

**Ipswich Schools Committee**  
**Thursday, April 23, 2020**  
**7:00 PM**  
**Remote Meeting via Zoom**

**Meeting Minutes**

**I. Open Session**

**Call to Order:**

Mr. Hopping called the meeting to order at 7:01pm.

**Present:**

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

**Also Present:**

Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools; Joanne Cuff, Director of Finance and Operations; George Gallagher, High School Student Representative

Mr. Gallagher read the District Mission Statement.

**Announcements:**

- The next School Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 7, 2020. This will be held remotely using Zoom.
- There is a Policy Subcommittee meeting scheduled for Tuesday, May 5th. This will be held remotely using Zoom.
- The Ipswich Public Schools will be continuing Remote Learning until the end of the 2019-2020 school year while schools remain closed, per Governor Baker.
- The last day of school for students is June 17, 2020.

**Citizens' Comments:**

There were none.

**Special Acknowledgements:**

Dr. Blake thanked the administrative team and the tech team for their work creating and implementing the remote learning website. He also thanked the business office for their continued work ensuring that payroll is getting done and invoices are being made.

**High School Student Representative Report:**

Mr. Gallagher reported that remote learning was continuing at the High School. He went on to explain the system the school is using to issue credit for courses. Each class is holding at least one video conference a week. Overall, Mr. Gallagher said that digital learning was going well, although it was not a

replacement for actual school. He also said that this has been a difficult time for the senior class and that they are hoping to have some events scheduled to help with closure.

### **Superintendent's Administrative Report:**

Dr. Blake reported on his schedule from the time of the last School Committee meeting. In his report, he stated the following:

- The School Committee had made the decision to continue to pay all employees through the closure;
- He, along with the administrative team, were focusing on the next steps in terms of the school closure;
- He was working through transportation issues with both special education and regular education;
- He was working with the business office to work through reimbursements for programs like Extended Day, bus passes and spring sports;
- He participated in a Communications Subcommittee meeting;
- He recorded another weekly video with Tony Marino to update the community on COVID-related issues;
- He attended his weekly meeting with the administrative team;
- He participated in a conference call with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner which addressed budgetary concerns for FY21;
- On Tuesday, Governor Baker announced that all schools in Massachusetts will be closed through the end of the school year;
- At his next administrative meeting, the team is going to begin discussing steps moving forward while he waits for additional guidance from the state.

## **II. School Committee Presentations**

### **B. Administrative Team Update: Remote Learning:**

Members of the administrative team were asked to share what each department has been doing in terms of remote learning since the beginning of the closure. They were each asked to discuss the use of technology within their buildings, how staff and families are utilizing the remote learning website and the curriculum being introduced to students at all grade levels.

Dr. Blake first presented some of the results from a survey that was distributed district wide to families in the beginning of the closure. Data from the slideshow included the overall feeling about remote learning from parents, the technology that families had or needed, when families felt their children learned best, family schedules, and more. Data was compiled and shared with the administrative team and also staff at each school. Dr. Blake reported that overall, the feedback from families has been overwhelmingly positive. He also shared that staff at all schools have been reaching out in various ways to families to work with them and encourage participation.

### Doyon:

Sheila Halloran, principal at Doyon, shared a sample “Week-at-a-Glance” that is given to students at the beginning of each week and outlines the assignments and activities to be done. All grades at Doyon are now utilizing Google Classroom and teachers are offering at least one Zoom meeting per week. Teachers are utilizing a variety of platforms for student work including EPIC! and RAZ Kids, while also providing some non-tech related activities. Specialists are also providing “Week-at-a Glance” assignments and utilizing Zoom for lessons. The Special Education department is reviewing plans, working to modify lessons as they see fit and providing specialized instruction to students. While a lot of the work is tech-based, Doyon is offering several non-tech options like journaling, passion projects, Choice Board activities and read-alouds.

Doyon is also focused on meeting the social and emotional needs of families during this time. Ms. Halloran said that staff are reaching out to families in a variety of ways and providing lunch and breakfast to students in need. Doyon has distributed tech devices, along with other resources to families, as well.

### Winthrop:

Sheila McAdams, principal at Winthrop, shared a sample “Week-at-a-Glance” that is given to students at the beginning of each week and outlines the assignments and activities to be done. She explained that the assignments each week are a mix of new lessons, review of materials, and practice. Younger grades are utilizing the SeeSaw app, while the older grades are using Google Classroom. Ms. McAdams stressed the importance of maintaining connections with the students and staff.

Ms. McAdams also addressed how her school is tracking teacher interactions with students and outreach to families.

### Middle School:

Kathy McMahan, Middle School principal, first acknowledged her staff who have jumped into action, along with the tech department. Like the elementary school before her, Ms. McMahan shared a “Week-at-a-Glance” view of the class assignments sent to students. Students are utilizing several different platforms to complete work and also participating in weekly Zoom meetings with their teachers. Staff are tracking completion of work using Aspen, which also allows parents to have access and see their child’s participation in class. If teachers are noticing a drop in participation or a student who is not completing their work, they are reaching out by email or phone calls.

Along with the core academic classes, related arts classes are also up and running. The music department is holding Zoom lessons for students. Several activities and clubs are also taking advantage of the virtual meetings.

### High School:

Joanathan Mitchell, High School principal, first stated that he was amazed at the professionalism of his staff during this time. The teachers have adapted well and he could not be prouder. He then went on to share the remote learning plan at the high school. Each class is assigned a certain amount of minutes of work per week, along with one Zoom meeting and a total of three assignments. Each assignment is worth one point which is marked as completed or incomplete. Currently, the third quarter grades have been weighted, while the fourth quarter grades will be based solely on completed work.

Mr. Mitchell shared a sample “Week-at-a-Glance” schedule that is distributed to kids. Within that schedule, students are utilizing a variety of platforms including Google Classroom. Teachers pace out work throughout the week and plan their Zoom meetings in the middle as a way to check-in with their students. Elective classes are also following a similar schedule.

Similar to the other schools, the high school is tracking participation in classes and is utilizing their student support staff to reach out to both students and families they have identified as needing assistance.

At this time, Mr. Mitchell and staff are in the beginning stages of planning some of the end of year events like award ceremonies and graduation. More information will be coming at a later date.

### Special Education:

Beverly Hegedus, Pupil Personnel Services Director, outlined what her and the special education staff are doing to help support students through remote learning. She said at this time, the overall feedback from families was 98% positive and that she is working on that other 2%. Some one the key components of special education at this time include planning/consultation, ongoing communication with families and continual adjustment such as progress monitoring and meeting diverse learning challenges. The department and staff are utilizing a variety of platforms to support students and have provided numerous resources to families to help during this time. Going forward, Dr. Hegedus said her department will continue to focus on adaptation, ongoing course corrections as they see fit and addressing workarounds for evaluations. She will also continue to participate in conference calls and meetings with the state and her job alikes in other districts to review any new guidance being issued.

### Teaching and Learning:

Tracy Wagner, Director of Teaching and Learning, shared what she has been focusing on during the closure, by breaking it down into four questions:

1) What do we know from DESE about Priority Standards and how does this tie to remote learning? The first standard was during the initial closure and addressed the need for food and tech supports for families. The second standard was the introduction of extended/remote learning to students. Tomorrow, the state is going to issue guidance on standards based curriculum, which Ms. Wagner feels the district is already doing. The last focus is on reopening of schools.

2) How are we continuing with our curriculum work during the school closure?

All work has been shifted online and is moving forward. The Compass groups are still meeting and continuing their work aligning curriculum.

3) What does professional development look like now?

Most professional development has shifted to online work and a lot of the professional development now being offered is going to focus on remote learning.

4) What are teaching and learning next steps for the remainder of the year?

Ms. Wagner is focusing on shifting all professional development online. When thinking about the curriculum going forward, it will include a remote learning portion. She would also like to think more about how curriculum looks in the home under different circumstances.

She finished by saying that she thinks the district is currently in a good place overall, however we need to think about ways to support families without an overload of communication.

#### Technology:

Amy Gregory, Digital Learning Specialist, shared the timeline of work that has been introduced since the beginning of the closure. That work included the launch of the Extended Learning website on March 18th, the launch of the Tech Support website on April 2nd and the launch of the Remote Learning website on April 8th.

Keith Borgen, Director of Technology, then discussed how his team assessed the tech needs for remote learning. To help with the introduction of remote learning, his team worked with the building principals to meet the tech needs of families and assess the various applications that teachers were interested in using. His team also worked to create Google accounts for all K-2 students who did not have one prior.

Mr. Borgen explained that at this time, all students who need a device at home have received one. The biggest strain on families may not be the tech devices, but rather a strain on families' personal networks.

Overall, the tech team has been a critical and valuable asset to the district during this time.

#### Questions/Comments:

After each administrator presented, members of the Committee thanked them for their work, commitment and communication during this time.

Some members felt that it would be beneficial to share this information with the community, however others felt that it was best for the administrative team to make that decision. It was pointed out that the remote learning website does already outline the learning plans at each school.

When asked what the pulse of the staff is a month into this experience, administrators answered that the district is full of amazing staff who want to do the best they can. While teachers continue to work on extensive lesson plans for their students, principals are reminding them to take care of themselves and to find balance. Ms. McMahon couldn't say enough about the collaboration that was happening within the schools and said that not one teacher had complained about the workload. Teachers did feel defeated after hearing that school would not return until the fall. For most, remote learning is not what they signed up to do, however they understand that it needs to be done.

It was suggested that at some point in the near future, it would be good to reflect on both the good and bad takeaways from this experience. Looking back on this experience could prove useful for future planning.

### **C. COVID-19 Update:**

Dr. Blake updated the School Committee on information that he has received regarding COVID-19 and the continuing school closures in the state. He reported:

- Per Governor Baker, schools will continue to be closed, while remote learning continues through the end of the school year.
- The last day of school for Ipswich is June 17, 2020.
- As of this meeting, there are 34 positive cases on COVID-19 in Ipswich. 17 of those cases remain in isolation and at this time, there have been no COVID-related deaths.
- He anticipates that September 14, 2020 will be considered a holiday in Massachusetts because of the Boston Marathon. Should this change pass through state legislation, the district will need to make minor changes to the 2020-2021 school calendar.
- There will be additional guidance on remote learning released tomorrow by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- At this time, he does not know what the re-opening of schools will look like this fall.
- There is no information on the status of the Extended School Year program this summer at this time. The district is awaiting guidance from the state.
- The district is looking to purchase a sanitization machine to be used in all school buildings.
- He continues to meet weekly with Joanne Cuff, Director of Finance and Operations to monitor the current budget and discuss any potential budgetary implications going forward.
- He continues to send out a weekly update to the school community.

### **D. NEC Collaborative Agreement:**

Dr. Blake shared two documents with the Committee from the Northshore Education Consortium (NEC). The first document was the red-line version of the collaborative's articles of agreement and the second was a letter from the NEC Director summarizing the changes. One change to the document was that the NEC was now recognizing the Pentucket School District as a member. The other significant change was that there was now an opportunity for School Committee representation on the Board of Directors.

Dr. Blake asked that the School Committee review these documents and take a vote to accept the changes and authorize the Chair to sign on behalf of the School Committee.

Prior to the vote, Dr. Blake reminded the Committee that the district had joined the collaborative last year and was seeing cost savings for programming and access to services for students.

*Dr. O'Flynn moved to accept the proposed changes to the Northshore Education Consortium agreement as written, seconded by Mr. Nylén. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote: Mr. Hopping-YES, Mr. Whitten-YES, Ms. Gilliam-YES, Ms. Kneeder-YES, Mr. Nylén-YES, Dr. O'Flynn-YES, Mr. Stevens-YES.*

*Dr. O'Flynn moved to authorize the School Committee Chair to sign the revised articles of agreement on behalf of the School Committee, seconded by Mr. Stevens. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote: Mr. Hopping-YES, Mr. Whitten-YES, Ms. Gilliam-YES, Ms. Kneeder-YES, Mr. Nylén-YES, Dr. O'Flynn-YES, Mr. Stevens-YES.*

#### **E. School Choice:**

Prior to the beginning of the discussion, Mr. Hopping clarified that he was not anticipating the School Committee taking a vote on School Choice during this meeting.

Dr. Blake presented historical information on past years of the School Choice program. When considering Choice going forward, he said there are a lot of considerations to factor in like the need to right-size the schools, the changing demographics of the Choice applicants and the possible budgetary implications in FY21 from the pandemic. Dr. Blake also shared that if there were to be a School Choice program opened for the upcoming school year, the administrative team would like to see some stricter deadlines put in place for when Choice applicants can be accepted, so as not to take kids mid-year.

After some discussion, it was determined that more information was needed to make an informed decision about the Choice program. Dr. Blake was asked to compile a report similar to one done in 2015 and present that information, along with the recommendations from each school at the next meeting.

A decision regarding the School Choice program must be made and reported to the state by June 1, 2020.

#### **F. School Closure Memorandum of Understanding:**

On April 2, 2020, the School Committee voted to pay the regular wages for regularly scheduled work days through May 1, 2020 to each employee of the Ipswich Public Schools, excluding day substitutes, provided that each such employee to be paid performs work that may be requested or required by the employee's supervisor.

Now that Governor Baker extended the school closure through the end of the school year, Dr. Blake has asked that the School Committee vote to continue to pay all employees, excluding day substitutes, through the end of their contracts on June 30, 2020.

He also asked that the coaches for spring sports be paid 50% of their stipend. He explained that coaches have been working diligently to prepare for the upcoming season.

*Ms. Kneedler moved to continue payment of all staff, excluding day substitutes, from May 4, 2020 through June 30, 2020, seconded by Ms. Gilliam. The vote was taken by roll call vote: Mr. Hopping-YES, Mr. Whitten-YES, Ms. Gilliam-YES, Ms. Kneedler-YES, Mr. Nysten-YES, Mr. Stevens-YES, Dr. O'Flynn-Abstain. The motion passed 6 in favor, 1 abstention.*

*Ms. Gilliam moved to pay spring coaches 50% of their spring coaching stipends, seconded by Mr. Nysten. The vote was taken by roll call vote: Mr. Hopping-YES, Mr. Whitten-YES, Ms. Gilliam-YES, Ms. Kneedler-YES, Mr. Nysten-YES, Mr. Stevens-YES, Dr. O'Flynn- Abstain. The motion passed 6 in favor, 1 abstention.*

### **G. Budget Update: Override Calculator Discussion:**

This agenda item was postponed until the next School Committee meeting.

### **III. School Committee Reports**

- A. Vouchers/Bills- Signed.
- B. School Committee Reports
  - a. Athletic Subcommittee- This group has not met.
  - b. Budget Subcommittee- This group is scheduled to meet next week.
  - c. Grant Subcommittee
    - i. Paine Grant Committee- This group has not met.
    - ii. Traverso-Weatherall Grant Committee- This group will be meeting tomorrow, April 24th.
  - d. Operations Subcommittee- This group has not met.
  - e. Policy Subcommittee- This group will meet on May 5th.
  - f. Communications Subcommittee- Thi group met on April 15th. A newsletter was distributed to the district on April 16th. The last installment of the newsletter will be distributed on June 18th. The Meet and Greet at the Council on Aging has been cancelled. The group is working with the Feoffees Working Group to help update and distribute the new Feoffee Grant Policy.
  - g. SEPAC- This group has not met.
  - h. Birth to Three- This group has not met.
  - i. Working Groups
    - i. The Feoffees Working Group has suspended their work for a while.
  - j. New Business- There was none.

### **IV. Consent Agenda**

*Mr. Hopping moved the Ipswich School Committee to accept the School Committee Open Session meeting minutes from April 2, 2020 and April 14, 2020, seconded by Ms. Gilliam. The motion passed unanimously*



*by roll call vote: Mr. Hopping-YES, Mr. Whitten-YES, Ms. Gilliam-YES, Ms. Kneedler-YES, Mr. Nylen-YES, Dr. O'Flynn-YES, Mr. Stevens-YES.*

## **V. Adjournment**

*Dr. O'Flynn moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:24 PM, seconded by Mr. Nylen. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote: Mr. Hopping-YES, Mr. Whitten-YES, Ms. Gilliam-YES, Ms. Kneedler-YES, Mr. Nylen-YES, Dr. O'Flynn-YES, Mr. Stevens-YES.*