

Ipswich School Committee
Thursday, October 1, 2020
7:00 PM

Middle/High Ensemble Room

(In-person for School Committee Members only. Public Participation utilizing Zoom)

Meeting Minutes

1. Open Session

Mr. Whitten called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

Present: Mr. Whitten, Mr. Nylan, Dr. O'Flynn, Ms. Kneedler, Ms. Gilliam, Mr. Stevens and Ms. Cannon.

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

Mr. Stevens read the District Mission Statement.

Announcements

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, October 15, 2020 at 7pm. The public is welcome to join the meeting remotely via Zoom.
- The following subcommittees will be meeting remotely utilizing Zoom:
 - Health and Safety Advisory Committee on Wednesday, October 7th at 5:00pm
 - Operations Subcommittee on Wednesday, October 7th at 6:00pm
 - Budget Subcommittee on Wednesday, October 14th at 6:00pm
 - Policy Subcommittee will meet on Thursday, October 15th at 6:00pm
- All schools and the district office will be closed on Monday, October 12th.
- Professional Development Day for all staff will be held on Wednesday, October 14th

Citizens' Comments

There were none during this portion of the meeting.

Special Acknowledgements

Dr. Blake thanked both Heidi Kent and Nicole Dziadose for their work while his administrative assistant was out on maternity leave.

A. Superintendent's Administrative Report

Dr. Blake's report included the following events he had participated in over the course of the past two weeks following the last School Committee meeting:

- The first North Shore Superintendents' Roundtable meeting
- A CREST Collaborative Board meeting via Zoom
- A presentation regarding Massachusetts Title IX changes
- Two Leadership Team meetings

- A Health and School Safety Advisory Group meeting
- Several subcommittee meetings
- A Rotary Meeting
- A meeting with the Ipswich Educators' Association president
- An Ipswich Education Foundation meeting
- A meeting with district nurses

Along with the events noted above, Dr. Blake was able to spend significant time in each of the schools.

Following his report, Dr. Blake asked for the will of the committee with regard to the way he presents his report each meeting. Both Mr. Nylén and Mr. Whitten suggested in a previous conversation that Dr. Blake focus on one or two events that occurred throughout his week and present more information on those, rather than present a high level overview of all events he participated in.

After a brief discussion amongst Committee members, it was decided that Dr. Blake would continue with his report as is and should the Committee like further information, he will present it.

II. School Committee Presentations

B. Summer and Fall Professional Development Update

Tracy Wagner, Director of Teaching and Learning, along with Amy Gregory, the district's Digital Learning Specialist, presented on the summer and fall professional development (PD) being offered.

First, Ms. Wagner presented the Summer/Fall PD goals which included:

- To compliment the Ipswich Public (IPS) Schools Review Cycle with a focus on mathematical thinking, computer science and history and social sciences standards
- Build awareness of Anti-Bias and critical social justice topics
- Digital tool and instruction method preparation for high quality Hybrid and Remote Learning

Ms. Wagner then shared the IPS Curriculum Review Cycle worksheet, which she had presented on at a previous meeting.

During the summer there were nine course opportunities for staff participation, 287 course seats were filled and 60 curriculum units were written across the district in an "Understanding by Design" style- all ready to go in Remote, Hybrid or Full Learning models. All professional development opportunities were done online this year.

Ms. Gregory discussed her course, Empowered Learners, which was in its third year. During this course, staff were tasked with rewriting modules around Hybrid and Remote Learning to

address the needs of teachers in the district. Throughout this course, teachers reviewed the capabilities of different digital tools and apps to help support both teachers and students.

Online magazines have been developed as a way to share out the curriculum developed over the summer. These magazines include an overview of the course, modules used and a link for IPS teachers to access the units. Ms. Wagner shared examples of the curriculum included in the magazine. She also discussed how the curriculum developed was tied to the *Successful Habits of Mind* standard of critical thinking, collaboration, communication and perseverance.

Ms. Gregory shared a chart that was created to help teachers address how they will apply their curriculum in a Hybrid or Remote model. She went on to explain the five “buckets” that include:

- Communication with students- What channels will teachers have access to communicate with students?
- Organization- How will teachers organize their directions, lessons, content and communication for themselves, students and families?
- Engagement- How do teachers engage students when they are not together physically? What does a lesson look like when considering learning possibilities such as face-to-face, hybrid and remote?
- Content- What variety of content will teachers include in their lesson to meet the needs of all learners? Will it be content created by the teacher or from an online source?
- Students Demonstrating Learning- What digital tools are available to offer students choices to demonstrate learning?

Ms. Wagner shared the fall professional development by the numbers. In the eight days prior to school beginning, teachers were tasked with participating in 8-10 hours of professional development on Remote and Hybrid topics. Course offerings included over 50 choices that reflected the current understanding of teachers and identified needs. Once the professional development was completed, teachers were then asked to complete a form to share how they would apply what they learned in the classroom. A total of 252 educators participated in this professional development.

Ms. Wagner then shared a sample of the offerings, which included asynchronous videos from Emma Pass, an expert on the Remote Learning experience, a STEM series, synchronous workshops and self-guided programs. Ms. Gregory also created a variety of training materials that reside on the tigertech.com website for teachers to access at any time.

The professional development offered this fall prior to school starting was in alignment with the Robust Remote Learning Criteria drafted by the Nimble Committee. Criteria included:

- Engagement
- Looking after the whole student
- Relational pedagogy
- Feedback and assessment
- Expectations
- Flexibility

- Equitable access

Lastly, Ms. Wagner shared the positive feedback that she and Ms. Gregory received from educators on the application of professional development to their classrooms.

On Wednesday, October 14th, the district will participate in a fully virtual, conference-style professional development day focusing on the “Self-Management” Habit of Mind as it relates to social justice issues, student engagement and Hybrid and Remote Learning challenges.

The keynote speaker on October 14th will be Debbie Irving, author of *Waking Up White*. Ms. Wagner encouraged members of the School Committee to attend if able. She also said that there will be recordings of some sessions available.

C. Return to Learn Update

Dr. Blake reported out information from the most recent Reopening Oversight Committee meeting, first stating the most recent statistics for positive cases in Ipswich. He then shared the following information:

Facilities Department

- The air flow and exchange testing has been completed in the district. Results of that testing will be available within the coming days.
- Work is being done to calibrate the HVAC system.
- They are in the process of hiring additional substitute custodians.
- Portable UV disinfection lights have been delivered and are currently being used within the buildings as necessary.
- They are currently waiting for the ionization filters to be delivered.

Athletics

- Pre-season for fall sports ends this week.
- The golf team has participated in their first match.
- The Cape Ann League began the season with a no fan policy, but has adjusted to allow for a limited number of spectators.
- All Cape Ann League schools are participating in athletics this fall.

Transportation

- There is a current waitlist for available seats on the buses due to the limited rider capacity of each bus.

Tents

- The district is looking to extend the rental agreements for all tents which were originally set to expire at the end of October.
- Schools have requested to have sides added on the tents to extend usage.

Parent Feedback

- Families seem to be settling into their new routines.
- Some grade levels are still having some stumbling blocks. Additional staff have been brought in and the issues are being closely monitored to ensure that students have a positive experience.

High School

- The teachers are working incredibly hard, however there is some concern about the long term viability of what teachers are doing in terms of teaching and planning in a hybrid model.
- There are some reporting difficulties keeping students engaged on remote days.
- There have been no technology or discipline issues reported.

Winthrop School

- Staff are reporting that remote engagement is difficult at this time.
- Both staff and counselors are working hard to make contact with all students and families.
- Reading assessments indicate that reading levels may have slipped over the past six months so teachers are doing additional work with reading.
- The principal is working on how to manage attendance and recording of attendance.

Doyon School

- Similar to Winthrop, there have been attendance issues that are currently being addressed by the principal and staff.
- The school is currently looking for additional lunch support.
- Maureen O'Connell is retiring at the end of the month. Her position has been posted.
- A new nurse was hired and has been working out well.
- Staffing shifts were made at the school to address earlier issues with particular grade levels.

Middle School

- Similar to the other schools, attendance is an issue. The school is working to identify the cause of missed classes.
- There have been requests by parents to switch from the remote model to the hybrid model. This will need to be a larger discussion district-wide on how to accommodate additional students in the building and potentially for longer days.

COVID Cases

- There was a positive case of COVID within the district. That person had not been in school in the 48 hours prior to exhibiting symptoms. A notification was sent to the district.

Ipswich Educators' Association (IEA)

- Educators have reported it is wonderful to see their students.
- Teachers are spending a lot of additional hours working. Giving feedback to remote work is different than providing it in real time.
- An email was sent to the district about HVAC concerns at the Middle/High School.
- There is an ongoing effort by teachers to make parents aware that it will take some time to reacclimate students back to school.

Social/Emotional Learning

- There are reports of higher anxiety in students. Counselors at all grade levels are working with families through these issues.

Dr. Blake addressed School Committee member questions about MCAS. He shared that MCAS will be administered in 2021 and the tentative schedule has been released. Also, the 10th grade students who did not take the MCAS last year as a graduation requirement will be issued the test this year.

Ipswich resident Heather Leonard, Bush Hill Road, asked for clarification on how teachers are taking attendance on remote days, especially Wednesday. Dr. Blake explained that teachers are required to log in to their classes each day and take attendance.

Dr. Blake also addressed the requirement for synchronous learning and how it pertains to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the IEA and the District. He explained that synchronous learning is mandatory, however, how teachers go about that is a choice.

D. Superintendent Goals Discussion

Mr. Whitten explained that Dr. Blake would like to hear what the School Committee recommends he focus on this school year. Rather than generate his goals first, Dr. Blake would like the School Committee to first approve their own goals so that he can then create his.

Ms. Gilliam reviewed the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Superintendent Performance Goals document and shared with the Committee her recommendation of standards to be used/evaluated this year. Those standards included:

- Standard 1: Instructional Leadership- Data Informed Decision Making
- Standard 2: Management and Operations- Environment
- Standard 3: Family and Community Engagement- Engagement
- Standard 4: Professional Culture- Commitment to High Standards

E. School Committee Goals Discussion

Mr. Whitten had asked the Communications Subcommittee, Budget Subcommittee and Vision 2030 Working Group to draft goals to be reviewed by the full Committee as potential 2020-21 School Committee Goals.

Mr. Stevens, Chair of the Budget Subcommittee, presented the Budget goals. They included:

- Develop strategy to manage COVID related spending and savings and its effect on the district's FY21 annual and long term budget. Complete by March 2021.
- Monitor expenses to determine timing for next Override, presumed to be FY23, and develop strategy for override by May 2021
- Prepare budget analysis for next contract negotiations and provide guidance to School Committee and contract negotiating committee by December 1, 2020

Mr. Nylan moved to support the 2020-21 Budget goals as presented, seconded by Dr. O'Flynn. The motion passed unanimously in support by roll call vote, 7 Yes, 0 No.

Ms. Gilliam, Chair of the Communications Subcommittee, presented the Communication goals. They included:

- Short Term Goal: To continue to provide access to timely information about Ipswich Public Schools for the community-at-large throughout the 2020-21 school year.
- Long Term Goal: To continue to broaden and deepen our communication efforts in order to increase the school-community connection by fostering meaningful, consistent two-way communication with staff, parents, town leaders, businesses, and other stakeholders and supporters of Ipswich Public Schools.
- Newsletters: To publish a bimonthly School Committee newsletter and distribute to our school community and the community-at-large. Target publish dates: September 30, November, January, March, May, June.
 - Create a "Subscribe to Newsletter" sign-up on our district website for community members not already on the email distribution list
- Community Engagement: Foster increased community engagement throughout the school year, utilizing both remote and in-person connection opportunities.
 - Support and reinforce district unity during this fragmented environment - #IpswichEverywhere
 - Community outreach (Rotary Club - February, annual budget overview. Council on Aging if possible)
 - Plan for a community forum in the spring to discuss elementary school(s) building project
- Website: To keep the School Committee information on the District website up-to-date and comprehensive so that information can be easily found.
 - Possibly allow Communication Subcommittee Chair admin access to SC website content
 - Review School Committee pages/links to ensure everything is up to date, including member bios and policy manual
 - Content for upkeep/expansion:
 - Update landing page - role & responsibilities, ethics, mission statement, vision, goals
 - Ensure agendas, minutes, and meeting packets are posted in a timely manner
 - Consider adding some scrolling social media posts on the website
 - Update Feoffees grant forms - annually
- Social Media: To continue to broaden/increase communication outreach through social media channels.
 - Establish Social Media Norms, using the existing town social media policy + MASC guidance

- Inter-Committee Communication: To foster a clear, consistent level of communication amongst the School Committee.
 - Create School Committee Calendar of Events
 - Determine procedure for disseminating information from MASC (proposed resolutions, etc)
 - Maintain and keep up-to-date existing documents such as the subcommittee/working group/liaison document

Mr. Nylen suggested that it may be beneficial to incorporate a survey to parents periodically to gather feedback and hear directly from the community.

Mr. Nylen moved to accept the 2020-21 Communications goals as presented, seconded by Dr. O'Flynn. The motion passed unanimously in support by roll call vote, 7 Yes, 0 No.

Both Mr. Nylen and Mr. Whitten presented the Vision 2030 goals. They included:

- Complete Vision 2030 Plan by June 2021 including the following actions:
 - Complete secondary education plan by December 2020
 - Conduct assessment of lessons learned under COVID response which should inform Vision 2030 and adjust plan accordingly, completing by February 2021
 - Integrate framework components and operationalize the plan by April 2021
 - Publish and distribute plan by June 2021

There was some discussion as to how each plan in the document may influence another and when certain documents will be updated in the plan.

Ms. Kneeder moved to accept the 2020-21 Vision 2030 goal as presented, seconded by Ms. Cannon. The motion passed unanimously in support by roll call vote, 7 Yes, 0 No.

F. Fine Arts Program Report

Gerry Dolan, Fine Arts Department Head, put together an overview of how the department has been doing during COVID and in general, how the program is progressing and where things are headed. Mr. Dolan specified that he would be focused on the music programs in this presentation and would present on art at a later time.

Due to COVID restrictions, wind and brass instruments, along with all choral activity, must be played outdoors. Courses are working in both remote and hybrid models.

After some adjustments, the chorus found a home in front of the Performing Arts Center (PAC) where they can now use an electric piano and are not drowned out by the sound of the band. Although it can often be hard to monitor remote students outside because of the sound quality and glare of the sun, Mr. Dolan said the teachers are doing a great job with what they have.

The band is playing under a large tent outside of the high school and overall it is working well. It is sometimes difficult to move equipment, keep up with the cleaning of chairs and monitor remote participants, but again, the teachers are making it work.

The orchestra is allowed to practice indoors and is currently spacing out in the PAC. Teachers are able to see all remote students due to the use of cameras, microphones, projectors and screens set up by Michael Coehlo. With the current configuration, students are able to interact with each other both remotely and in-person.

Mr. Dolan went on to say that although there have been a significant number of challenges, he feels privileged to have the ability to create music with the students. Benefits of continuing the music program during this time include:

- Reinforcing social and emotional needs of students
- Emphasizing the importance of the creative process for students
- The new creative digital tools used to reach a greater audience
- Virtual performances
- Flexibility and perseverance
- Learning to plan for the unexpected and adapt

Some of the challenges that the department have faced include:

- Accessibility to the arts/specialists in the elementary schools
- Loss of music group lessons at the MS
- Loss of rehearsal times
- No after school practice lessons
- State regulations prohibiting singing and wind instruments inside

Looking ahead, Mr. Dolan noted some of the departments strengths which included:

- A strong and talented faculty who are willing to work hard
- A music curriculum based on Gordon Music Learning Theory that allows for students to draw a greater meaning from music through performance, listening, composing and improvisation.
- The ability for three teachers to learn more about virtual performances funded by a Traverso-Weatherall Grant
- Community support

Some of the challenges moving forward include:

- A small ensemble room that cannot fit the amount of students playing
- The need to upgrade larger school-owned instruments
- Finding a balance between new digital music making with a traditional ensemble experience
- Expanding electives
- Balancing kindergarten through grade 12 music and arts programs

Mr. Dolan finished his presentation by discussing dreams for the future which included:

- A visual arts gallery dedicated to presenting student work
- A black box theater dedicated to student theater

Committee members thanked Mr. Dolan for his work in the district and for mobilizing all resources to bring the arts back.

G. Subcommittee and Working Group Goals

Although the Committee would not be voting on goals tonight, Mr. Whitten wanted the group to be aware that he intends to discuss them at a future meeting. He encouraged all working groups and subcommittees to meet to discuss their goals for the year and clarify why they are meeting. Subcommittees and working groups should submit their goals to Mr. Whitten who will then submit them to Ms. Gilliam. Ms. Gilliam will create one document to house all goals.

III. School Committee Reports

A. Voucher and Bills

All vouchers and bills were signed and returned to Ms. Cuff.

B. Subcommittee Reports

- a. **Athletics**- This subcommittee had not met prior to this meeting.
- b. **Budget**- This subcommittee met and created 2020-21 goals which were already discussed as part of an earlier agenda item.
- c. **Operations**- The group met and created 2020-21 goals. They also discussed the superintendent evaluation process, as well as the need to create a calendar for the Chair of upcoming School Committee events and important dates.
- d. **Policy**- This group met the day prior to the meeting and discussed a plan to begin year one of the policy review cycle.
- e. **Communications**- This group met recently to create the latest edition of the newsletter, create goals and talk about a social media norms document. Ms. Gilliam also discussed a letter to the Ipswich community that they would like to include in the newsletter being released on Friday. Ms. Gilliam is asking for approval from the School Committee to sign each of their names.

Dr. O'Flynn moved to support the thank you letter to the district to be included in the School Committee newsletter and signed by the School Committee, seconded by Mr. Stevens. The motion passed unanimously in support by roll call vote 7 Yes, 0 No.

- f. **Mutual Concerns**- This subcommittee had not met prior to this meeting.

C. Working Group Reports

- a. **Race, Equity and Social Justice**- This group met on Wednesday. At this time, the group is not ready to formulate goals. They are currently focusing on approaching the community and finding ways to have meaningful conversations about race, equity and social justice. The group is also drafting a survey to parents about concerns and questions they may have around social justice and racial equality in the district. They are still in the forming stages, as they are being mindful about the process of building on what the district is already doing.
- b. **Town Strategic Planning Group**- This group met and has one more meeting prior to the Triboard meeting. There was a discussion about what will happen at

the Triboard meeting and how to make the meeting the most productive. They will be asking the Triboard to vet recommendations they bring forward.

D. Liaison Reports

- a. **Ipswich Education Foundation-** This group met and updated their mission statement. They are working on updating their procedures and policies.
- b. **Climate Resiliency-** Mr. Whitten brought forward a pamphlet that was created by Chief Nikas about idling cars at Town Meeting. He believes that a pamphlet similar to this would be beneficial in addressing the idling issues at school pick up and drop off. Mr. Nylén added that the group is working on a resolution to go forward for board review and approval of going 100% emission free in Town.
- c. **Health and Safety Advisory Committee-** This group met and established goals. Cleaning logs are now being used in school buildings and HEPA filters have been installed. There are still concerns about thermostat issues in the buildings.
- d. **SE PAC-** This group has met several times. Most recently, parents with children on IEPs and 504 plans were able to meet with PPS Director Dr. Hegedus who addresses prescreened questions. The group will be meeting with the Policy Subcommittee to discuss any changes or edits that may need to be made on special education policies.

E. New Business

There was no new business presented.

IV. Consent

A. Consent Agenda

Mr. Whitten moved the School Committee to accept the School Committee Open Session meeting minutes from Thursday, September 17, 2020, seconded by Ms. Cannon. The motion passed unanimously in favor by roll call vote, 7 Yes, 0 No.

V. Adjournment

Dr. O'Flynn moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Gilliam. The motion passed unanimously in favor by a show of hands, 7 Yes, 0 No.