

## **Ipswich School Committee**

Wednesday, January 31, 2024  
MS/HS Ensemble Room  
134 High Street, Ipswich  
7:00 PM

### **MINUTES**

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

KE called the meeting to order at 7:01 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. Reading of the District Mission Statement**

JB read the mission statement.

#### **3. Announcements**

- The School Committee will meet tomorrow, February 1st at 7:00 PM, for the second night of budget presentations.
- The School Committee will meet on Thursday, February 8th and Thursday, February 29th at 7:00 PM in the MS/HS Ensemble Room. The public is encouraged to attend the Public Hearing on the FY25 Budget at the start of the February 8th meeting.
- The Ipswich Representative to the Whittier Regional Vocational Technical School Committee's term is expiring on March 31, 2024. Anyone interested in serving as the Ipswich Representative should submit a letter of interest to Kate Eliot at [keliot@ipsk12.net](mailto:keliot@ipsk12.net).
- KE asked that School Committee members speak louder.

#### **4. Special Acknowledgements**

KE thanked the administrative team for their work on the FY25 budget.

#### **5. Remarks from the Chair**

No remarks.

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

No comments from the public.

#### **7. Presentations**

##### **A. FY25 Budget Presentation**

BB began the presentation by thanking the administrative team for their collaboration and creative thinking when putting together the FY25 budget. The budget being presented reflects a collaborative effort to meet the current and future needs of Ipswich students. The ESSER funding used to support the budget over the past 3 years is nearly depleted. BB acknowledged that this was a difficult budget to put together. BB then reviewed the budget presentation agenda for this evening.

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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.

TM began by reviewing the budget sheets, explaining what the categories, columns, and rows represent.

The next slide showed a high level overview of the budget development this year. The slide shows the final FY23 budget, the FY24 budget, as voted on, and the initial proposed FY25 budget. The FY24 budget showed a 5.79% increase from FY23. The FY25 budget is coming in at 5.08%. The district will be requesting approximately \$1.49 million from the Stabilization Fund for next year.

The next slide highlights the number of FTEs contained in the budget. The FY25 budget shows an increase of 5.73 FTEs. The middle of the slide shows the total appropriated budget and any supplemental appropriation the district received. The FY25 budget has a net increase over the prior year of \$1,913,910. The bottom of the slide shows the funding that will come from other sources to support the budget. The FY25 shows an increased reliance on many of these funding sources. Most notably, some facilities charges will be offset by the Extended Day Program, the district is increasing the use of School Choice Funds, and there are plans to utilize some of the Special Education Stabilization Fund. The district is using less Circuit Breaker funding. State and Federal grant funding has decreased for FY25.

### **Massachusetts School District Profile- Ipswich**

The enrollment slide contains information from the DESE District Profile. This slide highlights enrollment data from the 2022-2023 school year.

### **Enrollment by School and Year**

This slide shows district enrollment from the 2019-2020 school year through our projected enrollment for the 2024-2025 school year. The district currently enrolls 1,626 students and is projected to enroll 1,629 for the new school year.

### **Federal and State Grant Funding**

The district is anticipating a sharp decline in Federal funding with the depletion of the ESSER funds. The district is also likely to lose roughly \$85,000 in Title 1 funding. That is a total difference of \$557,304 from FY24 to FY25.

### **School Choice Funds**

The current cash balance in the School Choice Fund is \$1,767,803. There are currently 59 incoming Choice students and 15 outgoing Choice students for the 2023-2024 school year. The planned expenditures for FY25 using Choice funds are \$250,000 for health insurance, \$60,000 for district-wide hardware, and \$212,000 for the purchase of the elementary ELA curriculum.

### **Circuit Breaker Funds**

The current net cash balance of Circuit Breaker is \$785,467. The DESE reimbursement rate has not yet been determined for FY25. For planning purposes, 75% is budgeted for FY25 using year-to-date Special Education costs that are currently deemed eligible. The district is budgeting the use of 50% of the projected net cash balance in FY25.

### **Fixed Cost Expenses Excluding Health Insurance**

The district has a number of fixed costs that include retirement, medicare, worker's compensation, unemployment, insurances (general liability and life benefits), and sick leave buy-back.

### **Health Insurance Expense**

Health insurance is projecting an 8% increase for FY25, costing approximately \$3,913,447. The district plans to access School Choice funds in the amount of \$250,000, bringing that net cost down to \$3,663,447.

### **Special Education Expense**

The amount of \$9,427,725 represents all Special Education services, including Special Education transportation. The district is seeing an increase in costs associated with out of district placements, transportation, and student services.

### **Total Compensation**

This slide represents the total compensation for all staff in the district. This takes into account steps, lanes, stipends, the administrative salary pool, and all non-bargaining unit employees.

### **Winthrop School**

Amy Sullivan, principal, shared Winthrop's mission statement, reviewed the school's educational goals, and shared the current and projected enrollment.

Budget highlights for Winthrop include:

- Total Net Budget Increase: \$49,196 or .93%
- Three ESSER funded positions were moved into Winthrop's budget
- Title 1 positions have been added to the budget to account for the potential decrease in Title 1 grant funding
- English Language Arts Teaching Materials- New PK-5 ELA Curriculum - \$106,000 funded by School Choice or EOY available FY 24 balances.
- Increase to Instructional Software in Math and Reading that was funded by the district budget and now funded by Winthrop- \$10,500

Ms. Sullivan then reviewed the Budget Breakdown and Comparison slide.

### **Paul F. Doyon Memorial School**

Peter Holtz, principal, shared Doyon's mission statement, reviewed the school's educational goals, and shared the current and projected enrollment.

Budget highlights for Doyon include:

- Net Budget Increase: \$141,064 (with ESY) or 2.74%
- Building Substitute (no longer ESSER funded)
- Addition of 1.0 FTE paraeducator into Doyon budget (no longer ESSER funded)
- .60 FTE SLP (.50 FTE position added to Doyon budget for SY24 after budget process; additional .1 FTE for SY25, based on service need)
- 2.0 FTE RBTs for Kindergarten to support new student and students rising from intensive PreK
- Summer ESY Program funded in Doyon budget instead of Winthrop budget
- Purchase of new PreK-5 Literacy Curriculum
- Online subscription to STAR/Freckle (previously funded by IT Department)
- Some decreases in consumables, particularly in social studies and science

Mr. Holtz then reviewed the Budget Breakdown and Comparison slide.

BB shared that there had been a Paine Grant several years ago to introduce the World Language program at the elementary level. The difficulty with these types of enrichment programs is maintaining them in the appropriated budget beyond the years they are supported by a Paine Grant.

### **Middle School**

Peter Ginolfi, principal, shared the middle school's mission statement, reviewed the school's educational goals, and shared the current and projected enrollment.

Budget highlights for the middle school include:

- Net Budget Increase: \$53,276 or 1.02%
- Increase 1.0 Teaching Assistant, Decrease 2.0 RBT from Special Education department
  - Needed to support an increased behavioral and special education need in 6th grade, and decreased support due to matriculating students
- Increase in ELA and Math materials line for iReady software and IM math costs
  - Loss of ESSER funding and movement from 'undistributed' software line to appropriate departmental budgets
- Increase of substitute salary line (\$22,200) to maintain the Building Substitute position
  - Loss of ESSER funding
- Anticipated but not yet negotiated contractual increases for salaries, stipends and co-curricular activities

Mr. Ginolfi then reviewed the Budget Breakdown and Comparison slide.

### **High School**

Jonathan Mitchell, principal, shared the high school's mission statement, reviewed the school's educational goals, and shared the current and projected enrollment.

Budget highlights for the high school include:

- Net Budget Increase: \$480,333 or 6.73%
- Peer Mentoring from grant funded to appropriated budget
- First Robotics \$6,000.00 moved to appropriated budget
- Classroom furniture requests ELA and World Language +\$11,500.00
- EL MAST from ESSR to appropriated budget +7.82%
- 1.0 School Adjustment Counselor from ESSR to appropriated +18.27%
- NSCC class moved from grant funding to appropriated \$8,000.00 +22.86%
- Increase one FTE to comply with incoming 8th grader IEP +12.22%
- Increase TWIG funding to appropriated. +\$4,500.00
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Mr. Mitchell then reviewed the Budget Breakdown and Comparison slide.

### **Building Operations**

Budget highlights include:

- Net Budget Decrease: (\$141,906) or -5.89%
- Leveling utility costs, except for 7% increase in Water & Sewer
- Building maintenance reductions expected due to new school roofs
- Continued major repairs needed at all of the buildings, school kitchens
- Utility cost increases are offset by revolving funds (EDP and SFS)
- Cost of Telephone Services moved to Technology Dept Budget
- 1.0 FTE school custodian/field attendant moved to High School Operations
- New cost for snow plowing of school grounds

### **District Wide- Central Office**

Budget highlights include:

- Net Budget Increase: \$1,331,947 or 10.69%
- Teacher CBAs negotiations to commence & settlements to be incorporated (TBD)
- Funding for a part-time shared with Town position, Climate Resiliency Manager
- 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 rate increase for OOD and greater service requirement, including mandated transportation
- Increase of 1.0 FTEs for ELL, driven by number of hours prescribed by state recommendations previously supported from ESSER III moved to appropriated budget
- Significant increases for fixed costs
  - Driven by 8% increase in health insurance premiums
  - Offset some of the costs with choice funds
  - Pension obligation increased by 11% over FY23
- Business/Central Office reorganization, reduced 1.20 FTEs
- First year of new cost for Short Term Debt Service for school roof projects
- School Bus transportation contract to be re-negotiated or extended

BB then reviewed next steps for the FY25 budget presentations which included dates for upcoming School Committee meetings, presentations to the Finance Committee and the vote at Town Meeting in May.

### **Questions and Comments:**

KE asked when the Capital budget would be discussed. BB shared that the Capital budget is built by the town. Schools submit their Capital requests to BB and the Facilities Director. Those requests are then shared with the Town Manager. A draft copy of the Capital budget can be shared at the meeting tomorrow.

JC asked if the School Choice funds cover the costs of Choice students in Ipswich or does Ipswich have to pay for the students

that come. BB said that School Choice slots are only opened in grades where there is available space. Ipswich received \$5,000 for each regular ed. School Choice student and \$7,500 for School Choice students with IEPs. The funding does not cover all costs of these students, but the intent is to use these School Choice slots to fill empty seats, not empty classrooms. The increment the town receives for each Choice student is not meant to cover the per pupil expenditure.

JC asked if the district could require Salter to provide a certain number of drivers. BB responded that it could be part of a new contract with Salater. TM added that the district could require certain routes, but a certain number of drivers may be difficult.

JC asked if it was possible for the Feoffee Grants to supplement salaries for some positions. BB thought that would be a discussion for the Feoffees Policy Working Group.

KE said she was struck by how bleak the budgets were. The majority of the expenses are salaries, stipends, and Special Education costs. There is little to cut without digging into substantial positions. BB said that the administrative team looked at programming in place and opportunities for savings and reductions. There is an increased amount that will be offset by outside funding. ESSER funded positions were brought into the budget out of necessity. BB added that some ESSER funded positions were eliminated, like building based substitutes, but funding was still carried forward into the budget. KE said she understood the value of the building based subs, but that BB should be prepared to explain those positions to the Finance Committee.

DF asked for clarity on how the FY25 budget plays into the Stabilization Fund and the Override calculator. BB said that they were anticipating putting funds into the Stabilization Fund this year and based on updated calculations from TM, the district is still on track with their commitment to extend that override five years.

JD asked for clarification and breakdown on what the School Choice fund would be used for in FY25. TM explained that the \$522,000 will be used toward supplementing health costs, IT needs, and the purchase of new ELA curriculum.

JP asked for additional information ahead of the next meeting which included a list of positions added to the budget, the number of positions eliminated from the budget, and the number of open positions that have not been filled.

JP then asked what would be considered a healthy balance in the School Choice fund and what was the history of using the Special Education Stabilization Fund. BB said this is the first year that the district is utilizing the Special Education Stabilization Fund. That fund has been maxed out for the last few years. JP expressed concerns about depleting these funds now when there may be larger cuts in future years and there won't be funds available to offset costs. KE added that the budget was able to come in at a 5.08% increase because of the offsets. KE asked for the anticipated fund balances of the funds that were utilized to supplement the budget. The only account that would be difficult to predict end of year balance, TM shared, would be the Special Education Stabilization Fund. The Special Education Stabilization Fund is funded through a vote at Town Meeting using surplus Special Education funds that were not expended in the current year.

JP asked if there were any items in the budget that could be grant funded or any items where administrators were hoping for grant funding that could be included in the budget.

JD asked Mr. Holtz about whether he was keeping a position in his budget that helps with the management of Special Education IEPs. Mr. Holtz responded that he was not adding any additional positions beyond an RBT who will provide support for student needs included in some IEPs. Doyon has not added or subtracted any Special Education educators.

KE asked for the number of EL students in each building, as well as the number of Special Education students in each building. KE also asked about class sizes and if there was an enrollment number that would trigger the district's consideration for reducing sections. BB said that reducing the number of sections would be dependent on the grade and needs of the students.

KE asked for clarification on the overall FTE of the Climate Resiliency Manager. TM was able to share what percentage of that position's salary is paid by the district.

DF asked if there were other positions that were partially paid by the school district and partially paid for by the town. TM said that the school district pays for a portion of the Facilities Director's salary.

TM reviewed the budget timeline, noting that the School Committee has the entire month of February to discuss the budget prior

to voting on it.

**8. New Business\***





No new business was presented.

**9. Adjournment**

➤ *Motion to adjourn was made by JD and seconded by DF. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

**Meeting adjourned at 9:29 PM**

**DOCUMENTS:**

	FY25 Budget slides SC Jan31 TM (1).pdf	
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	Ipswich Public Schools FY25 Budget v2 Jan31.pdf	
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