

Ipswich School Committee

Thursday, February 8, 2024

MS/HS Ensemble Room

134 High Street, Ipswich

6:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

KE called the meeting to order at 6:03 PM.

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

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 declares and return to open session was made by JP and seconded by DF.*

Roll Call

Motion passed unanimously

3. Return to Open Session

JB joined the meeting.

4. Reading of the District Mission Statement

JB read the mission statement.

5. Announcements

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, February 29th at 7:00 PM in the MS/HS Ensemble Room.
- A Tri-Board meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 28th at 7:00 PM in Meeting Room A at Town Hall.
- The Middle/High School will be closed on Friday, February 9th for building repairs.
- Schools will be closed Monday, February 19 through Friday, February 23rd for February vacation. All district offices will be closed on Monday, February 19th.
- The School Committee is accepting letters of interest for the Whittier Tech School Committee through next week.
- There are two openings on the Paine Grant Committee.

6. Special Acknowledgements

- Michael Coeho, Director of Fine Arts, 2X grammy nominated educator of the year and top 5 finalist this year
- School Counselors Appreciation Week
- Ipswich High School play, Clue, was well received
- Girls Track team are CAL Baker Division Champions

7. Remarks from the Chair

No remarks from the Chair.

8. Public Comments¹

There were none.

New Business: High School Student Representative Report

- Discussed the DEI Team mural at the HS
- Discussed raising school spirit and the potential celebration of the opening of the new basketball court
- Students have expressed concern with the limited parking at the high school

9. Presentations

A. Public Hearing: FY25 School Budget

- *Motion to open the Public Hearing on the FY25 Budget was made by JD and seconded by SS. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

The Public Hearing was opened at 7:27 PM. KE explained that the budget hearing was an extended public comment for the purpose of discussing the FY25 budget. Members of the public could ask questions about the budget at this time. KE reviewed the timeline around the posting of the budget and budget presentations. On February 29th, the School Committee will vote on the FY25 budget. The School Committee will present their FY25 budget to the Finance Committee in March and then it will be voted on at Town Meeting in May.

There were no members of the public present. The budget hearing remained open while the School Committee moved forward with their agenda.

B. Reappointment to Feoffees Committee- W. Zagrobski (Taken out of order)

KE shared that Mr. Zagrobski has served on the Feoffee Committee for three years and is one of two School Committee appointments to that committee. The Feoffee Committee has a term limit of two terms, totalling six years. The Feoffee Committee is responsible for managing the Feoffee Trust and interacting with the trust's financial advisor. KE reached out to the members of the Feoffee Committee for feedback on Mr. Zagrobski. Members spoke highly about his experience and knowledge in finance and investment.

Mr. Zagrobski introduced himself and spoke about this experience and interest in serving on this committee.

JC suggested that the School Committee publicly advertise for open positions like this one to ensure that interested parties are able to apply.

- *Motion to appoint Walter Zagrobski to the Feoffees Committee for a three year term beginning September 1, 2023 was made by JP and seconded by JD. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

C. Overnight Field Trip Request- Model U.N.

Members of Model U.N. presented their request for an overnight field trip to the Model U.N. Conference scheduled for March 22 through March 24th. There are approximately 60 students attending the conference with 6 chaperones. Students and chaperones will stay at the Westin Copley Hotel. The total cost is \$300 per student and scholarship opportunities will be available for students who cannot afford the cost of the trip.

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.

Prior to voting, KE acknowledged that three School Committee members have students attending this conference. This is not a school-funded initiative, therefore, those three members can take part in the vote.

- *Motion to approve the overnight field trip request for Model U.N. was made by DF and seconded by JC. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

D. FY25 School Budget Discussion

This discussion was for School Committee members to ask additional questions regarding the FY25 budget or to seek clarification on the information previously presented.

JP began by asking for clarification on the Override Calculator and the assumptions included about the annual budget growth for the Town coming in at 3.9%. TM shared that the assumptions that are currently used are an underestimate and suggested that a more realistic number to use would be closer to 4.5-5% which is more representative of the last few years. TM wanted to make those changes after having a discussion with the committee.

TM talked about the use of the revolving funds, stating that the district can always rely on a reasonable balance from the Circuit Breaker fund. Special Education costs continue to rise and are often out of the control of the district. The State legislature recognizes that and is able to continue to provide funding by way of Circuit Breaker funding to help with those costs. TM then talked about the Special Education Stabilization Fund, which he noted, was created to support the district with extraordinary Special Education costs. If the fund was not there, the district would need to drain funds from other sources to cover Special Education costs required by law. The district is using it as it is intended, and only with Town Meeting approval to do so. TM spoke about the School Choice fund, saying School Choice is a yearly policy decision and only time will tell how the fund is affected. If School Choice enrollment decreases and graduation students outpace new enrollments, then the fund balance will be affected. TM clarified that the Override Calculator makes no assumptions about the use of outside funding to support the budget.

SS talked about updating the assumptions for the Override Calculator. If the district uses the current figures, the calculator would be within \$170,000 of making sure the override lasts the full five years. SS believed it was within the district's means to pull the revolving funds to ensure the override lasts. TM said he supported that idea. Using the higher percentages from the Town still allows the district to meet its five year obligation with a little balance towards the future.

TM continued to answer questions regarding specific lines in the budget. He clarified that only custodial staff were included in the "Ground Maintenance" line in the Building Operations budget. The PD line in the Central Office budget went down significantly, which TM clarified was simply a correction on a typo in last year's budget. That budget line was never intended to be \$60,000. TM talked about the funding for technology, which accounts for replacements for switches and devices throughout the district. KE noted that the Special Education line for collaborative tuitions had increased significantly. TM said that the increase is student-driven and is the largest budget driver. TM also clarified that a position included in the Performing Arts line went from a 1.0 FTE to a .6 FTE solely to be reflective of the actual hours for the position. There was no reduction in the position or the work.

TM explained the debt services included in the budget. School renovations, approved in 2007, are included, as well as the wind turbine that was approved in 2011. The district will continue to pay for the wind turbine through FY30 and payments for the school renovations from 2007 will drop off in FY26 and FY27. The turf field, approved in 2016, will be paid for through FY31. Altogether, that debt equals \$173,000. Short term debt includes the school roofs that were approved at Town Meeting last year. The town had asked the school to fund that debt service from the school budget.

DF asked for clarification on parts of the Override Calculator, specifically relating to lines 4 and 7 and the amount of the end balances/transfers. TM explained that the district was able to transfer such high numbers in past years due to the availability of pandemic State and federal funding. During that time, the district was not expanding taxpayer dollars at the same rate it is now. With the loss of those funds, the district will begin to contribute less and need more as the years go. SS added that FY23 was also the beginning of the override.

DF asked how the projected enrollment at each school impacts the budget. BB said that it depends on the grade level and the needs of the student. Three schools made similar assumptions in their enrollment projections, while one school added 2-6 students per grade. DF wondered if that buffer was needed and suggested that all schools use the same assumptions for enrollment projections.

DF spoke about the World Language position that was not included in the FY25 budget and suggested that it could be potentially funded through a Paine Grant. The position originated from a Paine Grant and was then absorbed into the appropriated budget. BB said the position has been posted for months now and has gone unfilled after an unanticipated vacancy this school year. Funding the position, again, through a Paine Grant could be “dangerous territory”, said BB, as Feoffee grants are meant to supplement and not supplant. Even if it were to be grant funded, eventually the position would need to be rolled into the appropriated budget again.

JC asked for clarification on why the district could not use the money they were returning to the Stabilization Fund towards the FY25 budget. TM explained that the budget is an annual appropriation with a lifespan of 12 months. The district needs to account for the money and fund educational needs within that 12 months. It is not a roll forward budget. The district does not automatically get the funds to transfer into the Stabilization Fund; they need to be voted on at Town Meeting. The Stabilization Fund was also not intended to support building/Capital needs, but rather support operating needs closely aligned with teaching and learning.

E. Paine Grant Committee Discussion

The Paine Grant Committee is currently seeking applicants to fill two positions- Community Member At-Large and a Community Business Member. Members meet three times across April and May each year to review Paine Grant applications. This is a two year term for each position. Information on how to apply for this position will be shared in the upcoming School Committee newsletter.

F. Whittier Tech Appointment Discussion

The School Committee has received two letters of interest for the Whittier Tech School Committee position. Interviews will take place in public at the School Committee meeting on March 7th and the appointment will be voted on at the March 21st meeting. Members are encouraged to send KE and JP questions ahead of the March 7th meeting. KE is going to reach out to the Chairs of Select Board and Finance Committee to see if their committee members would like to also submit questions. Applications will be shared with School Committee members ahead of the March 7th meeting.

KE then suggested having a School Committee liaison to Whittier who would be responsible for going to the Whittier Tech website, looking at their school committee agendas and minutes and reviewing their capital plans and budget. SS asked if that was already the expectation of the representative to the Whittier School Committee and said he would be more inclined to set expectations for the new representative than to assign a liaison. Both DF and JC agreed that should be the expectation of the Whittier School Committee representative.

Public Hearing: FY25 School Budget

No members of the public participated in the public hearing.

- *Motion to close the Public Hearing on the FY25 Budget was made by DF and seconded by JD. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

G. Policy Update/Approval

DF reviewed the updates to policies GBEBD, LA, LB, LBC, LDA, AA, AB, ACA, ACE, AD, ADC, ADDA-R, and ADDA.

- *Motion to approve the policies in the 2/8/24 Policy Update folder as reviewed was made by SS and seconded by KE. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

The Wellness Committee policy was reviewed at the last Policy Subcommittee meeting. Members are needed for the committee. DF suggested advertising for those positions in the School Committee newsletter and on their social media page.

10. Superintendent’s Administrative Report

- Work on the FY25 budget presentation/discussions
- Attendance at the CREST Collaborative and Northshore Education Consortium Board of Director meetings
- Dealing with personnel issues

- Doyon closed for cleaning due to illness
- A meeting with MTRS
- Participation in the last of a three-part webinar series on negotiations
- Attendance at a North Shore Superintendent Roundtable meeting
- Engaged with ARC ED who will assist with the analysis of financial data around collective bargaining units/negotiations
- Air quality testing related to concerns about the kiln room ventilation
- Participation in a DEI Team meeting
- Attendance at several subcommittee meetings

11. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- **Communications Subcommittee:** Reviewed the draft February newsletter. The newsletter will be released on February 27th.
- **School Facilities Working Group:** Focused on the 2024 SOI submissions and the priorities that need to be identified on each application. The plan is to bring the SOIs to the School Committee at the first meeting in March.
- **Strategic Planning Committee:** Working to get an updated Strategic Plan document within the next 12 months. The group is currently working on gathering information and plans to review the 2020 Strategic Plan to see what projects are still in play.
- **Mutual Concerns Subcommittee:** Discussed the timeline for kindergarten screenings and educator concerns around support/physical restraints

12. New Business*

None presented.

13. Vouchers and Bills

All were reviewed and signed.

14. Consent Agenda




























- *Motion to approve the consent agenda as presented was made by JP and seconded by DF. **Motion passed unanimously in favor.***

15. Adjournment

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

Meeting adjourned at 9:25 PM.

DOCUMENTS

	*School Committee Meeting Agenda 02.08.24	
	5. Announcements: 02.08.24	
	9.B. Feoffee Application 6.24.20 W. Zagrobski.docx	
	9.C. Overnight Field Trip Request-Model UN.pdf	
	14. Consent Agenda: 02.08.24	
	14. Consent Item: 01.18.24 School Committee Minutes	
	14. Consent Item: 01.31.24 School Committee Minutes	
	14. Consent Item: Racing Challenge Donation.pdf	
	14. Consent Item: IHS Racing Challenge donations Jan2024.pdf	
	DRAFT February Newsletter	
	FY24 YTD Budget 02.08.24 SC report.pdf	
	Copy of Calculator SC memo TM Feb. 01.24.pdf	
	Copy of Ipswich Public Schools FY25 Budget v2 Jan31.pdf	
	Copy of Override Budget Calculator FY24-27 TM Jan. 31.24.pdf	