

Ipswich School Committee

Thursday, February 1, 2024

MS/HS Ensemble Room

134 High Street, Ipswich

7:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

KE called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

Present: D. Freehan (DF) M. Perry (MP)
 J. Donahue (JD) J. Connolly (JC)
 S. Sopic (SS) 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

No announcements were made.

4. Special Acknowledgements

There were no special acknowledgements.

5. Remarks from the Chair

There were no remarks from the Chair.

6. Public Comments¹

There were no comments from the public.

7. Presentations

A. FY25 Budget Presentation

The FY25 Budget was presented by BB and the administrative team on January 31st. Tonight's meeting was used to ask questions pertaining to the presentation/budget.

KE asked for clarification on the Circuit Breaker Funding slide, State and Federal Funding slide and the School Choice Fund slide. TM talked about those fund balances and how the totals have been calculated. TM also shared the total number of School Choice students coming into the district and the number of School Choice students that are going elsewhere.

TM explained that the \$2.9 million from outside sources is used to offset the appropriated budget.

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.

JC asked for clarification on the Stabilization Fund and how it is used. TM shared that the Stabilization Fund and the Special Education Stabilization Fund are both approved at Town Meeting and noted the page in the budget book where the anticipated amount being used from the Stabilization Fund was mentioned.

MP asked if there were any expectations that the town would see the “Fair Share” amendment money. TM acknowledged that Ipswich would receive an allocation, however, the amount is not clear at this time.

JD asked how the roles of the assistant principals are defined, the impact to the buildings, and the responsibilities that differ from the principal position. Mr. Holtz, principal at Doyon, shared that the assistant principal position allows the principal to do things that make the school better. Assistant principals are available to handle things that are not necessarily scheduled which allows the principal to prioritize getting into classrooms, preparing for meetings, and planning. The assistant principal does meaningful work like connecting with teachers, observing classrooms, re-regulating students, and building relationships with the school community. Amy Sullivan, principal at Winthrop, added that having an assistant principal has been life changing. Having an assistant principal allows for a more team approach in a lot of areas and has created more efficiency in response times to student issues and parent/teacher communication. Ms. Sullivan acknowledged that this was the first year where she has felt “caught up”. The assistant principal role also allows for assistance with required observations and evaluations. Ms. Sullivan also addressed the time that the principals and the assistant principals collaborate with the Director of Teaching and Learning.

KE asked Mr. Holtz about line items including where the previously ESSER funded 1.0 FTE paraeducator was going, why there was a jump in the nurse professional salary line, and why there was an increase in the home services line. Mr. Holtz was able to explain that the paraeducator position was tied to the eliminated K-1 classroom. The nurse salary was reflective of the new staff member in the position and where they fell on the salary schedule. The home services line was based on student need.

KE asked for a brief explanation on the reading delivery model at the elementary school. Ms. Sullivan said that the model differs at Winthrop because they are a Title 1 school. The reading specialist works with any grade level student that needs supplemental instruction outside of the classroom, including progress monitoring. The Title 1 component of the specialist’s position includes more intense reading instruction targeted in grades 1 and 2. Paraeducators help deliver the instruction. Post Covid, there has been an increase in students qualifying for Title 1 supports. Mr. Holtz added that through the Dyslexia Mandate and assessments, Doyon has identified students behind in reading and literacy. The Literacy Specialist tracks student data, prioritizes student needs, and creates learning plans to address those student needs. Paraeducators assist with the delivery of instruction.

Both Mr. Holtz and Ms. Sullivan reviewed their co-teaching models and identified which classrooms currently support that model.

JB asked about instructional software at Doyon and why it was no longer included in the budget. Mr. Holtz said the i-Ready software was moved to a different line.

KE asked about the effectiveness of the Adjustment Counselor position that was originally funded through ESSER and suggested that it could be powerful data to use when advocating for those positions.

Jonathan Mitchell, high school principal, spoke to the health service position and the additional paraeducator at the high school.

BB shared information on the ELL teachers and ELL students in the district, noting that the district is seeing an increase in the ELL population.

JD asked Tracy Wagner, Director of Teaching and Learning, to walk through a “day in the life” and discuss how she implements her role. Ms. Wagner shared that in most districts, there are multiple people who coordinate teaching and learning. In Ipswich, those roles all fall to her. Ms. Wagner talked about implementing good systems and the importance of teacher leadership. Ms. Wagner meets regularly with the principals and assistant principals, the Director of Technology and the Digital Learning Specialist. She oversees the Compass Committees, which are groups of teacher leaders with specific focus areas. Ms. Wagner creates and implements the curriculum review cycle for the district, coordinates PD Day, and does all grant writing and grant management for professional development. Ms. Wagner also facilitates summer professional development. A list of all grants that are written and managed by Ms. Wagner was also shared.

BB listed off the current open positions in the district that have not been filled, which included a custodian, a World Language teacher, and the District Family Liaison. It was noted that the family liaison position is not included in the FY25 budget. BB then listed the positions that were eliminated in the FY25 budget.

BB and TM talked briefly about the snow plowing contract that has been absorbed into the school budget per the request of the Town Manager.

There was a discussion on the Climate Resiliency position that is partially funded through the school budget.

SS noted that material supply lines have increased across the budget. BB shared that costs have gone up significantly. A lot of those materials, like assessment programs, were once ESSER funded and have been incredibly useful. Subscriptions to these types of programs are more expensive.

DF asked how many positions that were previously funded by Feoffee grants have been moved to the appropriated budget. There are two World Language positions currently in the budget, as well as the Computer Science educator position. There are no new Feoffee funded positions that are being brought forward in FY25. The Literacy Coach position that was part of a Paine Grant last year was not moved into the budget for this year. It was determined that the grant was underfunded and the position went unfilled after several attempts to hire someone. Many of the candidates who were offered the position were not able to commit due to the salary and the lack of a guarantee of employment beyond one year. Ms. Wagner was going to re-evaluate the position and submit another Paine Grant this spring.

BB spoke about the number of Special Education students currently in the district and the number of Special Education students who are outplaced. BB clarified that any student on an IEP is considered a Special Education student.

BB and TM talked about the salary lines and how some may differ from the start of the year. Throughout the course of the year and hiring process, there is the budgeted amount for salaries and then differences depending on where the person hired falls on particular salary scales.

A question was asked about projecting revolving fund balances for the end of the year. Due to a lot of unknown variables, projecting end balances for some revolving accounts can be difficult. Account balances are shared each month as part of the financial reports to the School Committee. TM did share that School Choice and the Food Service accounts each had healthy balances. TM noted that there was an advantage in using funds like School Choice for a one time cost like the new ELA curriculum.

JD expressed concern over the future of the School Choice account with the decline in the number of School Choice slots that have been opened over the past two years.

BB reviewed the draft Capital Plan, noting that it has not been approved by the Select Board. The Capital Plan is a revolving plan that takes into account new projects and completed projects over the years. Recommendations for Capital improvements come from the School Dude report, as well as through requests from the building administrators.

TM reviewed the projected amount that will be transferred into the Stabilization Fund this year. The conversation continued around the Override Calculator and the best approach to extend the override across five years. It was recommended that the Budget Subcommittee meet ahead of the February 29th School Committee meeting to further review the calculator.

BB said that he felt comfortable with the FY25 budget going into the presentations to the Finance Committee. The big concern from the Finance Committee last year was the ESSER funded positions moving into the appropriated budget and how much the budget would increase. BB said he was proud of the administrative team for their creative thinking and ability to get to a lower budget increase. KE added that another concern was that the budget increase needed to be within 4%, according to the Override Calculator, in order to extend the override five years. It has now been determined that the override could still be extended if the budget increases remain around 5%.

JD asked if there were plans to add positions in the budget to help support the new ELA curriculum. BB shared that the Literacy Coach position is still necessary and wanted. Teachers, however, have had a lot of professional development around this new curriculum. Ms. Wagner does plan to submit a Paine Grant again for the Literacy Coach position.



8. New Business*



No new business was presented.


9. Adjournment DF/JD/ Unanimous.



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

DOCUMENTS

 Calculator SC memo TM Feb.01.24.pdf 

 FY25-29 Ipswich Captial Plan draft Jan24.xlsx 

 Ipswich Public Schools FY25 Budget v2 Jan31.pdf 

 Override Budget Calculator FY24-27 TM Jan.31.24.pdf 

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