

**Ipswich School Committee**  
**Thursday, October 15, 2020**  
**7:00 PM**  
**Middle/High Ensemble Room**

**Minutes**

**1. Open Session**

Mr. Whitten, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:06 PM.

Present: Mr. Whitten, Dr. O'Flynn, Ms. Kneedler, Ms. Gilliam and Ms. Cannon. Mr. Nylen participated in the meeting remotely utilizing Zoom Video Conferencing.

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

Mr. Whitten first addressed the community and outlined changes to the public comment portion of the meeting. Public comments would be accepted during the two designated times listed on the agenda. All public comments made in the "Chat" feature of Zoom should include the name and address of the participant.

*Ms. Kneedler moved the Committee to meet in executive session pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws chapter 30A, section 21(a) for the purpose of discussing strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declare. Seconded by Dr. O'Flynn. The motion passed unanimously in favor by a roll call vote, 6 Yes-0 No.*

The School Committee returned to Open Session at 7:20 PM.

Ms. Kneedler read the district mission statement.

**Announcements:**

- The next School Committee meeting is November 5, 2020 at 7:00pm.
- The following subcommittees and working groups will be meeting remotely via Zoom:
  - Athletic Subcommittee- October 19th at 6:00pm
  - Communications Subcommittee- October 20th at 3:00pm
  - Race and Equity Working Group- October 22nd at 6:00pm
- There will be a Tri-Board meeting on Thursday, October 22nd at 7:30pm.

**Citizens' Comments:**

Gretchen Marinopoulos, teacher at Winthrop School, read a statement in support of the teachers in the district. She also asked for the community to stop with what she called "damaging social media posts" and negativity aimed at the schools and teachers.

Following Ms. Marinopolous' statement, Ms. Gilliam shared a message from the School Committee regarding social media. It read:

*According to the Pew Research Center, more than 70% of American adults use social media to “connect with one another, engage with news content, share information and entertain themselves.”<sup>1</sup> This data is from 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic and our subsequent increased reliance on technology, so this number is almost certainly higher now. While social media sites play an important and valuable role in the sharing of information, ideas and opinions, they can have a darker side as well: spreading misinformation and rumors, allowing online bullying, and exacerbating anxiety and other mental health issues.*

*Ipswich is full of kind, caring people, but we are unfortunately not immune from the downsides of social media. In an email to families last week, Ipswich Middle School provided some great social media recommendations for students that are relevant to all of us. Best-practice social media guidelines include a reminder of the illusion of any online privacy, not posting in anger or getting personal in remarks, directing complaints and concerns to the appropriate channels, and keeping in mind the three tenets of mindful speech (Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?) The intent of these recommendations is not to police or censor messages but to encourage us to be carefully aware and conscious of the words that we choose - especially with the knowledge that the audience may end up being much larger than originally intended.*

*The Ipswich School Committee historically hasn’t had much of a member presence on social media. Our communications subcommittee is working to change that, with a first step of drafting some social media norms to help guide the process. We hope that broadening our communication efforts to regularly include social media will continue to increase the level of quality two-way dialogue with our stakeholders and community members. We continue to strive to do our very best in service of the schoolchildren and families of Ipswich and deeply appreciate your support and work towards this goal.*

*Dr. O’Flynn moved to support the School Committee statement on social media as presented, seconded by Ms. Kneeder. The motion passed unanimously in favor by roll call vote, 5 YES- 0 NO.*

### **Special Acknowledgements:**

Ms. Kneeder took a moment to thank all the teachers, staff, families and students for making the school year a success so far.

#### **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:

- Participated in a number of parent meetings re: scheduling, school models
- Attended a School Facilities Working Group meeting
- Participated in meetings with school staff to discuss the expectations of synchronous vs. asynchronous learning
- Held a Leadership Team meeting
- Participated in a Northshore Education Consortium emergency board meeting

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/>

- Attended a North Shore Superintendents Roundtable planning meeting
- Called into a Tri Board Chair meeting
- Met with the Reopening Oversight Committee
- Participated in the district's Professional Development Day
- Attended a Town Strategic Planning meeting in preparation of the Tri Board meeting
- Met with several subcommittee groups

Dr. Blake then updated the Committee on the emergency Northshore Education Consortium meeting he attended. On September 30th, there was a major flood on all three floors of their building stemming from an issue with the water tank located on the roof. Because of an automatic refill mechanism, the water continued to pour into the building. By the next morning, both the Kevin O'Grady School and Recovery High School had transitioned their students to a remote learning model so cleanup could begin in the building. At this time, the group is looking for alternative spaces to house their programming in anticipation they will be out of the building for several months. In addition to the water damage, asbestos was discovered and must be abated. Dr. Blake shared that the school is anticipating that all costs associated with the flooding will be covered by insurance. He does not anticipate any additional costs to the district.

Dr. Blake shared an update on the district's Professional Development Day (PD Day) which was organized and facilitated by Tracy Wagner, Director of Teaching and Learning. Typically PD Day is held on the Tuesday directly following the Columbus Day holiday, however it was moved to the Wednesday of that week so kids would not lose a day of learning. The keynote speaker of the day was Debbie Irving, author of *Waking up White*. Ms. Irving also provided breakout sessions throughout the day. Other sessions covered topics such as trauma informed teaching, technology, restorative justice, mindfulness, transformational conversations, virtual Ed camp and hybrid/remote learning. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, however some staff did share that they thought it would be beneficial to have time for grading or working on curriculum.

#### **IV. School Committee Presentations**

##### **B. Tri Board Preparation**

Mr. Whitten talked about how the School Facilities Working Group met recently to discuss the potential costs of a new school building project. The numbers discussed were then shared with the Town Strategic Planning Group and will be included in the presentation at the Tri Board meeting. These numbers, however, are an assumption. Additional information being presented at the upcoming Tri Board meeting include the sequence of overrides and the potential for new school construction in 2026.

The Tri Board meeting will be run by the Select Board and meeting participation will be done utilizing Zoom.

##### **C. School Committee Evaluation**

Mr. Whitten asked that all members complete the School Committee Self Evaluation form prior to the November 5th meeting.

#### **D. Finance Update**

Ms. Cuff shared the quarterly report for revolving gift accounts and a grant status sheet which includes all grants managed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). At this time, all outside funds are in good shape. The Year-to-Date (YTD) spreadsheet shows encumbrances for salary/staff compensation. The appropriated budget is holding well. Ms. Cuff did explain that the grant sheet she shared did not include grants from the CARES Act or FEMA, but those grants are still being used towards COVID-related items. To date, \$950,000 has been spent on COVID-related expenses.

Ms. Cuff also shared the Budget Timeline for this year, which had been previously reviewed by both the administrative team and the Budget Subcommittee.

The business office completed and submitted the end of year report to DESE. In total, \$36,660,000 was expended in FY20.

Ms. Cuff said the health/dental insurance company experienced cost savings in the first three months COVID hit, resulting in a credit that will be issued to employees who are enrolled in the plan. Overall the district saved a total of \$114,000 and employees will receive a credit equivalent to their July payment for coverage.

Ms. Cuff clarified that the \$950,000 in COVID-related expenses came from outside of the appropriated budget and were spread across five grants- three from DESE, the CARES Act and FEMA.

#### **E. 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:

- A press release was issued by Town Hall re: Halloween. A similar message will also be sent to students.
- The group is looking ahead to Thanksgiving and the holiday season. They want to caution people about traveling or gathering in large groups.
- There have been questions about contact tracing in the district, however Dr. Blake stated that all protocols are being followed.
- A lot of the issues with technology have subsided as both staff and families are settling into their routines.
- During a recent rainy day, schools were able to accommodate all students inside.
- There is a continued concern over the lack of substitute teachers. Notices about the need for substitutes have been going out to the community.
- Student officer elections are happening at the high school, so there should be a new student representative by the next meeting.
- Fall sports are halfway through the season. One school in the Cape Ann League had a cluster of positive cases resulting in the postponement of some games.
- Fall sports are allowed a limited number of spectators. All must pre-register for contact tracing purposes.

- There is currently a shortage of bus drivers and officials, which may have an impact on all sports.
- The USDA announced the free meal program will continue through June 2021. The district is noticing an increase in participation.
- The district is attempting to negotiate with their transportation provider. There are currently some concerns over the contract and delivery of services.
- Changes to guidance on transportation may be coming from DESE.
- Parents are overall reacting positively to the school year, however there is some concern about educational differences between the two elementary schools.
- Teachers are feeling the effects of the “social media storm”.
- The airflow report has been concluded and results are in. The facilities department is in the midst of recalibrations in the schools.
- The ionization filters have started to be installed. That will continue as more are delivered.
- At this time, the MCAS is scheduled for the spring.

Dr. Blake then addressed questions about the possibility of bringing more students back into the schools. He said that the district is reviewing all options at this time. With the current spacing guidelines of 6 feet, it is not feasible to bring all students back into the buildings. The spacing would need to be decreased to accommodate all students. At this time, he is working to find more ways to bring back more elementary students.

Dr. Blake also noted that October 30th is the first check in with the remote learners to see if any would be coming back to the hybrid model. He said that the district may need to revisit spacing guidelines and bus routes if there is an influx of students wishing to return.

Dr. O’Flynn finished by saying that in-person learning is the best learning.

Dr. Blake then answered questions about the potential for winter sports, saying that the State is currently reviewing options. At this time, there may not be a viable option.

## **F. Superintendent Goals**

Dr. Blake reviewed his draft goals which included:

### **Student Learning Goal: Instructional Leadership**

#### 1:B Curriculum

- Continue to monitor and develop the new math program at the elementary level. (Illustrative Math) (We are heading toward pre-k to 8 for IM)

#### 1:E Data-Informed Decision Making

- Review student assessments throughout the year, observe lessons, review student work and compare to MCAS if appropriate.
- Monitor/review current reading program at elementary level.

### **Professional Practice Goal: Management and Operations**

#### 2-A: Environment

- Continue to develop systems/protocols in response to COVID-19 and ensure appropriate/safe transitions to full remote learning or full return to school.

### **District Improvement 1: Family and Community Engagement**

#### 3-C & D Communication and Family Concerns

- Provide opportunities for unifying the elementary school community around the elementary education plan as well as the Vision 2030 documents.

### **District Improvement 2: Professional Culture**

#### 4-B Cultural Proficiency

- Continue to focus on ELL population especially as it relates to COVID-19 restrictions and time on learning.
- Complete endorsement course for Superintendents
- Participate in the development of the Social Justice curriculum in alignment with the recently published Social Justice Standards.

Dr. Blake said that he could include reviewing the elementary reading program as part of his goals, in response to Ms. Cannon's request.

*Dr. O'Flynn moved to support the 2020-21 Superintendent Goals as presented, seconded by Ms. Kneedler. The motion passed unanimously in favor, 5 YES, 0 NO.*

### **G. Public Comment**

Erin Smith, in response to Dr. O'Flynn's comments about returning to school, asked the district to prioritize Grade 2.

## **V. School Committee Reports**

### **A. Vouchers and Bills**

Vouchers and bills were reviewed and signed.

### **B. Subcommittee Reports**

- Athletics**-This subcommittee has a meeting scheduled for Monday.
- Budget**- Joanne presented information on the budget and the group reviewed the items relative to the Town Strategic Development Plan. They discussed the transportation contract issues and decided those issues may need to be resolved in a legal fashion. There will be a meeting on December 16th between the subcommittee and administrative team to discuss the FY22 budget with a follow up meeting in February.
- Operations**- At their most recent meeting, the group talked about the Superintendent goals. They also discussed the creation of an annual School Committee calendar. There was a discussion about the timeline for creating School Committee goals and the need to have those created earlier in the school year.

- d. **Policy-** The SEPAC met with this subcommittee at their most recent meeting. They are hoping that this will become a regular occurrence in an effort to build bridges with the community. They will be meeting next week to review policies.
- e. **Communications-** The social media message was drafted and voted on. The group is working on creating social media norms for the School Committee. Both Ms. Kneedler and Ms. Gilliam attended a MASC sponsored webinar on social media. The group would like more regular information to be shared through social media, knowing that is how most people are getting their information.
- f. **Mutual Concerns-** This group has not met.

### C. Working Groups

- a. **School Facilities-** Items from this group's last meeting were discussed during an earlier portion of the meeting.
- b. **SEPAC-** The group met with the Policy Subcommittee prior to the School Committee meeting. There is another meeting next week.
- c. **Health and Safety Advisory Group-** This group met on Wednesday. They reviewed the air flow chart and discussed a digital maintenance request form being created for each school

### D. Liaisons

- a. **Ipswich Education Foundation-**The group is scheduled to meet next week
- b. **STEAM TEAM-**The group is scheduled to meet next week
- c. **HS School Council Meeting-** The energy in the school seems to be back to normal as people are settling in. There was a discussion about working through the hybrid model and keeping morale up. Students are being surveyed bi-weekly to check in. Teachers are reporting that this model is very hard work.

### E. New Business

Mr. Whitten said the warrant is light for the School Committee at Town Meeting. There will be no School Committee representative upfront. He then asked for all members to review article 7 prior to the meeting and determine if the School Committee should take a position on it.

### VI. Consent Agenda

*Mr. Whitten moved the Ipswich School Committee to accept the School Committee Open Session meeting minutes from October 1, 2020, seconded by Dr. O'Flynn. The motion passed unanimously in favor, 5 YES- 0 NO.*

### VII. Adjournment

*Dr. O'Flynn moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:48 PM, seconded by Ms. Cannon. The motion passed unanimously in favor, 5 YES- 0 NO.*

