

## **Ipswich School Committee**

Thursday, February 29, 2024

MS/HS Ensemble Room

134 High Street, Ipswich

6:45 PM

### **MINUTES**

#### **1. Call to Order**

KE called the meeting to order at 6:52 PM.

Present:           D. Freehan (DF)           M. Perry (MP)  
                  J. Donahue (JD)       J. Connolly (JC)  
                  S. Sopic (SS)           J. Poirier (JP)  
                  K. Eliot (KE)

Also Present:   Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools (BB)  
                  Tom Markham, Director of Finance and Operations (TM)  
                  Jimmy Bornstein, High School Student Representative (JB)

#### **2. Executive Session:**

- *Motion to enter into executive session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declared was made by DF and seconded by SS.*

#### **Roll Call**

**Motion passed unanimously**

#### **3. Return to Open Session**

The meeting returned to open session at 7:17 PM.

#### **4. Reading of the District Mission Statement**

JB read the mission statement.

#### **5. Announcements**

- The next regular School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, March 7th at 7:00 PM in the MS/HS Ensemble Room.
- The School Committee will present their FY25 budget to the Finance Committee on Tuesday, March 5th and Wednesday, March 6th. Both meetings will be held at 7:30 PM in Meeting Room A at Town Hall.
- The School Facilities Working Group will meet remotely on Tuesday, March 5th at 5:30 PM.

#### **6. Special Acknowledgements**

There were no special acknowledgements.

#### **7. Remarks from the Chair**

KE attended the presentation hosted by Ipswich Aware on substance abuse and underage drinking, noting that it was a powerful experience. The presentation was also given to high school students, which was well received. The same presentation will be held on May 1st in Gloucester. KE encouraged anyone who could not attend in Ipswich, to go to the Gloucester presentation.

KE talked about the Paine Grant Committee. There are two vacancies on the committee- a Community At-Large member and a Community Business Representative. The School Committee has received three applications for these open positions. The School Committee needs to determine timing for appointing the new members ahead of the upcoming grant cycle.

JC is going to create a list of all the School Committee appointed positions. That information will be shared in the School Committee folder. The list will include what the positions are, who is currently in the position, and what the term is for each position.

## **8. Public Comments<sup>1</sup>**

There were no comments from the public.

## **9. High School Student Representative Report**

JB shared his experience on the Spain trip that took place over February vacation. He mentioned the benefit of having an adjustment counselor on the trip. JB then talked about the high school student perspective on the presentation on substance abuse and underage drinking. Students are counting down until April break and the Student Advisory Council is meeting tomorrow. JB shared that the BRIDGE program would begin in April for participating seniors. It was shared that there will also be an adjustment counselor attending the trip to France in April.

## **10. Presentations**

### **A. IEA Snapshot Presentation: Journalism**

Due to a scheduling conflict, this agenda item will be presented at the next School Committee meeting.

### **B. Overnight Field Trip Request: Quebec**

Lauren Hover, HS French Teacher, presented her request for an overnight trip to Quebec on February 6-9, 2025 to experience the Quebec Winter Carnival. Ms Hover highlighted some of the itinerary which included a dinner, dog sledding, and various tours. At this time, approximately 20 students have expressed interest for the trip and approximately 20 students have said they may be interested. The cost of the trip is dependent on the number of students who attend. Ms. Hover would like to open the trip up to next year's sophomores, juniors and seniors. The request, if approved, will be part of a Paine Grant application for the upcoming grant cycle.

KE asked what the trip would look like for students if the Paine Grant funding was not approved. Ms. Hover said that when she applied for the Paine Grant for the upcoming France trip, they asked for a 50% reduction of cost per student and then to cover the cost of any student who qualifies for free or reduced lunch. This trip to Quebec is significantly less expensive, so it is still undetermined what the Paine Grant request would be for.

JP asked if Ms. Hover had a sense of how many students who are participating in this year's France trip would also be attending the trip to Quebec and at what frequency did Ms. Hover anticipate doing these types of trips. Ms. Hover explained that this year's trip to France is only open to juniors and seniors. By next year, it would only be the rising seniors that had experienced a trip. The goal would be to offer the France and Quebec trips to all students at least once in their four years at the high school.

➤ *Motion to approve the overnight field trip request to Quebec from February 6-9, 2025 was made by JD and seconded by SS. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

### **C. Overnight Field Trip Request: Yellowstone**

Jeff Krieger and Lori Lafrance, High School teachers, presented their overnight field trip request to Yellowstone National Park in March 2025. The trip to Yellowstone, they explained, is a fantastic opportunity to combine science and the teaching/exploration

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

that is done in the high school civics class. The trip has been planned through Ecology Project International who provide educational courses for students in different locations. Students participating in this trip would do 30 hours of coursework and 20 hours of service learning work, making them eligible for college credit for the course. Students will fly from Boston to Bozeman, Montana and then travel roughly 70 miles to the North Yellowstone Lodge where they will stay for eight nights. Students will meet with guides from Yellowstone National Park and participate in a combination of field work. There would be a maximum of 13 students in grades 10-12 on the trip and Ipswich would be the only group staying at the North Yellowstone Lodge during that week. The cost per student is \$2,795, which does not include airfare. Ms. Lafrance and Mr. Krieger said they are budgeting \$500-700 per student for airfare. Ecology Project International does offer financial aid to participants. In an effort to bring this trip back to Ipswich, students will Zoom into the elementary schools from Yellowstone to share their experiences and what they've learned. Ms. Lafrance and Mr. Krieger plan to submit a Paine Grant to reduce the cost to students by 50% in an effort to make the trip accessible to all students. It was explained that the week in March was chosen because it does not conflict with athletics in any way.

JP asked how other high school teachers felt about students missing a week of school for this trip. Some teachers think it is a great idea, while others find it may be disruptive. Mr. Krieger felt that it is important that students are communicating with their teachers ahead of time and are accountable for the work they will miss. JP then suggested that the Paine Grant applications factor in the fee for college credits, noting that it would be a shame if students who participated in the coursework could not get the college credit due to financial reasons.

The discussion continued around the potential frequency of this trip. Although this is a pilot year, is the expectation that if successful, the trip would be planned annually? Mr. Krieger said that he would love to see this happen annually if possible.

- *Motion to approve the overnight field trip request to Yellowstone was made by SS and seconded by DF. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

There was a brief discussion on the need to look at the overnight field trip policies, possibly evaluating the pilot trips and creating better parameters around the requests, scheduling and funding.

#### **D. Discussion and Vote on FY25 School Budget**

KE gave an update on the FY25 budget timeline, noting that the administrative team presented the budget on January 31st and February 1st. The draft budget has been available to the public on the district website since January 30th. Tonight is the fourth meeting discussing the budget. The School Committee will present the FY25 budget to the Finance Committee on March 5th, 6th, and potentially the 12th. The budget increase stands at 5.08% which remains the same as it was presented on January 31st and February 1st. KE felt her budget questions had been answered, but acknowledged that she would spend more time reviewing the budget in preparation for the Finance Committee meeting.

MP felt the budget was fair and addressed what it needed to. SS is pleased that the School Committee can continue to extend the override for the five years they had planned for with this budget. KE said that it has been fortunate that past overrides have extended beyond the five years and that some of the community may expect that as a standard now. There are factors that drive the budget that may not allow for the override to extend beyond the five years.

- *Motion to approve the FY25 School Budget in the amount of \$39,616,403 as presented by the Superintendent was made by JP and seconded by JD. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

KE then discussed the plan for the Finance Committee presentations scheduled for the following week. BB said his intent is to present the beginning slides that cover the high level budget overview. MCAS data will be shared ahead of time with the Finance Committee as it was presented to the School Committee. The Special Education data is woven throughout the budget and may be difficult to pull out as a separate item. The elementary schools will present their budgets on the first night. BB said he'll also be

prepared to present the district-wide and Central Office budgets on the first night if time allows. The middle and high school budget presentations will be on the second night's agenda. There are some Finance Committee members who have an interest in graduation rates and test scores at the high school level, so that information will be included in the presentation.

SS said that some information, like test scores and graduation rates, while important, are not directly correlated to the budget. He asked how the School Committee could address those topics outside of the budget presentation. KE and BB acknowledged that those types of questions come up each year and members of the Finance Committee do believe that there is a correlation between the budget and some of those statistics. It is a Finance Committee meeting and the floor is theirs to ask the questions they would like.

JP said that the School Committee heard from each of the schools in one night. The presentations did not seem as long this year and it may be because there were little changes and a lot of consistent numbers. The preparation for the Finance Committee may be to pace out the presentation a bit more and that maybe more information is presented on the first night. JP was not sure three nights were necessary. The School Committee knows what questions are going to be asked. The best thing to do to prepare is to make the presentation as focused as possible. It was determined that the administrators were not going to attend the third night.

#### **E. Discussion on Whittier Tech School Committee Member Candidate Interviews**

KE shared that the Whittier Tech School Committee representative's term ends on March 31, 2024. The School Committee has been advertising the opening and collecting letters of interest for the position. Two applicants have expressed interest in serving in this role- the current Whittier Tech School Committee representative, Gary James, and Carol Sullivan, a resident of Ipswich. Both candidates will be interviewed by the School Committee in open session at the March 7th meeting. The Select Board had submitted questions to be included in the interview process and the Finance Committee has also expressed interest in submitting questions as well. KE shared that there was a discussion at the Tri-Board meeting the night prior about the ongoing discussions among state legislators and city/town officials around the regional contract with Whittier. The Whittier Tech School Committee representative serves in a role with similar responsibilities to any School Committee member. There is general consensus that there needs to be more attention paid to what is happening at Whittier Tech. If anyone has questions they would like to ask, they should be sent to KE. An appointment will be made at the March 21st meeting.

#### **F. Tri-Board Recap**

The Tri-Board meeting took place the previous night and covered a lengthy agenda which included a presentation on the NORESO project. The Climate Resiliency Coordinator, Rick Mitchell, recommended moving forward with the "better" plan for FY26. KE questioned how involved the Facilities Director was in the process and what his thoughts were on the details of the plan. BB said that both the Facilities Director and he was involved in the process from the start. It was important to them that the Middle/High School was part of the plan. The School Committee will need to take a position on this when it comes to Town Meeting.

JD said that she liked the point that BB made about the things in the Capital Plan, and also included in the NORESO plan, that were to ensure that the Middle/High School does not end up like Whittier. Maintenance is the key to extending the life of the building. SS would like more information on the lighting in the elementary schools and what the payback period is. KE encouraged SS to reach out directly to Rick Mitchell. BB then added that additional questions for Rick could be filtered through him. KE is curious about the cost of the carpools.

The Specialized Stretch Code was also discussed. KE felt it was an informative presentation. The School Committee will need to take a position on the Specialized Stretch Code for the Town Meeting warrant articles. JC talked about her concerns with the stretch code. KE confirmed that the School Committee took a position on this topic at the last Town Meeting because it could have implications for a new school building.

The Tri-Board meeting also covered a budget overview from the Town and a review of the Capital Plan, as well as a 3A update. KE thought it would be helpful for a member of the School Committee to attend the 3A meetings. There is a community forum in March or April. The group working on the SOIs is taking 3A into consideration when talking about enrollment and gathering more information on the topic. KE said that there is a helpful website on the topic that can be accessed through the Town's website. The school building project was discussed briefly at the Tri-Board meeting. KE is reaching out to the MSBA to ask if school repairs will hurt the chances of getting accepted and how that is factored into the application process. DF said that BB answered questions on the SOI submission process nicely. JD had shared that buildings that were approved this year had done some replacements ahead of being approved.

JP had some questions about the Capital Plan, specifically mentioning the improvements to the high school kitchen for \$42,000. JP asked how it is determined what comes out of the Capital Plan versus the Food Services Revolving Account. TM said that the Food Services Director maintains a running list of equipment and maintenance requests. The district had not addressed those requests in recent years, so now TM is working to address those needs within the revolving fund budget. The Food Services Director provided the Facilities Director with a list of potential Capital Projects. The Facilities Director then determined what larger item would be considered a Capital item. TM said that while there is no specific policy on this matter, he is trying to keep all requests within the \$10,000-\$20,000 or lower range within the Food Services revolving account.

JP then asked about the electric car charging stations and where they would be installed. BB shared that when the chargers were originally installed at the middle/high school, the conduit was extended so more chargers could be installed at a later time. SS then asked if there was offsetting revenue or credits for the use of the charging stations. The concern from SS was that the district was subsidizing someone else's electric vehicle. TM said that there is no real incentive except for "the good of the order". The charging stations, while revenue generators, are not coming close to offsetting the costs of providing the service. There is not a charge for usage during school hours which was intended to be an incentive to encourage the use of electric vehicles. SS expressed hesitation using school and town funds to pay for the charging stations. BB added that the installation of the charging stations was a student-led initiative and data from those charging stations is still used in a course at the high school. BB said he would get more information and bring that back to the School Committee at a later date. KE asked if there was a town-wide master plan for electric vehicles and charging stations. BB was not aware of a plan. SS would like to know the installation costs, maintenance costs, revenue, and incentives tied to the charging stations. KE said she would be more comfortable supporting this Capital item if there was data that supported the need and/or a town-wide master plan for these charging stations.

## **11. Superintendent's Administrative Report**

BB's report included the following:

- Attended the Governing Board meeting for AASA
- Attended the National Conference for Education, presented by AASA
- Meetings with staff members
- Ipswich Aware presentation for students and families
- Administrative team meeting
- Hosted three local superintendents in the district to discuss how music education is presented and scheduled in Ipswich
- Participated in the Race, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion course
- Attended the Tri-Board meeting
- Participated in a mediation with a former employment
- Monthly Ipswich Educators Association meeting

## **12. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports**

- **School Facilities Working Group:** Focused on the SOI. SS sent an email to the committee with the SOI submission timeline. The timeline was reviewed. Comments from the School Committee on the draft SOI should be sent directly to SS or they can be included in the document. Members were reminded there can be no back and forth dialogue or discussion within the comments on the document.
- **Negotiations Subcommittee:** Negotiations will begin with the IEA in the coming weeks.

DF gave an update on where the draft sustainability policy stands. There are groups at each school level looking at a potential policy with the goal of coming together with some other potential stakeholders in town to create a policy unique to Ipswich. The goal is to have a policy ready to present to the School Committee by June.

**13. New Business\***

No new business was presented.

**14. Vouchers and Bills**

All were reviewed and signed.

**15. Consent Agenda**

- *Motion to approve the consent agenda as presented was made by DF and seconded by MP. **The motion passed with 6 in favor and 1 abstention.***

**16. Adjournment**

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