

IPSWICH SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
THURSDAY, JULY 16, 2020
7:00 PM
REMOTE MEETING VIA ZOOM
MINUTES

Present: Emily Cannon, Sara Gilliam, Pavica Kneedler, Carl Nylén, Hugh O'Flynn,
Greg Stephens, Charles Whitten, Brian Blake, Joanne Cuff
Guests: Becky Slawson (IEA President), Walter Hartford (Ipswich resident), Walter
Zagroski (Feoffees Trust Committee Applicant), Lillian Eden (Ipswich
Local News), Kim Mavroides (Ipswich resident)

I.	OPEN SESSION	7:06 PM
-----------	---------------------	---------

Remote Meeting Statement: Dr. Blake

**OPEN SESSION: SENIOR IPSWICH SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBER PRESENT
(CHAIRPERSON PRO TEM) - Dr. O'Flynn called to order.**

**1. ELECTIONS OF IPSWICH SCHOOL COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON, VICE
CHAIRPERSON, AND SECRETARY**

Nominations: *Mr. Nylén made a motion to nominate Mr. Whitten for Chair, Ms. Kneedler seconded the motion; and the roll call vote was unanimous in favor.*
Mr. Whitten made a brief statement of appreciation.

Mr. Whitten made a motion to nominate Mr. Nylén as Vice Chair, Dr. O'Flynn seconded the motion; and the roll call vote was unanimous in favor.

Dr. O'Flynn made a motion to nominate Dr. Blake as Secretary, Mr. Nylén seconded the motion (Explanation of nomination by Mr. Nylén), and the roll call vote passed unanimously. Dr. Blake then reassigned the position to Laura Hillery and, in her absence, Heidi Kent.

2. READING OF DISTRICT MISSION STATEMENT - Mr. Whitten
ANNOUNCEMENTS - Mr. Whitten welcomed Ms. Cannon to the school committee and congratulated Ms. Kneedler and Mr. Stephens on their successful re-elections.

3. CITIZENS' COMMENTS - None

4. SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS - Tech Team, Amy Gregory, Tracy Wagner for staff and parent surveys. Dr. Blake commended Ms. Cuff and the accounting department for the successful completion of the FY 2020 close-out and opening FY 2021. Seemed to

be a smooth process, while hectic. Mr. Whitten asked about the parent re-opening survey responses. Dr. Blake responded that 936 of 1,700 students have been received to date, reminder will be sent out and some calls made on Friday as they are due on Tuesday. Ms. Gilliam asked if kindergarten parents had received the survey and Dr. Blake responded with some received them, but not all kindergarteners are in the system yet. Ms. Cannon asked if the percentages would be published and Dr. Blake said once all responses are in they will be sent to a data studio for graphs and charts, then published.

5. **FEOFFEE TRUST COMMITTEE NEW MEMBER INTERVIEW** - Mr. Whitten Walter Zagrobski, only applicant & Ipswich resident since 1976, reviewed his vitae & experience pertaining to this position. Mr. Stephens said that Mr. Zagrobski's background is just what the committee needs to hold managers accountable for performance, to stay in line with the investment policy statement, and make sure they follow exactly what Feoffees had instructed them to do. Current members support him 100%, critical to have someone with his background. Dr. O'Flynn gave kudos to outgoing Feoffee's Trust Committee member, Seth Ward as to his excellent service on this committee over the last several years.

Dr. O'Flynn made a motion to nominate Walter Zagrobski as a member of the Feoffees Trust Committee, Mr. Nysten seconded the motion, and the roll call vote passed unanimously.

Mr. Nysten asked that the school committee send a letter of appreciation to Seth Ward.

6. **SUPERINTENDENT'S ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT** - Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent
- Been a busy month closing FY 20 and opening FY 21.
 - Attended superintendent roundtable meetings
 - Weekly calls with DESE commissioner
 - Met regarding Athletic Stipends, correcting a contract typo
 - Extended Year Program (summer): Elementary began last week with both in-person & remote; middle & high school remote began last week, some in-person begins next week
 - Met with IEA President, Becky Slawson, & Joanne Cuff regarding payroll deduction schedule and processes moving forward
 - Met with a teacher regarding her concerns regarding emergency licensure stipulations
 - Met with the school facilities working group
 - Met with Laura regarding work transfer in her absence
 - Laura had a baby girl, Ruby, on her due date. All are doing well and adjusting.
 - Continue tapings of COVID-19 updates on ICam, with another next week
 - Strategic Planning working group
 - Met with colleagues and leadership team to discuss commissioner's guidance documents

- Meeting regarding the kindergarten split & gray area to even out numbers between the schools.
- Took a week's vacation, but attended several remote meetings and phone calls with the commissioner and colleagues
- Met with IEA President to discuss archaic language & look at things to take out of the contract moving forward (part of the negotiation process) that are no longer relevant (i.e., dates from early 2000s that are irrelevant)
- Initial meeting of Nimble Systems Committee (remote learning model)
- Met with Tom Gallagher regarding new contract as Full-time Athletic Director and Health Department Head
- Met with new school committee member, Emily Cannon
- Met with the principals regarding reopening feasibility (piece of the commissioner's guidance recommended a feasibility study of reopening following the new safety guidelines)
- Met with Chub & Carl regarding the reorganization of the Facilities Working Group
- Attended the annual superintendents' conference, held remotely and recorded, on Tuesday & Wednesday. Day 1 focused on reopening & planning to care for ourselves & staff; Day 2 focused on Equity & Diversity issues).
- Met with the parents of a student regarding EDP - still not clear what that will look like
- Met with Tracy Wagner and Amy Gregory to finalize the staff survey, which was sent out tonight at 7pm and will be open until Thursday. It was not sent to the school committee yet, but will be.
- Carl commented on the policy update regarding the school split and the term "gray area" having been eliminated as well as the school committee having to approve the split. Dr. Blake said the decision is based on the populations of each school, was made in June with the principals & Laura, and he apologized for not being aware of the need for school committee approval as it has not been done for the three years he has been here. Mr. Nylen said we should either do that or change the policy. He said he always thought that the concept of assignment areas be revisited and that a "team" look at it in the future. Dr. Blake agreed that it "concerning to us and difficult for us in making those decisions and difficult for parents" and would welcome that; suggest discussing at planning retreat later this summer. Ms. Gilliam agreed and questions always pop up between parents. Biggest question is for incoming parents: How do parents find out about what school their students will attend other than calling the school? Dr. Blake said that the decision is not made each year until kindergarten registration. Mr. Nylen wants to make it clearer for all involved. Mr. Whitten agreed that it would be a good retreat topic. Dr. O'Flynn said it has been an issue for the last 40 or 50 years - splitting families & neighborhoods.

7. **SUBCOMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS** - Mr. Whitten

- Reviewed the sub-committees & working groups for Ms. Cannon

- Suspended turf field committee because there wasn't funding available, if a national capital funding program or other funding opportunities, they will quickly revive it as they do have a building plan for locker room facility.
- Working groups are typically for shorter duration, single defined purpose, have a beginning and end - not a standing committee. Past ones have been effective.
- Members to send email of interest to Mr. Whitten as to what sub-committees interested in, and he will fill in the chart at the next meeting. NEGOTIATIONS Committee (Mr. Nylén & Dr. O'Flynn cannot serve) needs to be added.
- Ms. Cannon has questions regarding those currently in existence & ongoing issues she is hearing about from parents that the school committee needs to address. First is the issue of race equity and social justice in the curriculum from Pre-K through high school. There was a "pretty controversial video shown at one of the schools last year that could have been handled differently had there been a sounding board for how we are addressing these issues". She believes a working group or sub-committee should be formed to address issues and asked that it be added to the list of topics for the planning retreat.
- The second is the issue of inequities between the two elementary schools - not receiving the same services, not getting the same experiences, different communication. Mr. Whitten explained the former Elementary Education Plan working group that addressed differences between the elementary schools, some of which are by choice and some are not. Mr. Nylén said that those issues are directly related to the Facilities working group that looks at the common values between the two buildings, why the one-school initiative failed, physical buildings, as well as what goes on inside the buildings. Dr. O'Flynn stated that the school committee's focus is for hiring/firing superintendent, setting policy, and budget oversight and that much of what Ms. Cannon is referring to is under the superintendent and senior leadership domain, which is operational practice. Align Elementary Curriculum Working Group - work being done with the Director of Teaching & Learning and the schools to align same experience & exposure to curriculum (i.e., new math at both schools) and professional development during the end of the school year and this summer. Mr. Nylén suggested that these two topics be discussed at the retreat to figure out if there is some activity the school committee should pursue to work with the superintendent and senior leadership on both of these topics. Ms. Gilliam requested that Ms. Wagner present to the school committee on how changes to the curriculum reflect systemic racism and equity so that it is visible - Dr. Blake already set up Ms. Wagner to present at the next school committee meeting.
- Dr. O'Flynn asked if developing a Diversity Working Group is possible; Mr. Whitten said he will set one up in terms of POLICY.
- Feoffees Sub-Committee - will not meet again until May
- Policy Working Group - should focus on diversity & reopening (to include students, parents, and teachers)
- Working groups will be discussed at the retreat

8. SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING CALENDAR APPROVAL - Mr. Whitten

- August 6th - next meeting (Dr. O'Flynn & Ms. Gilliam can call in, won't physically be in town) - very important since the reopening plan will be presented before its due date of August 10th.
- August 13th - Planning Retreat 5:30pm TENTATIVE (Dr. O'Flynn will check availability of Turner Hill) - in person. This could be the first in-person meeting, and all agreed to attend if social distancing and mask wearing is followed. If anyone is uncomfortable, they could join remotely.

Mr. Nylen made a motion to approve the calendar with the Retreat on August 13th and regular meeting on August 6th, Ms. Kneedler seconded the motion, and the roll call vote passed unanimously. (Mr. Whitten stated that the rest of the calendar was included in the vote, but is subject to change at any time.)

9. COVID-19/ REOPENING UPDATE - Dr. Blake, 8:20pm

- Nimble Committee includes 8 educators (2 from each school -regular & special education & PE), psychologist, adjustment counselor, Dr. Blake, & Ms. Wagner. Looking at all different models - hybrid, remote, and full in-person. IT is looking at the remote model and what technology is needed. Looking at new platforms used, what worked & what didn't, what they will continue to use and was not used and why. Several hybrid models are being looked at such as every other week, 2 days in-person/3 days remote, etc. Will be presented to the Oversight Committee for review.
- Principals did a feasibility study over last couple of weeks - measuring classrooms, can students fit with teachers, etc.
- Not committing now or even on 8/10. Preliminary plans are due to DESE commissioner on July 31 - 2 page outline briefly describing plans
- Different groups are preparing different scenarios for all three plans
- Parent survey (1 per child) was sent out this week, received 937 responses so far, data is being collected and used to inform decisions moving forward. Trend is that 20% parents may not send their students back to school even if all safety precautions are met. Expect to see similar results from staff survey and will take all into consideration regarding reopening decision.
- Every Tuesday all parents receive weekly updates, every Thursday all staff will receive weekly updates, posted on website, school newsletters.
- As of today, # of cases in Ipswich have been 70 total, no new confirmed positive cases since June 4th. Health Department is not utilizing presumed case reporting.
- Leaning toward full opening, the district has ability in terms of space, can put number of safeguards in place, moving things out of classrooms, and will be tight. All will be determined on national and local data at the time, given recent increases across country. All we can do is prepare. Safety of students and staff are paramount. Working to get kids back into the buildings; however, if 20% of parents are choosing remote, it will be a hybrid model right out of the gate.
- There is talk at the state level about forgiving "time on learning" - providing planning time for teachers to set up classrooms, prepare curriculum, participate

in professional development, etc. If we are not doing a full in-person reopening, we must have rigorous models in place to ensure that teachers across the district are utilizing provided resources, accountability for both staff and students, and have a good participation rate (remote was good but not

- The Oversight Committee includes Dr. Blake, the Health Department director, parents, one of the head school nurses, IEA president, and principals.
- The decision is at the local district level by the school committee and superintendent after recommendations by the Oversight Committee. Collectively sort out the models to post on 8/10. Many districts have already said that they are not fully reopening due to high incidence rate and lack of space. Dr. O'Flynn asked what Dr. Blake's general bias is. He said that any educator will say they want the kids back in school. Is it feasible - he supposes it is, but just because it is may not be a reason to do it. Kids need structure, social/emotional support, get back to some sense of normalcy, but we have to do what is safe for all involved. Ms. Kneedler asked if the 20% of parents keeping their kids home will be looking at remote learning or homeschooling? Those details are not known - according to the Yes/No answers. There is some concern among educators regarding pre-existing conditions or high-risk categories, but administrators state that many teachers with whom they have spoken are anxious to get back. The staff survey mirrors the parent survey so as to get similar data.
- Question and discussion regarding hybrid or remote model parent support given that some students do not have support at home, and special education services were cut dramatically. Supports around technology/parent education for educational tools being used as well as places around town to get support. Commissioner's guidance suggests the plans include how to provide in-person services to the neediest services.
- Becky Slawson sent out survey to teachers - will summarize and share chart to school committee later. 127 responses. 13.4% are willing to return into the buildings with no safety precautions; 10.2 % (13 people) are unable to return into the buildings due to risk factors such as age/health; 1 person is no willing to return into the building related to a person in the home with health issues; and 5 people said there is no option for their situations pertaining to other issues. The vast majority of teachers do not feel the 3" distance is safe, but feel that 6' is. IEA requested a presence must be included in decision-making for the safe return plan as they have not been able to collaborate with the district. Ms. Slawson is appreciative of the Oversight Committee invite. (Facilities Working Group is morphing in the Oversight Committee.) Also, when will MOU bargaining discussion begin? Dr. Blake will get her a date - probably the first week of August.
- Mr. Nysten strongly suggested that a decision be made before 8/10 in order to open on 9/2. Dr. Blake is confident that a full reopening can be done as they are already working on moving desks, materials, etc. out of the classrooms in order to fit both students and teachers. The district is definitely ready for a remote opening. Ms. Kneedler stated that we all must be mindful that no one knows

what will happen within the next 6 weeks and what fall will look like and we need to get used to everything being in flux and it being out of our hands - to an extent.

- Mr. Whitten commented that the principals and assistant principals are working extremely hard on all of the issues.
- Kim Mavroides had 2 comments regarding the 80%/20% numbers. Parents found it hard to answer survey questions because they don't know how standards will be implemented (recess, etc.) and whether the homeschooling process would change (it won't - letter to Director of Teaching & Learning is required and the state is also contemplating purchasing their own remote learning-at-home program). She requested a decision sooner rather than later so parents can make an informed decision as to what choice they will make to return.
- Question as to whether hybrid could be remote only students & in-person students - not splitting all. It is all part of the planning process for the 3 different models, it is a DISTRICT-WIDE initiative, not individual schools. Updates to the public will come directly from the superintendent's office and the school committee will assist getting the information out to elementary school newsletters and local newspapers.

10. POTENTIAL NEW SC WORKING GROUPS - Mr. Whitten

- Mr. Nylén: Having been a member of the COVID-19 Working Group for quite a while, it is a good group, motivated, cautious but confident, encouraging to see they want to make it work, encouraged by the leadership team.
- Ms. Gilliam: Adjusting school choice question - concern with additional distance needed and adding more students. Not known how many have confirmed, but there is an August 1 deadline so they will know in time for the release of plans on 8/6.

III. SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS

9:03pm

1. VOUCHERS/BILLS - all set
2. SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS
 - A. ATHLETIC SUBCOMMITTEE - has not met but MIAA will have a plan regarding fall sports next week, sports classifications - high, moderate, and low risk
 - B. BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE - excellent presentation at Town Meeting
 - C. GRANT SUBCOMMITTEES
 - 1) Payne Grant Subcommittee - not meeting until May 2021
 - 2) Traverso-Weatherall Innovation Grant Subcommittee (new application received, will get to school committee on 8/6)
 - D. OPERATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE - Ms. Cannon received orientation binder. Mr. Whitten, Mr. Nylén, and Ms. Kneedler to schedule orientation with Ms. Cannon.
 - E. POLICY SUBCOMMITTEE - has not met
 - F. COMMUNICATION SUBCOMMITTEE - last newsletter went out on June 18th - Mr. Hopping's farewell message, excellent newsletter

1) Note: Some subcommittees are missing (Birth to 3, CPAC)

G. WORKING GROUPS - Only Facilities/Oversight met

H. NEW BUSINESS

1) Received a letter from Institute for Savings announcing the closure of their school branches. Mr. Whitten thanked the bank for their continued support over the years and is sorry to see them go. The space has already been assigned to the high school special ed program.

IV. CONSENT

A. CONSENT AGENDA - none

V. ADJOURNMENT

9:35pm

Mr. Nylen made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Gillam seconded the motion, and the vote passed unanimously by hand count.