

Ipswich School Committee

Thursday, May 2, 2024
MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
6:15 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

KE called the meeting to order.

Present: D. Freehan (DF) M. Perry (MP)
 J. Donahue (JD) J. Connolly (JC)
 S. Sopic (SS) K. Eliot (KE)
 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)- 7:10 PM

2. Executive Session:

- *Motion to meet in executive session pursuant to M.G.L. chapter 30A, sec. 21(a) for the following purpose: (2) To conduct strategy session in preparation for contract negotiations with nonunion personnel and (3) To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining was made by*

3. Return to Open Session

The meeting returned to open session at 7:10 PM.

4. Reading of the District Mission Statement

JB read the mission statement.

5. Announcements

- The next School Committee meeting is scheduled for May 16th at 7:00 PM in the MS/HS Ensemble Room.
- The Feoffees Working Group is meeting remotely on Tuesday, May 7th at 4:15 PM.
- The Policy Subcommittee is meeting remotely on Tuesday, May 7th at 5:30 PM.
- The Communications Subcommittee is meeting remotely on Wednesday, May 8th at 4:30 PM.
- Town Meeting is taking place on Tuesday, May 14th at the Dolan Performing Arts Center at 7:00 PM.
- The STEAM Shocase is being held at the MS/HS on May 16th from 5-7:00 PM.

6. Special Acknowledgements

BB acknowledged the cast and crew of Legally Blonde. BB also talked about the middle school students and art teacher whose work was accepted into a special art show. The Multicultural Showcase was also highlighted.

7. Remarks from the Chair

There were no remarks from the Chair.

8. Public Comments¹

There were no public comments.

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.

9. High School Student Representative Report

JB discussed:

- Newly implemented hall pass system: Teachers are telling students they don't support the policy. Enforcement differs from class to class.
- BRIDGE Program: Seniors have the opportunity to get real-world experience in the workforce from May through the end of the school year. Typically BRIDGE students participating in AP courses have to come back to school to attend those classes. This year, even when the AP class/test is complete, students still need to return and attend the classes even if they are not moving forward with the curriculum. That change was made mid- BRIDGE experience this year.

10. Presentations

A. Discussion and vote on hiring of the Pupil Personnel Services Director position

After a thorough interview process, BB presented his recommendation to hire Eric Oxford as the new Pupil Personnel Services Director.

- *Motion to support the hiring of Eric Oxford for the Director of Pupil Personnel Services position effective June 30, 2024 was made by JD and seconded by DF. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

B. Review of High School Handbook changes and potential vote of approval

Jonathan Mitchell, principal of the high school, presented changes made to the Chemical Health policy. Mr. Mitchell explained that the changes to this policy were prompted by events that took place involving alleged underaged drinking. Complaints were made that there was not a clear policy in the handbook around expectations of underage drinking. The High School Council worked on this policy for approximately four meetings. One issue that was brought forward was how athletes would be punished, but no other student. This new policy will apply to all students and was supported by the legal team.

In the past, when the high school received a report from the police and list of names, Mr. Mitchell would apply the high school's interpretation of the MIIA rule that used to state, "in the presence of" drugs or alcohol. The MIIA rule no longer states that. In order to make sure the distinction was clear, the line, "in the presence of alcohol or drugs" was included in this new policy. Mr. Mitchell outlined the consequences for each offense.

KE asked if the first and second offenses were for the academic school year or applied across multiple years. Consequences are intended for the year, however if something happened at the end of the school year, the consequence would carry into the new year. KE then asked if any thought has been given about a similar policy at the middle school. Mr. Mitchell said that would be up to the middle school administration. Mr. Mitchell clarified that the policy would live in the parent/student handbook and the athletic handbook. This policy specifically speaks to drinking outside of school. KE then asked if it was worth having links to the MIIA and/or the Cape Ann league policy. Mr. Mitchell said there are consequences linked to current MIIA policy.

JP asked a question about a first offense for a police charge or summons for possession. He then noted the removal of another automatic consequence and the addition of the language, "at the discretion of".

JC asked if it would be confusing and/or frustrating with terms like "shall", "at the discretion of", etc. Mr. Mitchell said there was a conversation about the additional burden that would put on the administration. Some wanted discretion because not all situations are the same.

JB spoke to the "discretion" piece and students that are involved in multiple activities. He felt the consequences may not be equitable. Mr. Mitchell said it would be a case by case situation and talked about examples that were brought up during the development process.

JD thought there was some gray area in the policy and asked Mr. Mitchell to speak to how other districts handle similar situations. She also asked for clarity on what/how situations were substantiated by "law enforcement". Other districts only deal with situations when someone has been charged. Otherwise, the school does not deal with it. A police report would be substantiated evidence. JD talked about the incident in October where there was a police report, but no one was charged. JD then referenced other incidents that had occurred where people were charged. She then asked, again, what a substantiated report in Ipswich related to Ipswich High School students. Mr. Mitchell clarified that if a student is charged, the police report would state that. If they were present at the party, the police report would state the students were present. JD said she still felt the policy was gray and put more burden on the administration.

Other Cape Ann districts follow the MIAA Chemical Health policy when a student is charged. DF asked if other districts have a policy that addresses students who are in the presence of drugs or alcohol. Mr. Mitchell said that several years ago, the MIAA moved away from that language. Districts are free to have a stricter policy if they want. Ipswich has enforced a stricter policy that did not match what they had in writing. One of the goals of this policy overhaul was for the policy to match the expectation.

JC felt there were a lot of experiences where kids would not know they were in the presence of alcohol. MP asked if the police just handed over a list of students to the high school. Mr. Mitchell said that police typically don't breathalyze each student. They make students call their parents and get a ride home. From there, a list is provided to the high school. There would be instances where police may charge a student. MP felt that the language, "in the presence of" could be gray if the police aren't making that determination, but the district is. Mr. Mitchell said that the police would be making the determination by providing a list of students.

JD said that the phrase "in the presence of" does not allow a student leader to say, "I want to be here, but no thanks to drinking". JD said that students are not given the chance to say no and it opens up Ipswich to a lot of liability. The policy, JD said, felt gray and could be a repeat of past experiences. Mr. Mitchell said he cannot have a policy that appears to show any approval of underage drinking.

KE said she wanted to respect the work that the School Council did on the policy, noting that it was a big improvement.

SS said he appreciated the specificity of the policy and that the first offense was a nice addition. SS said his concern is that his concern lies with the fact that the policy revolves around things that take place outside of school hours and off school grounds. SS felt the policy should explicitly say that the policy addresses issues outside of school grounds which may be public or private residences. SS also added that the language "in the presence of" should be made more clear. He then asked how this would apply to concerns about use in school, in particular with the "in the presence of" language as it applies to kids using drugs in a school bathroom. Mr. Mitchell clarified that there is a separate policy about drug or alcohol use in school, but said they could look at making that language more clear. SS asked if this applied to middle school students, too. Mr. Mitchell said this specific policy would apply to any middle school students who applied for a waiver to play high school sports. SS said it would be helpful to understand how the administration would confirm events above and beyond what was included in the police report. In general, SS thought there could be additions to make the policy more clear and again expressed concern on how this policy could be applied outside of school grounds.

DF said she does not condone underage drinking and then asked how the "in the presence of" language would be applied. DF then asked what the relationship is between the police and the school and how can the district ensure that the policy is applied fairly. DF also asked if the "in the presence of" language only applies to someone who was with a person who was charged. The answer, Mr. Mitchell said, was no. The police provide a list of students who were in an area or presence of alcohol.

JB talked about the recent presentation from Ipswich Aware, sharing that the message was not that you can't go out and drink, but it was to go out and do it safely. JB said to support that message and then apply this policy was sending mixed messages. KE added that the School Committee and administration cannot support underage drinking.

SS asked if the policy only applies in Ipswich. Mr. Mitchell said that if the administration has proof of someone partaking in underage drinking or drugs, then the policy still applies. DF asked for clarification about whether the incident would need to be verified by police. Mr. Mitchell added that the policy was intended to help the administration deal with issues when they come to him.

JP clarified that Mr. Mitchell and the School Council chose a tiered approach to the policy that allows for some discretion.

Given the feedback, KE asked if Mr. Mitchell felt like the policy was ready to be voted on. Mr. Mitchell said he was happy to put together a package of all proposed handbook changes and bring them back to the School Committee at a later date. Members were asked how they felt about voting on the changes to the policy tonight. SS shared that he had outstanding legal questions about the reporting on activity outside of school grounds. BB clarified that the policy was run past legal and they confirmed that the policy was enforceable as written.

Mr. Mitchell said that students were concerned that there was some sense of urgency from students to have this new policy in

place.

Mr. Mitchell also said that he was not inclined to remove the “in the presence of” language from the policy. It would represent a substantial step back from what the previous enforcement policy was. The policy now is more lenient than what it was before.

SS and DF agreed that it should be explicit that “in the presence of” language applies regardless if anyone is charged.

BB stepped in and shared his frustration with the conversation. Members acknowledged the work that went into the policy and that the questions being asked were with the best interest of students in mind.

The final discussion and potential of approval of this policy will take place at an upcoming meeting.

C. Discussion and potential vote to increase the Capital Fund limit for CREST Collaborative

Ipswich is a member of the CREST Collaborative. The Collaborative currently has a Capital Fund limit of \$650,000 and they are requesting to increase the Capital Fund limit which must be voted on by member district School Committees. CREST is anticipating having to do significant upgrades in future years and is asking for member districts to vote to increase the Capital Fund to \$2 million. This is not an ask for additional funding from member districts.

The Capital Fund is funded each year by any budget surplus each year up to a certain amount. The fund is capped at \$650,000 currently. If the cumulative surplus exceeds a certain amount, dictated by state law, then the excess funds are returned to member districts.

School Committee members reviewed the Capital Plan for CREST forecasted from 2025-2030.

- *Motion to support an increase to the Capital Fund limit for CREST Collaborative to \$2 million was made by JP and seconded by MP. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

D. Feoffee Distribution Approval

Every spring, the School Committee receives the Feoffee disbursement amount. The letter, from the Feoffee Trust, indicated that the Feoffee distribution to the schools will be \$1,053,412 for the upcoming year. The disbursement is broken down into the Manning Fund and the Paine Grant. The Manning Fund rotates schools each year and is used for library materials. This year, the \$16,686 will go to the middle/high school. Less the Manning Fund, the total disbursement amount for the Paine Grant is \$1,036,726. Typically, the School Committee first votes to accept the distribution as a whole and then votes to split the Paine Grant distribution between the Traverso-Weatherall Innovation Grants and the William Paine Enhancement Grants. The Traverso-Weatherall Innovation Grants typically receives 25% of the remaining disbursement and the Paine Grants is awarded 75% of the remaining disbursement.

- *Motion to accept the gift from the Feoffees Trust distribution in the amount of \$1,053,412 was made by JP and seconded by JP. **The motion passed in favor.***

BB clarified that the cap for the Traverso-Weather Grants was \$7,500 per grant. There are two cycles, one in the fall and one in the spring. DF asked if the Traverso-Weatherall Grants typically use all their allotted funds. BB said he could not recall a year where they needed additional funding. TM added that the FY24 Paine Grants are under the allocated amount by \$1,800.

- *Motion to allocate \$ 777,544.50 to the William Paine Enhancement Grants and \$ 259,181.50 to the Traverso-Weatherall Innovation Grants was made by JP and seconded by JD. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

E. Policy Update

DF reviewed the updates/changes made to the following policies:

- BDB: School Committee Officers
- BDD: School Committee-Superintendent Relationship
- BDE: Subcommittees of the Schools Committee
- BDF: Advisory Committees to the School Committee
- BDFA: School Councils
- BDFA-E: Conduct of School Council Business

- BDFA-E-1: School Improvement Plans
- BDFA-E-2: Submission and Approval of School Improvement Plans
- BDG: School Attorney
- BE: School Committee Meetings
- BEC: Executive Sessions
- BEDA: Notification of School Committee Meetings
- BEDB: Agenda Format
- BEDD: School Committee Rules of Order
- BEDF: Voting Method
- BEDG: Minutes

➤ *Motion to approve the policy updates as presented by the Policy Subcommittee was made by JP and seconded by MP. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

11. Superintendent's Administrative Report

BB's report included:

- Prep session for negotiations
- Bean Counting
- Hosted music educators from Pentucket
- Athletic Director update
- Meeting with staff regarding a personnel issue
- Interview for the PPS Director
- Negotiations
- Meeting with the Technology Director and Digital Learning Specialist
- Subcommittee meetings
- North Shore Superintendent Roundtable meeting
- Met with legal counsel
- Administrator meetings
- Meeting with School Committee candidate
- Agenda planning
- IMADA event
- Preparing for the superintendent evaluation
- Administrative Team meeting
- Extended Day Program Director
- Multilingual Learners Showcase

12. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- **Feoffes Policy Working Group:** meeting planned for next week
- **Operations Subcommittee:** will need to meet before the end of the school year to onboard a new member
- **Traverso-Weatherall Grant Committee:** met to review the grants, but was waiting on the disbursement amount. The committee would like to define the parameters for the applications and repetitive grants.
- **Budget Subcommittee:** reviewed budget related warrant articles. Talked about the end of year closeout.

13. New Business*

BB talked about his evaluation folder which will include his evaluation rubric, goals, and evidence. All members should provide their evaluations to KE by May 10th. The final evaluation will be read into the record at the May 16th meeting.

SS mentioned the fights that have taken place at school. Principals have addressed the issues, but some videos are circulating and there is a growing concern about the school environment. It would be helpful for the administration to communicate what steps are being taken to address those issues.

14. Vouchers and Bills

All were reviewed and signed.




















15. Consent Agenda

No consent agenda was presented.


16. Adjournment


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


DOCUMENTS:


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|--|--|---|
|  | 1.School Committee Meeting Agenda 05.02.24 |  |
|  | 5.Announcements: 05.02.24 |  |
|  | 10.B.DRAFT Chemical Health Rule for Co-curricular & Extracurricular Activities and Athletics |   |
|  | 10.D.Feoffee Disbursement 2024 (FY25) |  |
|  | CREST Capital Plan Fund Request001.pdf |  |
|  | CRESTCapitlaPlanv3.13.24.pdf |  |
|  | Feoffees Distribution FY25 May2024.xlsx |  |
|  | FY23-24 Rev_Gift_Stab balances SC mtg 05.02.24.pdf |  |
|  | FY24 YTD Budget 04.29.24 SC report.pdf |  |


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[W](#) [Copy of File_ BDFA-E-2_ Submission and Approval of School Improvement Plans 2017.docx](#) 


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