

## **Ipswich School Committee**

Thursday, April 17, 2025  
MS/HS Ensemble Room  
134 High Street, Ipswich  
7:00 PM

### **Minutes**

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

DF called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM

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

Also Present:   Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools (BB)  
                  Edwin (Charlie) Quimby, HS Student Representative (CQ)

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

CQ read the mission statement.

#### **3. Announcements and Special Acknowledgements**

- The next School Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 1st at 7:00 PM in the MS/HS Ensemble Room
- Schools will be closed Monday, April 21-Friday, April 25 for vacation week.
- All district offices will be closed on Monday, April 21st.
- The 8th Annual STEAM Showcase is taking place Thursday, May 8th from 5:00-7:00 PM at Ipswich High School.

Special Acknowledgements:

- BB: Congrats to all of the MS students and staff walking the Walk for Hunger, 9 miles to the Neck and back. Currently over the fundraising goal.

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

DF read the statement on public comment.

Gary Champion, Palomino Way: Spoke regarding a citizen petition warrant article related to model schools. He emphasized that the article is not a mandate for the school committee and cannot override the separation of powers between the school committee and town meeting. He noted that the MSBA already requires consideration of model schools during its process, rendering the article unnecessary. However, he expressed concern that the article's language, specifically the phrase "full consideration must be given", could be misinterpreted as a mandate by its supporters. He warned that if the article passes in May, it could lead to conflict over the anticipated October 2025 feasibility study warrant article, potentially risking Ipswich's participation in the MSBA program. Mr. Champion urged the school committee to oppose the petition article to prevent future misinformation.

#### **5. Community Presentations**

##### **A. Curriculum Review Cycle Presentation**

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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.

Dr. Wagner presented on the Ipswich Public Schools curriculum review cycle, outlining its purpose, structure, and outcomes. She explained that the cycle was developed in response to evolving state standards starting around 2013, prompting districts to implement structured review processes. Ipswich initiated its curriculum review cycle in 2018, engaging various stakeholders, including teachers, counselors, and administrators, in a multi-year process that begins with standards unpacking, gap analysis, and ultimately curriculum adoption, implementation, and refinement. She illustrated the structure using current and past examples, such as the adoption of Wit & Wisdom for ELA and Illustrative Math, and emphasized the role of Compass Teams who drive the review across content areas. Tangible outcomes include aligned, standards-based curriculum across K–12, consistent assessments, and improved instructional coherence. Dr. Wagner highlighted that the effectiveness of the cycle is confirmed through external reviews (such as the 2023 DESE Comprehensive Review report), internal feedback, and regular data analysis. She emphasized that the process is collaborative, data-informed, and closely aligned with school improvement goals, the district’s strategic plan, and the budget. The presentation concluded with discussion and questions from committee members, including how the curriculum cycle informs equity and effectiveness across content areas, how it connects to school improvement goals, and how student progress is measured.

#### **B. Compass Health Committee Presentation (7:35)**

Gina Bevilacqua, middle school adjustment counselor, Dr. Wagner, and Ryan Daly, middle school health teacher, presented on behalf of the Comprehensive Health Compass Committee to discuss the new Comprehensive Health Standards going into effect across Ipswich Public Schools next school year. The committee, which includes educators and counselors from across all school levels, conducted a thorough, two-year review of the updated Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Standards Framework. This process involved identifying gaps in the outdated 1999 standards, assessing shifts in grade-level expectations, and evaluating new content areas such as mental health, digital safety, and sexual health education.

Using a state-recommended curriculum guide and a locally developed rubric, the committee narrowed its review to several curriculum programs to support the new standards. After reviewing and scoring various programs, conducting demos, and observing lessons in a nearby district, the committee selected *HealthSmart* for its strong alignment with updated standards, adaptability, ease of implementation, affordability, and wide use across the state.

A key recommendation includes hiring a licensed health educator to teach elementary health, acknowledging that the new standards require specialized instruction beyond the scope and time that current staff such as PE teachers, counselors, and nurses can give. A Paine Grant proposal has been submitted to fund this position. If funded, health would be incorporated into the elementary Specials rotation. Planning for various scheduling scenarios is already underway with school-based teams, with several potential models developed to ensure implementation regardless of grant approval. The curriculum is K–12 and intended to support a consistent, standards-based approach districtwide.

#### **C. Presentation on Section 3A Multi-Family Overlay District/ Vote on Town Meeting Warrant Article 18: Amend Zoning Bylaws**

Sarah Player, Select Board representative and 3A Task Force member, along with 3A Task Force Member Toni Moorad, shared updates on Town Meeting Warrant Article 18: Amend Zoning By-Laws, Add Section IX.V. Section 3A Multi-Family Overlay District, including the re-opening of the warrant to correct a prior omission of the affordability section, which has now been restored without changes. They noted the recent Supreme Judicial Court decision upholding 3A and the state’s permanent regulations, emphasizing increasing consequences for non-compliance, including potential loss of state funding. It was clarified that Ipswich received state funding (approximately \$75,000) for technical assistance related to 3A compliance, and that these funds were for zoning work, not infrastructure. Concerns around the loss of local control via the special permit process were addressed by noting that Ipswich’s planning practices already align with the overlay, and that site plan review and new design guidelines will maintain community character. The overlay offers property owners a choice between existing zoning and the new 3A option.

- *Motion to support Article 18: Amend Zoning By-Laws, Add Section IX.V. Section 3A Multi-Family Overlay District was made by SS and seconded by JD. The motion passed with 5 in favor and 1 opposed.*

#### **6. Superintendent’s Administrative Report**

- Attended April 5th Bean Counting meeting with the Selectboard and FINCOM.
- Met with the athletic director to discuss spring sports, summer work, and a new athletic policy working group.
- Participated in the IEF meeting on April 7th featuring Steve Filosa, who spoke on community fundraising and IEF’s history.

- Admin team meetings focused on the facilities position, custodial supervision (now under principals), educator evaluation rubrics, IT initiatives for April break, Memorial Day assemblies, and end-of-year staffing updates.
- Met with outgoing facilities director Brad to ensure smooth transition; Brad left on good terms.
- Held a monthly meeting with IEA leadership.
- Participated in Ipswich Aware meeting with Jon Mitchell and Peter Ginolfi, discussing vaping issues at middle and high schools.
- The Educator Evaluation Committee adopted updated DESE rubric for next year.
- Interviewed finalists for Paul F. Doyon assistant principal position; offer decision pending.
- Attended stakeholder meeting at Ascension Church on town-wide issues; highlighted success of the new middle school program run with EDP and church support (50+ students enrolled).
- Continued subcommittee work: Elementary Building Project, Feoffees Policy, Policy, and Communications. North Shore Superintendents/Directors meeting addressed special education transportation and legislative issues.
- Scheduled for a NORESKO Zoom interview Thursday morning with Rick Mitchell and Sara Coyle.
- Received monthly tech update from Keith Borgen.

## 7. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- **Budget Subcommittee:** Met to respond to the Strategic Planning Committee's request regarding future overrides. While detailed projections are ongoing, the subcommittee recommended two future overrides based on historical trends in 2027 and 2032. The approach is consistent with past practice (every five years) and will continue to be refined.
- **Communications Subcommittee:** Reviewed and approved the April newsletter topics, including updates on budget planning, the elementary school building project, the NORESKO project, No Place for Hate, and community discussions. The group discussed ways to encourage community feedback, including adding a standing reminder in the newsletter inviting residents to email the School Committee. There was strong support for continuing the pre-meeting community forums, with members agreeing they provide valuable input. A suggestion was made to track general topics discussed at these forums in an informational-only format for future reference, possibly as a standing agenda item at School Committee meetings. Additionally, a wording change was recommended for the NORESKO update to avoid implying the original proposal was irresponsible.
- **Policy Subcommittee:** Met and will present updates at the next meeting. On track to complete policy reviews for the second consecutive year.
- **Feoffee Policy Working Group:** Held a productive meeting; updates and clarifications in progress. Final recommendations expected at the next meeting.
- **Athletic Policy Working Group:** In the process of setting two meeting dates before the end of the school year.
- **Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board:** Discussion about a potential program offering increased grant access.
- **Strategic Planning Committee:** Met recently. No final report ready for FINCOM booklet; aiming to post to town website by May 9. Will present a brief update at Town Meeting.
- **Paine Grant and Traverso-Weatherall Grant Committees:** Paine Grant presentations held; described as inspiring and impactful. The Traverso-Weatherall Committee will meet May 6.

## 8. High School Student Representative Report

CQ reported on several recent and upcoming student activities. The high school's Model UN team attended a Boston event. CQ also attended a community stakeholders meeting through his involvement with Ascension Church and noted progress on the teen drop-in center. He mentioned that "Senior Assassin," a non-school-sanctioned senior tradition, is currently underway. Upcoming events include the Culture Fest, featuring clubs like the Green Team, Global Languages, and DEI, and the distribution of free trees to students as part of Earth Day celebrations. Regarding the rain garden project, Charlie shared that the Green Team met to finalize sketches and coordinate with vendors, with planting expected after April break. He noted this was likely his second-to-last meeting due to upcoming junior prom and the transition to a new student representative on June 5.

## 9. Finance Report

No Finance Report was presented.

## 10. Presentations

### A. Vote on Town Meeting Warrant Articles/Speaker Assignments

#	Title	School Comm	Vote	Speaker
1	Consent Calendar	SS/JC Support	6-0	
2	Finance Committee Election	RATM		
3	FY 2026 Municipal Budget	SS/JD Support	6-0	
4	FY 2026 School Budget	SS/JD Support	6-0	Sasha
5	FY 2026 Whittier Regional High School Budget	SS/HR Support	6-0	Jen
6	FY 2026 Essex County Technical Institute Budget	SS/HR Support	6-0	
7	Transfer of FY25 Appropriated Budget Funds to Educational Stabilization Fund	SS/MP Support	5-0-1	Sasha
8	Stabilization Funding	SS/HR Support	6-0	
9	Transfer Funds for Opioid Abatement Purposes	SS/JD Support	6-0	
10	To Close Unspent Capital Funds and Transfer To Capital Stabilization	SS/MP Support	6-0	
11	Revaluation of Real Property (5-yr Recertification for FY26)	SS/HR Support	6-0	
12	Other Post-Employment Benefits Funding	SS/JD Support	6-0	
13	Annual Capital Plan	SS/HR Support	6-0	Sasha
14	Borrowing for Water Treatment Plant Replacement	SS/HR Support	6-0	
15	Debt Exclusion for Fire Truck Purchase	SS/HR Support	6-0	
16	NEW Borrowing for Energy Efficiency Improvements - NORESO	SS/JC Support	6-0	
17	Amend Zoning Bylaws Section IX.D. Floodplain	NO VOTE		
18	Amend Zoning Bylaws, Add Section IX.V. Section 3A Multi-family Overlay District	5-1 Support		
19	Citizen vote of no confidence in Town Manager	SS/JD Support	0-6 (fails)	
20	Citizen Petition supporting cost efficiency in Ipswich school building projects	RATM		Haley will be prepared to speak if necessary

The School Committee discussed supporting Article 13, the annual capital plan, with a particular focus on concerns related to the proposed modular building at Winthrop. While there was general support for the overall plan, multiple members expressed hesitation about the ongoing and future costs of the modular unit. Questions were raised about whether approval of the article would commit the committee to spending funds specifically on that project. It was clarified that voting in favor would make the funds available but would not require the committee to proceed without further discussion. Members voiced a desire to better understand how the recurring \$64,000 annual cost would be absorbed into future budgets and whether alternative space solutions had been explored. Dr. Blake noted that space constraints at Winthrop are critical, and the modular is necessary to create

appropriate learning environments and meet compliance needs. He also mentioned the possibility of utilizing revolving funds, such as the preschool fund, to offset costs. Ultimately, the committee felt more comfortable proceeding with the vote, acknowledging that further deliberation would take place before committing to spend the funds on the modular.

The committee discussed Article 20, which stems from a citizen petition requesting a cost analysis comparing model and non-model schools, with language referencing small and large school designs. It was noted that the MSBA process already includes reviewing model schools and assessing various options for cost efficiency, meaning much of what is being requested would happen regardless of the article's approval. Some committee members expressed concern that the article's language could be interpreted as advocating for two schools, based on the terms "small and large schools," which could create confusion or stir public division. The group agreed that clarity in the motion wording at Town Meeting would be critical, particularly since the petitioner indicated a willingness to amend the motion to reflect broader support. Several members emphasized the importance of exploring all options during the feasibility phase to avoid future accusations of incomplete analysis and to ensure public buy-in, especially given the financial commitment required from taxpayers. Others noted that the MSBA process already ensures that multiple options will be evaluated, regardless of the article.

#### **B. New NORESCO Letter Review**

The School Committee reviewed and supported a Letter to the Editor endorsing the revised New NORESCO project warrant article for the May 13th Town Meeting. The letter, authored by KE and reviewed by the Communications subcommittee, highlights project revisions, funding details, and benefits. Members agreed to submit the letter to the local newspaper.

#### **C. Elementary School Building Project Working Group Update**

The Elementary Project Support Working Group provided an update on efforts to prepare materials for public engagement ahead of the MSBA process beginning in July. Two documents were shared: (1) Guiding Principles, highlighting key values such as prioritizing educational planning, addressing current facility challenges, financial responsibility, sustainability, and transparency, and (2) Process Timing, a one-page overview of the MSBA timeline adapted from their website. Committee members discussed edits to the Guiding Principles for clarity and tone and agreed to finalize the document for website publication by the end of the month. There was also discussion on whether to include projected completion dates, with consensus to omit them for now due to variability. Next steps include working with Laura Hillery to publish the documents online, determining the placement of previous project materials, and preparing to transition communications responsibilities to the future School Building Committee.

#### **D. End of Year Events Review**

The committee reviewed a list of end of year events taking place across the district and discussed who may be interested in attending particular events.

#### **11. New Business\***

No new business was presented.

#### **12. Consent Agenda**

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

#### **13. Adjournment JC/MP. Unanimous. 10:11 PM**

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

**Meeting adjourned at 10:11 PM**