

Ipswich School Committee Meeting
Thursday, February 27, 2020
MS/HS Ensemble Room
7:00 PM

MINUTES

I. OPEN SESSION

Call to Order:

Mr. Hopping, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

Present:

Mr. Stevens, Mr. Whitten, Dr. O'Flynn, Ms. Kneedler and Ms. Gilliam

Also Present:

Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools; Joanne Cuff, Director of Finance and Operations

Reading of the District Mission Statement:

Mr. Whitten read the District Mission Statement.

Announcements:

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, March 5th in the MS/HS Ensemble Room
- The Feoffee Policy Working Group and the Policy Subcommittee will hold a joint meeting on Tuesday, March 3rd at 6:00pm in the MS/HS Guidance Conference Room.
- The Policy Subcommittee will hold a meeting on Tuesday, March 3rd at 7:00pm in the MS/HS Guidance Conference Room.
- The Budget Subcommittee will hold a meeting on Wednesday, March 4th at 7:00pm in the MS/HS Guidance Conference Room.
- The Communications Subcommittee will hold a meeting on Thursday, March 5th at 6:00pm in the MS/HS Guidance Conference Room.

Citizens' Comments:

There were no citizen comments at this time.

Special Acknowledgements:

There were no special acknowledgements.

High School Student Representative's Report:

George Gallagher was absent from this meeting. He submitted his report prior to the meeting, which was read aloud by Mr. Hopping:

The student body has done rather well in the last few weeks, and I am pleased to report that the overall consensus was that February break was rather enjoyable. Some events that have taken place include a night skiing trip on February 7th, and on the 11th the senior poetry class hosted an open mic. The Massachusetts Scholastic Art and Writing contest awarded Jason Rollins and Ella Borgman for short fiction, while in the Fine Arts, Emily Davidson and Annaika Brink were awarded Silver and Gold Keys respectively. In sports, on Jan 28th Ipswich Track won over Essex Tech, girls 52-25, boys 64-24. Later, on February 5th, at the Cape Ann League Championship, girls took 5th place and boys took 7th place. A day later, the Ipswich Math League took second place at their meet at Pentucket. On the 10th, Ipswich Theatre Arts competed in Massachusetts Thespian One Act Festival winning both top awards: the Audience Choice and Judges Choice Awards, as well as two individual acting awards and best overall design. Their success qualifies them for the National Thespian Festival in Indiana later this year. Finally, on Tuesday, the student body was shown the film "Like", which explores the impacts of social media on teenagers.

Superintendent's Administrative Report:

Dr. Blake reported on his schedule over the past three weeks. He attended an unemployment hearing for a former employee and participated in a meeting at the middle/high school to discuss makerspaces. He met with the Ipswich Educators' Association and Human Resources to discuss the Freedom to Join Act and held two leadership meetings with his administrative team. Dr. Blake went to a CREST Collaborative Board Meeting, attended the AASA Superintendent Conference, and met with a community member to discuss the program Americans Who Tell the Truth. He attended the Bank of Gloucester Open House and volunteered at the Empty Bowl Dinner sponsored by Rotary. He met with Joanne Cuff and Gerry Dolan to discuss the budget and met with Chris Rais to review work that was done at the schools over February vacation. Dr. Blake attended an Ipswich Education Foundation meeting and participated in a training that centered around workplace discrimination and harassment. He met with a representative from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to discuss the Tiered Focused Monitoring that took place in the district and held his monthly meeting with the Athletic Director. Dr. Blake participated in observations at both elementary schools and met with Kathy Simms to discuss the Payne Grant Committee. Lastly, Dr. Blake attended several subcommittee meetings.

II. SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS

B. High School Parking Fees:

On behalf of the High School administration, Jeff Carovillano spoke about the current high school student parking fees and the difficulty the school has had collecting the fees and enforcing the current parking policy. He said that the current enforcement process takes significant time away from both him and the School Resources Officer while they walk the parking lot looking for cars without passes, run the license plates of the cars in the lot and then try to identify the drivers of the vehicles. At this time, he said that the collection of parking fees

has decreased because of a lack of enforcement. Without the ability to ticket, fine or tow, there is little stopping people from parking in the lot without paying.

After some discussion about what the fees have been used for in the past and the need for the School Committee to justify this reduction to the Finance Committee going forward, it was ultimately decided that parking fees for students should be removed.

Dr. O'Flynn moved to remove the parking fee for High School students effective immediately, seconded by Mr. Hopping. This motion passed unanimously.

C. Public Hearing: Proposed FY21 School Budget:

Before opening the Public Hearing, Dr. Blake shared several revisions to the proposed FY21 budget that came from a decrease in special education out-of-district tuitions. He also shared that he added \$10,000 to the Performing Arts Center budget to account for supplies and materials needed that are not already reflected in the budget. Overall, there is a reduction in the budget of \$326,160. With the revisions, the new total budget is \$32,375,538.

Dr. Blake then showed a new slide that reflected the new use of the Stabilization Fund. The planned use of the Stabilization Fund in FY21 will now be \$898,497. The minimum amount carried forward into FY22 from the Stabilization Fund will be \$1,328,554.

Mr. Hopping then asked Ms. Cuff to talk about the current balance in the Special Education Stabilization Fund. She said the current total is \$272,640 and that the fund has not been drawn down since its inception. She then explained that state law now allows districts to reserve funding for unanticipated special education costs up to \$330,000. Should a district need to use these funds, they can be accessed by a vote from the School Committee and the Select Board without going to Town Meeting.

Mr. Hopping then asked how the increase to the special education budget compared to years past. Dr. Beverly Hegedus, Pupil Personnel Services Director, explained that it is difficult to set quotas on special education numbers because they are based on the needs of the students. She then shared a comparison to the number of referrals the high school received last year to this year. Dr. Hegedus believes that the increase in referrals this year is due to the changing needs of students and that anxiety, depression and substance abuse are all contributing factors.

Ms. Gilliam moved to open the Public Hearing of the Proposed FY21 School Budget, seconded by Mr. Stevens. The motion passed unanimously.

Rachel Roesler, Spillers Lane: Ms. Roesler said that with level budgeting and the addition of some necessary programming, the budget looked good. She asked if it was accurate that the district is in a good place looking ahead to 2021-2022.

Mr. Hopping responded that the district has been good stewards of the budget and the Stabilization Fund. Conversations about another override are happening as the district looks forward.

Dr. O'Flynn added that the committee is looking at information to determine the timing of the next override. Looking at the current numbers and the draw out of the Stabilization Fund, the override may need to occur for next year's budget.

Ms. Roesler continued saying that often with budgetary restraints, the elementary schools take the biggest hits. Seeing how there are lower numbers coming into the schools, she suggested highlighting class sizes now and cutting a section at the lower grades. If the override does not pass, the higher elementary grades are most vulnerable and most affected if a section has to drop, increasing their class sizes. If it is done in the lower grades now, then class sizes would remain consistent for them through fifth grade.

Ms. Roesler also asked about the World Language program and if that was only at Winthrop School.

Sheila McAdams, principal of Winthrop School, discussed the World Language program at both Winthrop and Doyon schools.

Jason Wurtz, Turkey Shore Road: Mr. Wurtz first commended the new administrative staff at the Middle School for a job well done, saying that his kids are coming home from school happy and excited to learn. He then discussed his concerns around the Humanities curriculum and cutting an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher and a Social Studies teacher. He feels that by cutting an ELA teacher and moving to a Humanities model, time may be taken away from students to become better readers, writers and critical thinkers. Mr. Wurtz then asked if any other subject teachers were considered being cut over the two chosen.

Kathy McMahon, principal of the Middle School, addressed Mr. Wurtz and his concerns. She said that her team has thought deeply about how to ensure that strengthening student's reading and writing skills is still a priority with the Humanities model. As far as the cuts, they were necessary based on the current and incoming enrollment numbers. She felt that right now, the Middle School is ready for these cuts and that the model and curriculum will not suffer because of them. Ms. McMahon explained that with the Humanities model, blocks are longer and all students receive an additional literacy block. They have also introduced Lexia for students struggling with reading. They are focusing on ELA professional development to make sure that all teachers feel confident in their ability to teach ELA.

Tracy Wagner, Director of Teaching and Learning, also spoke to the work being at the Middle School. She explained that as of three years ago, the state has aligned the English Language Arts (ELA) standards and the Social Studies standards. The state is currently not a fan of having

silos of classes. Ms. Wagner said she is working with teachers and administrators on how they are incorporating reading and writing skills into all their curriculum.

Mr. Hopping concluded the Public Hearing by thanking those that participated.

Ms. Gilliam moved to close the Public Hearing on the Proposed FY21 School Budget, seconded by Mr. Stevens. The motion passed unanimously.

D. FY21 School Budget Discussion and Vote:

After the Public Hearing closed, Mr. Hopping asked if there for a motion by the committee to approve the FY21 Proposed School Budget.

Mr. Steves moved to accept the FY21 Appropriated School Budget at \$32,375,538.00, seconded by Mr. Whitten. The motion passed unanimously.

E. Financial Update:

Ms. Cuff first stated that she submitted three warrant articles for Town Meeting in May. The first article was approval of the annual school budget and two were placeholders to allow the district to move money into the Stabilization Fund and the Special Education Stabilization Fund. Ms. Cuff then talked about the potential to move some money into the stabilization funds this year.

Mr. Whitten asked when the committee would know how much money would be moved this year. Ms. Cuff said that she would not be prepared to move forward with a recommendation until early April.

Ms. Cuff discussed the Powers and Sullivan audit that reviewed the FY19 End of Year Report. She hopes to have the full report by next month. She also discussed two internal audits of Student Activity Accounts. These audits are completed to be sure that the accounts are being reconciled correctly and follow state guidelines.

Ms. Cuff notified the committee of the Payroll Coordinator open position. She is currently working with Toni Mertz, a consultant with the Town and district, to develop a new job description. She hopes to have that position posted soon.

Lastly, Ms. Cuff talked about the need to change the current transportation fees for bussing. Despite reminders, there has been an ongoing issue with late registration. Because routes are set in August, late registrations can be disruptive to the routes and makes scheduling more challenging. She is asking the committee for a change in policy that would increase the late fee for registrations after mid August and to establish a set date that a waiting list will go into effect. The current policy mentions that a waitlist may be established.

After discussion about the reasons why families may register late and the impact a waitlist may have on families, the committee took a vote on the matter.

Mr. Stevens moved to support the late fee increase from \$25 to \$50 and to establish a set date for a waitlist for those who register after a particular date, to be determined year to year, seconded by Dr. O'Flynn. This motion passed unanimously.

F. Policy Update:

At their most recent meeting, the Policy Subcommittee approved to move the following policies forward for School Committee approval:

DJE: Procurement Requirements

DK: Payment Procedures

EDF: Meal Charging Policy

IJLA: Library Resources

JBB: Educational Equality

JIB: Student Involvement in Decision Making

JQ: Student Fees, Fines, and Charges

Mr. Gilliam moved to support policies DJE, DK, EDF, IJLA, JBB, JIB, and JQ as presented, seconded by Dr. O'Flynn. The motion passed unanimously.

G. Crest Property Acquisition:

Dr. Blake explained to the committee that CREST Collaborative, of which Ipswich Public Schools is a member, wishes to purchase a property at 20 Shattuck Road in Andover utilizing proceeds from the sale of their Methuen property. The CREST Board of Directors would like each board member to notify their school district of the purchase and seek their approval. Dr. Blake explained that the purchase of this property would not increase membership dues or tuition at this time. He also clarified that should CREST default on their mortgage, it would have no impact on Ipswich.

Dr. O'Flynn moved to approve CREST Collaborative to move forward with the acquisition of 20 Shattuck Road in Andover, seconded by Ms. Kneedler. The motion passed unanimously.

III. SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. Athletics: The next meeting is scheduled for March 11, 2020
2. Grants
 - a. Payne Grant: This group has not met.
 - b. Mini-Grant: This group has met. They are currently seeking one community member to join the committee. It is their hope that changes to the Feoffees Policy can be made prior to their meeting on March 26th.
3. Operations: This group has not met.

4. Policy: The next meeting is scheduled for March 3, 2020.
5. Turf Field: This group has not met. This group will be taken off future agendas.
6. Communications: This group met on February 11th. The third installment of the newsletter was distributed on February 13th. The next Meet and Greet is scheduled for May 19th with the Council on Aging.
7. SEPAC- There is a meeting scheduled for March 24, 2020
8. Birth to Three- This group met on February 12th. There was a presentation on fine motor development and the need to increase these skills in pre-school.
9. STEAM- This group met on February 7th. They are currently working on the logistics of the STEAM Showcase.
10. Working Groups:
 - a. Feoffee Policy: This group is scheduled to meet on March 3, 2020.
 - b. Facilities: This group has not met.
11. New Business:

Ms. Gilliam talked about the most recent Ipswich Education Foundation (IEF) meeting on February 25th. They created a press release to be distributed announcing new members and the need for additional members.

Ms. Gilliam attended the movie presentation of "Like" at the high school on February 25th. The presentation focused on the effects of social media on kids.

Dr. Blake read a letter into the record regarding the Novel Coronavirus (COVID 19) and what the town and district is doing. He then assured the committee that he is working with Town officials and the state to address measures should the threat level increase.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

Mr. Hopping moved the Ipswich School Committee to:

- Accept the School Committee Open Session Meeting Minutes from Thursday, February 6, 2020
- Accept a check in the amount of \$500.00 from Defending the Early Years to be used for the Early Education Program to be deposited into the Winthrop Gift Account

Seconded by Mr. Whitten. The motion passed unanimously.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Gilliam moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:04 PM, seconded by Mr. Whitten. The motion passed unanimously.