

Ipswich School Committee Meeting
Tuesday, April 14, 2020
6:00 PM

Minutes

This meeting was held remotely utilizing Zoom video conferencing.

I. Open Session

Call to Order:

Mr. Hopping called the meeting to order at 6:08 PM.

Present: Mr. Hopping, Mr. Nylen, Mr. Whitten, Dr. O'Flynn, Ms. Gilliam and Ms. Kneedler

Also Present: Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools and Joanne Cuff, Director of Finance and Operations

Announcements:

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, April 23rd remotely via Zoom at 7:00pm
- The Ipswich Public Schools Remote Learning Website has launched. A link to the website can be found on the homepage of the district website located at www.ipsk12.net.

Citizens' Comments:

There were none at this meeting.

II. School Committee Reports

A. District COVID-19 Update:

Dr. Blake updated the Committee on the actions, decisions and next steps regarding COVID-19 and the school closure. His update included:

- Schools will be closed until May 4, 2020. Students are expected to participate in remote learning during this time.
- There is speculation that the state will extend the closure beyond May 4th based on a conference call with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Commissioner.
- The IPS Remote Learning Website was launched last week. There has been a lot of positive feedback from staff and families.

- Both Tracy Wagner, Director of Teaching and Learning and Amy Gregory, Digital Learning Specialist, should be thanked for putting the Remote Learning Website together.
- Staff have continued to be paid through this closure.
- Screenings for English Language Learner (ELL) students continue to happen, but are done remotely.
- Special education services continue to be provided remotely, where appropriate.
- A letter was sent to Salter Transportation from Ipswich and other area districts seeking a discount in terms of the rates we are paying through our transportation contract with them. This letter is looking for assurances that the company is not “double dipping” at the expense of the district.
- Teachers continue to meet remotely with their classes on a regular schedule.
- Weekly lessons are being distributed to each grade level.
- There are some concerns from administrators around student and family engagement. They are finding that even with continued outreach, some families do not have the capacity to support their students at home for a number of reasons.
- Administrators, teachers and support staff are actively reaching out to families, especially those that are not participating. Staff have been asked to document all outreach attempts.
- Staff are taking things day by day, knowing that this is a fluid and ongoing situation.

After his update, Dr. Blake opened the discussion to the Committee to ask questions.

He first addressed some questions around participation, stating several reasons that students and families may not be engaging in remote learning. Some examples included an outright refusal by students and the inability for parents to monitor their child’s participation due to their own work, illness or lack of skill set needed to do the work. Dr. Blake did share that administrators felt that 85%-90% of students are currently participating.

Dr. Blake discussed the various standardized tests that have been cancelled for the spring including MCAS and the SAT. At this time, AP exams will take place remotely and be drastically different in format than what is normally done.

Mr. Hopping confirmed with the Committee that the administrative team will be presenting an update to the School Committee at their next meeting on April 23rd.

In terms of next steps, Dr. Blake said that his team is acting on information as they receive it. Because this is a fluid situation, things are changing at a rapid pace. He did say that he expected Governor Baker to make a decision about when students will be returning to school by the end of this week or the beginning of next week. He stated that when the decision comes to open the schools, there will be a lot that goes into what that looks like. No one should expect that returning to school will look the same as if kids are coming back from a regular summer

break. Not only does the district need to prepare for what learning will look like, they would also need to prepare the buildings to reopen.

Mr. Nysten asked if there was a place where the community could find a comprehensive FAQ sheet that details all of the information that is coming out. Dr. Blake responded that although it was a good idea, it did not exist at this moment. All updated information is posted to the district website as it becomes available.

Dr. Blake talked about what things look like from a financial aspect, stating that because staff are still being paid, not much has changed. At this time, it is hard to see if there will be savings because bills have been paid up to this point and the new ones have not arrived yet. Ms. Cuff joined in the conversation and said that most of the district's costs have remained stagnant. The district has spent an additional \$30,000 on technology and materials for COVID-19 related services, but they hope to receive some of that money back in reimbursements.

Lastly, Ms. Cuff updated the Committee on the status of the Salter Transportation contract. Like Dr. Blake stated in his update, a letter was sent on behalf of Ipswich and several other districts requesting accountability from Salter. As part of that letter, they are requesting information on the company's promise to keep staff on the payroll, profit margins, wear and tear, and what would happen if the company begins to receive funding from the government. Ms. Cuff has worked with area school business professionals and the district legal counsel on this matter.

B. Town Meeting Update

Mr. Hopping shared that he had met with the Town Manager and chairs of the other boards and committees to discuss the Town Meeting. At this time, the meeting will be scheduled tentatively for mid-June. A venue has not been chosen although several different options have been considered if we are still practicing social distancing by then. It was decided that Town Meeting will focus on time-sensitive articles first, like the budget and then if time allows they will discuss the other articles. Depending on the length of the meeting, they would hold a Special Town Meeting to address the articles they did not get to.

Bean Counting is tentatively scheduled for May 9th. At this time, a decision has not been made as to whether it will be held remotely or in person.

C. April Vacation Discussion and Vote

Dr. Blake explained that this discussion around April vacation was the primary reason that the Committee was called upon today. He is asking for a discussion and vote to continue to work through April vacation and move the last day of school back by four days to June 17, 2020. Monday, April 20th would still be a holiday and both staff and students would not be expected to work. Tuesday, April 21st through Friday, April 24th would be treated like a regular week of school and both staff and students would be working.

Several area districts have already voted to continue working through vacation. The Ipswich Educators' Association (IEA) distributed a poll to the district and 89.3% of staff responded they were willing to work through the vacation. Another 9.4% of the staff said they were fine either way. While some administrators felt it would be good to give teachers and families a break during this time, they all ultimately concluded that working through the vacation was ideal.

Mr. Hopping asked what impact this would have, if any, on the budget if hourly employees not typically paid on vacation worked. She responded that if you take into consideration the loss of four days in June, there would be no impact.

Mr. Nylan moved to keep Ipswich Public Schools open Tuesday, April 21 through Friday, April 24 in lieu of April Vacation, seconded by Mr. Whitten. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote: Mr. Hopping-Yes, Mr. Whitten-Yes, Mr. Nylan- Yes, Ms. Kneedler-Yes, Ms. Giliam-Yes, Dr. O'Flynn-Yes.

D. New Business

The latest installment of the School Committee newsletter was coming out on April 16, 2020.

III. Adjournment

Mr. Nylan moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:48 PM, seconded by Mr. Whitten. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote: Mr. Hopping-Yes, Mr. Whitten-Yes, Mr. Nylan- Yes, Ms. Kneedler-Yes, Ms. Giliam-Yes, Dr. O'Flynn-Yes.