learning Specialist, reviewed the law and current practices. The team found that the district was already using DIBELS, an approved screening tool, had interventions in place through Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS), had interventionists embedded in general education programming, were communication with families if a child fell significantly below a benchmark and had systems in place for internal record keeping.

Both elementary schools are currently utilizing DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literary Skills) as an assessment tool. To comply with the updated guidance, the district must screen students two times per year in Grades K-3. Ipswich schools are already screening students in grades K-3 three times per year.

Ms. Wagner then discussed the Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS) that is at each school. MTSS consists of:

- Tier 1: Universal Support
- Tier 2: Targeted Support
- Tier 3: Intensive Support

Ms. Wagner noted that these supports can take place within the general education environment, although some students may require more intense support under an Individualized Education Plan.

Next steps to continue to prepare for the updated guidance will include:

- DIBELS trainings for anyone needing them (spring-early fall 2023)
- Continuing communication planning (spring 2023)
- Enhancing the MTSS process (ongoing)
- Continuing to monitor and adapt processes and procedures based on feedback (ongoing)

Given that Dyslexia affects such a large group of students, EC suggested that the district do more research on the language used when presenting this type of information. EC said that Dyslexia was not a neurological misfire. EC also asked if teachers were now using the term Dyslexia in their communication and sharing of results. Ms. Wagner responded that the terms used in her presentation came directly from the definition of Dyslexia provided by the state.

EC added that it could be valuable to have Special Education teachers included on the planning team as they are crucial in the service delivery to students. Ms. Wagner agreed, but shared that the new laws are focused heavily on the general education classroom. She acknowledged this shift and felt it could be powerful in supporting students in the general education classroom. Ms. Wagner also confirmed that training will be available for all teachers. There is also a Paine Grant application to support the Science of Reading/Reading Coach.

C. Middle School Handbook Changes

Kathy McMahon, Middle School principal, first shared the updated harassment policy to be included in the Middle School Handbook. This is a required policy and uses the same language as what is in the High School Student Handbook.

The dress code has also been updated. The policy is reviewed each year and updated to reflect changes in trends, cultural changes, gender issues, etc. This most recent policy was reviewed twice by the Middle School Council, as well as presented to faculty for feedback. This latest dress code reflects changes that address gender equality and socio-economic status, creating a policy that is representative of all students. What is presented tonight is supported by faculty and the school council.

Some changes to the policy include the removal of the word “cleavage”, badly ripped jeans, safety pins, spikes, and studs. The dress code encourages clothing that is appropriate, safe, and comfortable.

PK shared that the Middle School’s dress code differs greatly from the district’s policy which comes from Massachusetts General Law. PK wanted to ensure that the two policies were not at odds with one another. KE added that the law is focused more on health, safety, and cleanliness.

The discussion continued about what could be considered disruptive and to whom it is disruptive to. JB felt that from a student’s perspective, the disruption came not from the clothing itself, but from students being pulled aside and asked to change clothes.

It was clarified that students are now allowed to wear leggings in school. Ms. McMahon also confirmed that “visibly displayed undergarments” could mean bra straps. The discussion continued over the dress code and how some aspects of the policy could play out in unintended ways. Some members agreed that disruption often stems more from the “dress-coding” incident and less from the actual clothes. Members also agreed that the wording felt specific and objective in comparison to the district’s policy. While the new language was an improvement, the discussion should continue.

Ms. McMahon said the School Council may meet once before the end of the school year and could review the dress code again. It will need to be approved prior to the summer so handbooks can be printed before the start of school.

The committee focused on the language around “visibly displaying undergarments” and “excessively revealing”, with some members expressing concern that “excessively” could be subjective. It was suggested that “visibly displaying undergarments” be removed from the policy. Ultimately, it was decided to leave the second to last bullet in the policy which discussed excessively revealing clothing.

- *Motion to recommend to the Middle School Council to strike the wording “visibly displaying undergarments” from the proposed Middle School dress code was made by EC and seconded by PK. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

- *Motion to approve the Harassment Policy in the Middle School Handbook as presented was made by GS and seconded by EC. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

D. Policy Approval

PK presented the following policies from Section J for approval with any edits made by the Policy Subcommittee:

- JFBB: School Choice
- JHD: Exclusions and Exemptions from School Attendance
- JI: Student Rights and Responsibilities
- JIB: Student Involvement in Decision Making
- JIC: Student Discipline
- JICA: Student Dress Code
- JICC: Student Conduct on School Buses
- JICE: Student Publications
- JICFA: Prohibition of Hazing
- JICFA-E: Hazing

PK then presented Policy GCBC: Benefits of Administrators and the proposed changes to longevity, vacation time, and tuition reimbursement. Longevity was changed so that administrators could start receiving this benefits at the end of their first 3 year contract and the amount would increase every three years thereafter. All administrators would be able to carryover up to 15 vacation days per fiscal year and have an option to buy back up to 5 days. Administrators hired after July 1, 2023 could be reimbursed for up to 9 credits per fiscal year. For every 9 credits they are reimbursed, it would be expected that the administrator stay for an additional year or pay the district back. This policy is referenced in administrator contracts.

PK discussed the process for making the recommendations in Policy GCBC. BB had discussed the current policy with the administrative team during their retreat in the summer and came up with a list of proposed changes. The edits were also reviewed by legal counsel.

There was a discussion about the language used in the Tuition Reimbursement section. After some wordsmithing by the committee, the policy was voted on.

- *Motion to approve policies in Section J as presented, including Policy GCBC with edits as discussed was made by EC and seconded by GS. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

The Policy Subcommittee had discussed the need for a searchable Policy Manual. The Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) can host the district policy manual on their website for an annual fee. Funding for the maintenance and storage of this searchable policy manual would come from the School Committee line of the operating budget.

- *Motion to support the School Committee subscribing to the MASC Policy Manual at the cost of \$900 per year was made by PK and seconded by GS. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

E. Feoffee Distribution Amount

The School Committee received a revised distribution total in the amount of \$1,001,670. This is comprised of \$15,866 from the Manning portion of the Fund and the remaining portion, \$985,804 is the Paine Distribution. At the last meeting, the School Committee voted to split the distribution so 75% of the \$985,804 goes to the Paine Enhancement Grants and the remaining 25% goes to the Traverso-Weatherall Innovation Grants.

Nat Pulsifer, liaison to the Feoffee Trust, shared that the Feoffees would like to urge the respective grant committees to develop a procedure where individual grants can be documented for the benefit of the schools. The Feoffees feel it would be beneficial to the town and to the schools to highlight the benefits and outcomes of the grants. The Feoffees would like to work with committee heads to develop and meet this objective.

KE added that she would like to find School Committee members willing to continue the relationship with the Feoffees now that GS is stepping down.

F. Tiger Tour Recap

The Ipswich Educators Association (IEA) organized tours of each school over the course of the week following April vacation. Members of the School Committee, Select Board, and Finance Committee were invited to attend. This year, nine members of the Finance Committee were in attendance, as well as the Town Manager and members of the Select Board. While most FinCom and Select Board members were specifically interested in the school facilities, it was nice to see them in the buildings.

JP and DF toured the middle and high school and were able to see a lot of classes. It was interesting for them to see how teaching and learning differed from when they were in school. DF added that the high school still feels relevant in the way it is being used.

It was mentioned that while there is a lot of great education happening within the elementary schools, the buildings are not relevant to the type of education the staff are trying to provide. Staff need to be creative with schedules and how spaces are being used. These tours highlighted the need for both elementary schools to be addressed as soon as possible.

G. Security Update

BB has scheduled a public forum on Wednesday, May 10th to discuss school safety and security. An email was sent to the school community with information on the forum, as well as a form to submit questions ahead of the meeting. A reminder will be sent to the district tomorrow.

In addition to planning for the safety forum, BB has a meeting scheduled with the Town Manager and Police Chief to discuss adding another school resource officer for the remainder of the school year. The administrative team has met to review safety protocols for their buildings. BB had a meeting with the Technology Director about additional safety measures like cameras and upgrades to badging in the entryways of the schools and Central Office. BB also met with the Facilities Director to talk about adding radio boxes, panic buttons and increases to building security. The district is looking into additional speakers at the two elementary schools and increasing the volume on all sound systems. BB is also looking into an emergency response app for the district.

KE asked about an independent safety audit. BB responded that he is working with NEMLEC to bring in someone to do a safety audit this summer.

H. Financial Update

TM first discussed the Year-to-Date report which shows a 3.2% balance left in the FY23 budget. Funds intended to be returned to the Stabilization Fund are not included in the 3.2%. While there are still available funds, most funds will be spent prior to the end of the year.

TM then reviewed the fund balances for the gift and revolving accounts, all of which had healthy balances.

The last memo that TM reviewed highlighted a discrepancy in the utility consumption for natural gas during FY22 which led to an underbilling of consumption. The issue came to light through work done by the former Climate Resiliency Director. The technical issues were fixed, but there is now an obligation to pay National Grid. The memo notifies the School Committee that the district plans to use funds from FY23 to pay for last year's bill.

GS asked about the flow of funds from the Middle School Athletics account to the High School Athletic accounts. He wanted clarification on where the money is allocated and how it is spent. GS suggested looking into how the Middle School Athletics Revolving Account could be better utilized in supporting Middle School athletics through stipends for coaches or subsidizing uniform and registration fees.

8. Superintendent's Administrative Report

BB reported on his schedule since the last meeting. His report included:

- Participation in the Addressing Hate in School Sports training
- An administrative team meeting
- A meeting with the Technology Director
- A meeting with the IEA president
- An Athletic Advisory Committee meeting
- A Policy Subcommittee meeting
- Participation in the Safe Walk to School Day

- A meeting with Representative Kassnew

BB also talked about his upcoming schedule which included:

- A meeting with the Town Manager and Police Chief
- The start of the Middle School Principal Search
- Planning for the Safety and Security Forum

9. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- *Policy Subcommittee*: discussed as part of a previous agenda item
- *STEAM Showcase*: the showcase will take place on May 18th.
- *Communications Subcommittee*: the group would like to discuss one last newsletter ahead of new members joining the committee.
- *Operations Subcommittee*: need to schedule a meeting to onboard new members.
- *Traverso-Weatherall Innovation Grant Committee*: all grants were approved. Letters notifying applicants will be sent out next week.
- *Feoffees Policy Working Group*: discussed where the group would like to see the distribution/fund be used in the future. Members of the working group met with the Feoffees to discuss potentially using additional funds to be used toward “big ticket” items outside the realm of the Paine and Traverso-Weatherall grants. The distribution policy is restrictive and the guidelines of the Trust dictate how much of the distribution can be used each year. Larger projects would still need to be funded through the annual distribution. The working group would like the new committee to consider allocating a portion of the annual distribution in future years for things that could ease the financial burden of parents. GS clarified that it was within the School Committee’s scope to change the parameters of how the annual distribution is used.
- *Paine Enhancement Grant Committee*: the committee is currently reviewing applications. Applicants will present their grants to the committee on Monday.

DF shared that the Communications Subcommittee has previously discussed the School Committee’s social media presence and policies/procedures around that. DF was hoping to continue that discussion prior to the summer and asked if it should go before the Policy Subcommittee. With three members leaving, DF is now the only member of the Communications Subcommittee for the remainder of the year. KE offered to help and suggested that DF present information on social media at the next School Committee meeting.

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 PK and seconded by EC. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

13. Adjournment- EC/PK. Unanimous. 9:38 PM

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

Meeting adjourned at 9:38 PM