

Ipswich School Committee

Thursday, June 6, 2024
MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
6:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

KE called the meeting to order at: 6:07 PM.

Present: Kate Eliot (KE) Mat Perry (MP)
Sasha Sopic (SS) Dianna Freehan (DF) at 6:12 PM
Jen Donahue (JD) Haley Rist (HR) at 6:16 PM

Also Present: Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools (BB)
Tom Markham, Director of Finance and Operations (TM)
Charlie Quimby, High School Student Representative (CQ)

2. Executive Session:

- *Motion to enter into executive session pursuant to M.G.L. chapter 30A, sec. 21(a) for the following purpose: (3) To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining; and (2) To conduct strategy session in preparation for contract negotiations with the Superintendent of Schools was made by JD and seconded by SS.*

Roll Call

The motion passed unanimously in favor.

3. Return to Open Session

The meeting returned to open session at 7:12 PM.

4. Reading of the District Mission Statement

CQ read the mission statement.

5. Announcements

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, June 20, 2024 at 7:00 PM in the MS/HS Ensemble Room.
- Negotiations with the Ipswich Educators Association will be held on June 12th at 4:15 PM.
- The Operations Subcommittee will be held on Thursday, June 13th at 6:00 PM in the MS/HS Guidance Conference Room.
- The last day of school for students in kindergarten through grade 11 will be June 13th. Elementary students will be dismissed at 11:50 AM and middle/high school students will be dismissed at 11:20 AM.

6. Special Acknowledgements

The Class of 2024 was acknowledged, as well as the Green Team dinner and the Pops Concert.

7. Remarks from the Chair

KE discussed the block party and parade taking place on June 8th to commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

8. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

9. High School Student Representative Report

CQ, the newly elected High School Student Representative, gave a brief introduction. CQ shared that students were looking forward to the end of the school year. He also talked about student concerns around the new High School cell phone ban.

10. Presentations

A. New Member Welcome

Haley Rist, the newly elected School Committee member, was welcomed to the group by KE. HR then followed with a brief introduction.

B. Introduction of Incoming Pupil Personnel Services Director-E. Oxford

Eric Oxford, the newly hired Pupil Personnel Services Director, introduced himself to the committee. He will start in his new role on July 1st. BB reviewed his transition plan.

C. Paine Grant Presentation/Approval

Ted Spinale, member of the Paine Grant Committee, gave an overview of the Paine Grant Committee, the history of the Feoffees, and the guidelines for Paine Grant applications. The total disbursement for Paine Grants this year was \$777,544 and the total amount requested across 11 applications was \$983,543. Mr. Spinale explained that through collaboration with grant applicants, they were able to reduce the total amount of several grants. He then reviewed each grant application.

1. IHS Choral Robes

- Amount Requested: \$13,500
- Amount Approved by Paine Grant Committee: \$0.00

After a discussion with the applicant, it was determined that this grant could be resubmitted as a Traverso-Weatherall Grant in the upcoming Fall cycle. The

2. Building at Jack Welch Stadium

- Amount Request:\$250,000
- Amount Approved by the Paine Grant Committee: \$140,000

The goal of this grant is to move forward with Phase 2 of the multipurpose building project at the MS/HS stadium, providing accessible bathrooms, as well as other necessities onsite. It was also explained that similar grants have been approved in the past to help support the completion of this project. It is the hope of the committee working on this project that having a set amount of funding in place would make it possible for them to ask for outside funding elsewhere. This led to a discussion on the timing of the use of Paine Grant funds and whether the approved funds would need to be used during FY25. At this time, there is no specific language in the policy that addresses when funding must be used.

3. Yellowstone National Park Civics Course

- Amount Requested: \$37,081
- Amount Approved by the Paine Grant Committee: \$0.00

The goal of this grant is to fund a field trip for 13 students and chaperones in March 2025 to attend a nine-day program, offsetting some program and transportation costs for students and providing funding for substitute teacher coverage. The Paine Grant Committee felt this grant impacted a limited number of students.

4. Instrumental Impact: Elevating Performance Quality in Our High School Band Program

- Amount Requested: \$36,189.31
- Amount Approved by the Paine Grant Committee: \$26,189.31

The goal of this grant is for the acquisition of new instruments to enhance the scope of inventory available to our band program. There was a discussion regarding the number of instruments the school owns and the number of students that could be impacted by this grant. It was explained that these instruments could impact the entire program, adding a different layer of sound.

5. Professional Development

- Amount Requested: \$145,440
- Amount Approved by the Paine Grant Committee: \$130,440

The goal of this grant is to provide professional learning opportunities to faculty and staff that will take place in both the district as well as at professional conferences such as NCTE and NCTM. This grant has been approved in years past.

6. Enhancing Safety and Innovation with 21st Century Workplace

- Amount Requested: \$99,178
- Amount Approved by the Paine Grant Committee: \$84,178

The goal of this grant is to provide proper systems and equipment as required to enhance curriculum, including cleanliness and safety systems, tools, and ventilation, air purification, and dust removal. There was a discussion around whether aspects of this application should be considered as a Capital Project and if the district was prepared to address the safety issues if the grant is not fully funded.

7. College Bootcamp

- Amount Requested: \$13,500
- Amount Approved by the Paine Grant Committee: \$12,750

The goal of this grant is to help rising seniors self-manage their college application process. This is a grant that has been approved in past years. Last year, 40+ students took advantage of this program.

8. Bringing Art to Life

- Amount Requested: \$87,617.26
- Amount Approved by the Paine Grant Committee: \$87,617.26.

The goal of this grant is To purchase a digital projection system that will enhance stage backdrops, set designs, or visual effects during theatrical productions, concerts, dance performances, and other live events.

9. Place Based Learning

- Amount Requested: \$156,730
- Amount Approved by the Paine Grant Committee: \$151,730

The goal of this grant is to subsidize costs for place-based learning experiences for all our students. This grant was approved in past years.

10. Rave-O

- Amount Requested: \$10,200
- Amount Approved by the Paine Grant Committee: \$10,200

The goal of this grant is for the purchase of two Rave-O reading instruction kits and staff training.

11. Literacy Coach

- Amount Requested: \$134,378
- Amount Approved by the Paine Grant Committee: \$134,378

The goal of this grant is to provide an Elementary School Literacy Coach salaried and benefited position to assist with the implementation of a new elementary-level literacy program. This grant was submitted last year for a lesser amount. The position went unfilled due to the proposed salary. The requested amount has increased and would cover salary and benefits for the position. It is anticipated that this position would be moved to the appropriated budget in upcoming years.

Discussion:

The School Committee discussed each grant prior to taking a formal vote. Issues that arose during discussion included:

- The difference between funding the Place-Based Learning grant vs. one off trips like the Yellowstone grant.

- Support (and lack of support) for the building at the Jack Welch Stadium and it's funding source
 - This is a priority for the athletic department and the first request from the athletic department in years
- Process for returning unspent funds
- Whether the School Committee can apply funding that was not given to one grant other grants that were not fully funded.

The School Committee then voted on the following Paine Grants:

- *Motion to approve the "Bringing Art to Life" grant in the amount of \$87,617.26 was made by DF and seconded by JC. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***
- *Motion to approve the "Rave-O" grant in the amount of \$10,200 was made by DF and seconded by JC. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***
- *Motion to approve the "Literacy Coach" grant in the amount of \$134,378 was made by DF and JC. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***
- *Motion to approve the "Building at Jack Welch Stadium" grant in the amount of \$140,000 was made by SS and seconded by JC. **The motion passed with 3 in support, 2 not in support, and 2 abstentions. **Note: At the time of the meeting, the vote was recorded as a failed vote, but has been amended *****
- *Motion to approve the "Instrumental Impact" grant in the amount of \$26,189.31 was made by HR and seconded by JC. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***
- *Motion to approve the "Professional Development" grant in the amount of \$130,440 was made by SS and seconded by KE. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***
- *Motion to approve the "Enhancing Safety and Innovation" grant in the amount of \$84,178 was made by SS and seconded by HR. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***
- *Motion to approve the "College Boot Camp" grant in the amount of \$12,750 was made by SS and seconded by JD. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***
- *Motion to approve the "Place Based Learning" grant in the amount of \$151,730 was made by SS and seconded by JD. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

No action was taken on the Choral Robes grant of the Yellowstone grant.

D. 2025-2026 Academic Calendar Approval (Taken out of order)

Two options for the 2025-2025 school calendar were presented- one with a start date before Labor Day and the other with a start date after Labor Day. Both the Ipswich Educators' Association and the Administrative Team reviewed each option and were in agreement that they preferred a start date before Labor Day.

- *Motion to approve the 2025-2025 academic calendar with a school start date before Labor Day was made by SS and seconded by JC. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

E. Textile Bin Approval

A request was presented from the Waste Reduction Advisory Committee for the placement of additional textile bins at each of the schools. There are currently bins located at each of the schools and although the company picks up often, the bins are quickly filling. It was recommended that an additional bin at each school would be helpful. There is no additional cost to the district for these extra bins.

- *Motion to approve the placement of three textile bins, one at each school, was made by JC and seconded by HR. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

F. Superintendent Evaluation

KE reviewed the Superintendent evaluation process before reading BB's summative evaluation into the record. The summative evaluations, written by KE, stated:

The end of this school year marks the completion of Dr Blake's seventh year as Superintendent of the Ipswich Public Schools. He continues to be a proficient and capable administrator for the district, and has made significant progress toward achieving his goals. In the past year, Dr. Blake's presence was felt as he oversaw the rollout of new state standards in curriculum, managed the hiring of new administrators, and worked with them in delivering a solid budget. He has taken on a consistent form of engagement with the community each week with his superintendent's newsletter and continues to lead the districtwide DEI initiatives. His constant presence at school events, meetings, and performances is stellar and appreciated as it makes a positive impact across the district. We appreciate his hard work and dedication to the Ipswich Public Schools.

The role of superintendent carries the weight of endless responsibility. It continues to be a challenging environment in education, with behavioral and academic ramifications from the COVID-19 pandemic still present. We can sympathize that it must be frustrating to have families and community members regularly expressing their frustrations or unrealistic expectations of the superintendent role. Some general comments received in evaluations from School Committee members included comments that Dr. Blake has trouble controlling his emotions at times during School Committee meetings, and while it is understandable, his effectiveness as a district leader may be dulled in these moments. Several committee members also reported that Dr. Blake has a bias against certain groups/parents in the community or certain schools in the district, which may impact community relationships or the work environment. Two committee members felt Dr. Blake was not always respectful of School Committee members. While these comments do not reflect the opinions of all committee members, I have decided as Chair to make this a topic of discussion at our upcoming summer retreat. I feel it is important that the School Committee and Superintendent have a strong working relationship, so we will put some effort towards discussing and resolving these concerns and strengthening our relationship so we can continue to serve our students, staff, and community in the best way possible.

Standard I: Instructional Leadership

1-A Curriculum, Goal to work with the Comprehensive Health and PE Compass Committee to unpack Standards that are being rolled out by DESE

Dr. Blake successfully met his goal of unpacking the new Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Standards as set out by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for the district this year. This work included monthly meetings and a full-day workshop with the Health and PE Compass team including counselors, health teachers, physical education teachers, and a school nurse. Perhaps the largest accomplishment of this goal was the organizing of the spreadsheet that spans by grade level to prepare each department and grade level for future integration and implementation of the standards. The spreadsheet defines where we are currently meeting the standards, and also identifies gaps where curriculum needs to be developed. One member expressed concern that we didn't get to see the entire spreadsheet and the progress wasn't specifically discussed at a School Committee meeting. Based on Dr. Blake's report and evidence provided, this process seems to be on track and progressing smoothly per the district's curriculum review cycle. 6 of 7 members rated Dr. Blake as Proficient for this goal.

Standard II: Management and Operations

2-A Environment: Goal to ensure the successful integration of new administrators into the Ipswich Public Schools and facilitate cohesion between administrators and staff.

We had multiple new administrators this school year, including 2 new assistant principals at the elementary schools, a new principal at the Paul F. Doyon school, and a new middle school principal. The assistant principals were important additions to the elementary schools, and since these are new positions, Dr. Blake has been working with the principals and the rest of the administrative team to integrate and fine-tune the responsibilities and expectations of these positions. The new assistant principals have been positive additions to the buildings, have acclimated well, and are becoming trusted members of the school communities,

to families and staff alike. These positions have taken on essential duties and seem to have alleviated some pressure in the 2 buildings by offloading the principals and allowing them to be the educational leaders for their schools.

It became evident in the spring that the new principal at the Paul F. Doyon school was not going to be successful in our district, and Dr. Blake handled it swiftly and appropriately and communicated as much as possible to both the School Committee and to the wider community.

The middle school principal has had a successful year and has integrated into the district well.

Some committee members expressed concerns about how Dr. Blake hears and perceives staff and family input from the communities at the 2 elementary schools. Given the high level of administrator turnover at the elementary schools in recent years, administrator and staff relationships in both schools will need to be rehabilitated and nurtured in the upcoming school year and in years to come. While the majority of committee members rated Dr. Blake as Proficient for this goal, others gave a rating of Needs Improvement. A suggestion was made to revisit our screening process and hiring system for administrators to allow the district to take a deeper look at candidates that will hopefully result in hiring candidates who will be with the district long term.

2-E Fiscal Systems: Given the fiscal cliff, and anticipated and potential unanticipated expenses, build and defend a fiscally sound budget.

The FY25 budget was successfully built and delivered on schedule and on track to make override funds last for 5 years. Dr. Blake worked closely with the Director of Finance and Operations, building administrators, and the SC budget subcommittee during the process. During budget subcommittee meetings we had rich discussions about the direction of the district and ideas for how to implement changes to improve long-term financial sustainability for the district. We recognize the challenge of building a budget that is sustainable and still meets the needs of students. Dr. Blake was receptive to feedback from the School Committee on his initial budget presentation, and we were able to further reduce the budget 0.7% before being adopted by the School Committee. The final budget achieved unanimous support from other town boards and overwhelming support from Town Meeting. Dr. Blake achieved a rating of Proficient for this goal.

Standard III: Family and Community Engagement

3-A Engagement: Goal to continue to improve ongoing communication with the educational community around important issues.

Dr. Blake has continued to provide timely and informative updates to the educational community through his weekly newsletter that many have come to expect on Friday afternoons. The ability to translate it into different languages for non-English speaking families makes it an even more inclusive communication tool. He also keeps the school community informed via emails and his updates at School Committee meetings. Dr. Blake is a regular attendee at most school events, and has made himself accessible throughout the school year to meet with community stakeholders on different topics including athletics, and safety and security. One committee member reported that Dr. Blake is biased in his treatment of parents who raise concerns. Overall, the School Committee is pleased with Dr. Blake's efforts, and gave him a rating of Proficient.

Standard IV: Professional Culture

4-B Cultural Proficiency: Goal to continue to lead the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work in the district.

Dr. Blake has been a leader for DEI initiatives in our district, and continues to be a positive driving force for this work in our schools. This current school year Dr. Blake continued to lead the district-wide DEI group, oversaw the work in each school to ensure they each achieve the No Place for Hate designation by the Anti-Defamation League by the end of the school year, and attended a MASS REDI course for professional development. Having a superintendent who fully supports these initiatives is imperative, and we enjoyed the presentation from the district-wide DEI group and hearing about their work this school year. There were a couple of comments in the evaluations related to wishing there was more specific evidence of actions taken and results

achieved, for example, greater details about Dr. Blake's learning from the MASS REDI seminar and how it will specifically be applied in the district. The cultural fairs and showcases that have taken place at IHS are examples of the pride our district has in our EL students and the pride that those students have in themselves of being part of our school community. We appreciate Dr. Blake's dedication and enthusiasm for these events, and his continued attention and sustained progress in this area.

The School Committee is grateful for the leadership of Dr Blake and the entire District staff over the past year.

G. Policy Update

This agenda item was tabled until the next meeting.

H. Summer Meeting Schedule/Retreat Agenda Planning

The School Committee agreed to schedule their Summer Retreat tentatively for July 22nd at 5:00 PM. Topics for the agenda will include a review of the Feoffee Policy and the School Committee/Superintendent working relationship. There will be a regular open session meeting on Thursday, August 22nd.

11. Superintendent's Administrative Report

BB reviewed his schedule over the weeks since the last School Committee meeting which included:

- BRIDGE Program presentations
- CREST Collaborative Board of Director meeting
- NORESCO project meeting
- Health and PE Compass Committee
- Senior Week events
- Review with Facilities Director
- Whittier Luncheon
- IEA Negotiations
- Staff, parents, and student meeting
- 504 Plan training
- Subcommittee meeting
- Tabletop exercise with FEMA
- Review of the High School Cell Phone Policy
- Pops concert
- Retirement party

BB confirmed with SS that the high school strength and conditioning summer program will be running. BB also confirmed that the Cell Phone Policy will come before the School Committee for review.

12. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

The Policy Subcommittee and Negotiations Subcommittee both met.

13. New Business*

Ipswich Youth Lacrosse has proposed the installation of a wall ball at the fields at Mile Lane. The request and a map identifying the location of the proposed wall ball was shared. This will be of no cost to the district.

- *Motion to support the installation of a wall ball at Mile Lane Field was made by JD and seconded by DF. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

14. Vouchers and Bills

All were reviewed and signed.

15. Consent Agenda

















- *Move the Ipswich School Committee to approve the disposal of textbooks at the High School as listed on the School Property Disposal application was made by KE and seconded by MP. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***



16. Adjournment



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



Meeting adjourned at 10:41 PM



Documents:



	1.School Committee Meeting Agenda 06.06.24	
	5.Announcements: 06.06.24	
	10.B.E. Oxford Resume.pdf	
	10.D.DRAFT School Calendar 2025-2026 (For SC Approval)	
	13.New Business: Mile Lane Wall Ball Request- Map	
	13.New Business: Mile Lane Wall Ball Request.pdf	
	15.Consent Agenda: 06.06.24	
	15.Consent Item: School Property Disposal Request001.pdf	



 Copy of DBG_ Budget Adoption Procedure 2021.docx 


 Copy of DEC_ Federal Funds Supplement Not Supplant Policy 



 Copy of FA_ Facilities Development Goals 2021.docx 



 Copy of FCB_ Retirement of Facilities.docx 

 Copy of FF_ Naming Facilities 2021.docx 



 Copy of FFA_ Memorials 2021.docx 



 Copy of File DBJ_ Budget Transfer Authority 2021.docx 

 Copy of File DD_ Funding Proposals and Applications 2021.docx 



 Copy of File DGA_ Authorized Signatures 2021.docx 



 Copy of File DH_ Bonded Employees and Officers 2021.docx 

 Copy of File DI_ Fiscal Accounting and Reporting 2021.docx 

 Copy of File DIE_ Audits 2021.docx 



 Copy of File DJC_ Petty Cash Funds 2021.docx 

 Copy of File DK_ Payment Procedures 2021.docx 


 Copy of File DKC_ Expense Reimbursements 2021.docx 

 [Copy of File DKC_Expense Reimbursements 2021.docx](#) 

 [Copy of File DN_School Properties Disposal 2021.docx](#) 

 [DEC_Federal Funds Supplement Not Supplant Policy](#) 

 [HA_Negotiations Goals 2020.docx](#) 

 [HB_Negotiations Legal Status 2020.docx](#) 

 [HF_School Committee Negotiations Agents 2020.docx](#) 
