

IPSWICH SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2020
6:30 PM
MIDDLE/HIGH ENSEMBLE ROOM
(School Committee members only, public participation through Zoom)

MINUTES

I. Open Session

Mr. Whitten called the meeting to order at 6:34 PM.

Present: Mr. Whitten (Chair), Ms. Gilliam, Ms. Cannon, Ms. Kneedler and Mr. Stevens. Mr. Nylen participated remotely via Zoom.

Also Present: Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools.

Ms. Kneedler moved to meet in executive session pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws chapter 30A, section 21(a) for the following purposes: 2. To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel, seconded by Mr. Stevens. The motion passed, 6 in favor, 0 opposed, by roll call vote.

The School Committee returned to Open Session at 7:03 PM. Dr. O'Flynn and Ms. Jepsen, the High School Student Representative, were now present at the meeting.

Mr. Whitten shared that School Committee meeting folders are available on the district website: www.ipsk12.net under the School Committee section.

Ms. Jepsen read the District Mission Statement.

Announcements:

- The next School Committee meeting is Thursday, December 3rd at 7:00pm.
- Schools will have an early release on Wednesday, November 25th. Students will only have work assigned in the morning.
- All schools and district offices will be closed on Thursday, November 26th and Friday, November 27th.

Citizens' Comments:

There were none at this time.

Special Acknowledgements:

Dr. Blake recognized and thanked the Rotary for their generous donation of 300 masks to the Ipswich Public Schools.

High School Student Representative Report:

Ms. Jepsen reported on activities/events taking place at the High School:

- The theater department performed their student-directed one act plays for families. The show was recorded and will be available to view.
- The band is now able to practice indoors thanks to new masks with small openings for their instruments, as well as the addition of bell covers.
- There is uncertainty about the winter sports season at this time.
- Clubs at the high school are currently meeting in a socially distant way or via Zoom.
- The InterACT Club is collecting toy donations for Toys for Tots.
- IMADA is selling 2020 merchandise.

Ms. Jepsen also shared that some students are having a difficult time getting in touch with their teachers. Students have expressed frustration with the current block schedule in the hybrid model. They are spending significantly more time on Zoom and doing homework. She also reported that the students in the hybrid model are happy to be in school, but often find it difficult to be social with all the guidelines in place.

A. Superintendent’s Administrative Report:

Dr. Blake shared a detailed report of his schedule over the weeks between tonight’s meeting and November 5, 2020. His report included the following:

- In Joanne’s absence, Dr. Blake is keeping up with school finances and COVID- related expenses.
- He participated in webinars on school finance which included Chapter 70 spending
- He attended a North Shore Superintendent Round Table (NSSRT) planning meeting.
- Dr. Blake participated in a NSSRT meeting where they discussed the different models/approaches area schools are using.
- Along with Chris Rais, he participated in a webinar by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) reviewing ventilation guidelines.
- He is spending significant time with the school nurses checking in and keeping up with COVID concerns.
- He attended another English Language Learner (ELL) endorsement course.
- He attended a Finance Committee meeting to present the status of the budget.
- He met with potential Interim Director of Finance candidates.
- He had a meeting with the Digital Learning Specialist, to discuss her current job description and what makes sense moving forward.
- Dr. Blake participated in several subcommittee meetings.
- He facilitated two administrative team meetings.
- Dr. Blake listened in on two calls with the DESE Commissioner.

IV. School Committee Presentations:

B. Interim Director of Finance and Operations Discussion/Vote:

Mr. Whitten shared that in Joanne Cuff’s absence, the School Committee needed to hire an interim director. Mr. Whitten, along with Dr. Blake and Mr. Nylen, met with four potential candidates. Of the four candidates, one person was brought forward to the Budget Subcommittee and then introduced to the full School Committee during the executive session earlier in the evening. The final candidate is Bill Frangiamore, a recently retired business manager from Dracut Public Schools.

Mr. Stevens moved to fill the Interim Director of Finance and Operations vacancy with Bill Frangiamore, seconded by Ms. Gilliam. The motion passed, 7 in favor, 0 opposed, by roll call vote.

C. Secondary Education Plan Presentation:

Dr. Blake discussed the background leading to the creation of the Secondary Education Plan. Last school year, Kathy McMahon, Jon Mitchell and Tracy Wagner worked to create this plan and were ready to present it to the School Committee in early spring. Because of COVID closures, the presentation had been postponed until now. The draft of this plan was first presented to the Vision 2030 Working Group. Upon review, the working group responded with questions and suggestions which were addressed and revised prior to the presentation tonight. The newly revised draft was included in the School Committee folder for review prior to tonight’s meeting. School Committee members are encouraged to ask questions and make suggestions. A final draft of the plan will be presented for approval during a December School Committee meeting.

Ms. Wagner started the presentation by sharing the goals of creating the document. It was the expectation that this document would lay out the aspirations, expectations and goals of the secondary schools over the span of five to ten years.

Mr. Mitchell then outlined the timeline used to create the document. Staff were first broken into content based groups and asked to share departmental goals. From there, Ms. Wagner, Ms. McMahon and Mr. Mitchell created the first draft of the

document. Because consistency is important, the group first reviewed the Elementary Education Plan document and used a lot of the same language and adapted parts where appropriate for the middle and high school. Most of the headings and elements of both plans are the same.

Overall, the vision for this document is to help mold a coherent graduate of Ipswich High School who is able to take content learned and transfer it to real world, authentic learning experiences. With this document, Mr. Mitchell explained, the High School can closely align the School Improvement Plans going forward and integrate the Successful Habits of Mind in a more authentic way.

Ms. McMahon discussed the next steps for the Middle School relative to the Secondary Education Plan. The Middle School will continue to collaborate with the High School on establishing a better writing program, cross-content/cross-grade level work and bettering the transition from 8th grade to 9th grade to help meet the needs of students. In an effort to strengthen the integration of the Successful Habits of Mind into 21st century skills, teachers have committed to computer science skills training, more project-based learning and strengthening their ability to understand students emotionally.

Both the Middle and High School would like to expand their community and business partnerships through events such as the STEAM Showcase, in the development of career pathways, sustainability courses and robotics and coding.

Overall, the hope is that this plan creates the guidance to provide the best opportunities resulting in dynamic and responsive students.

School Committee members shared their enthusiasm for the plan. Students are being prepared to be adaptable in an ever-changing world.

All outstanding questions and comments should be directed to Ms. Wagner, Ms. McMahon and Mr. Mitchell. They will revise the document if needed and present a final draft for approval at the December 17th School Committee meeting.

D. Tri Board Recap:

Mr. Whitten shared the Town Strategic Plan will be shared with the community at the Select Board meeting on November 23rd. The School Committee contributed a sequence and budget for both an override and school building project which will be included in the presentation.

E. School COVID Oversight Update:

Dr. Blake began his report with the current COVID numbers for Ipswich. At this time, there has been no evidence of school transmission of COVID and he believes that the hybrid model has cut down on exposure. He shared that Governor Baker wants schools to remain open as long as possible. Dr. Blake shared that earlier issues with remote learning have been resolved and that students and staff are working hard at being adaptable. One issue that has remained is the lack of substitutes. This remains a problem not only in Ipswich, but all surrounding towns.

Dr. Blake addressed an earlier question from Mr. Whitten about a recent report that schools were being offered free testing. This was an optional program introduced by DESE, however the district decided that they would not participate. Ipswich already has a contract with Action Ambulance to provide the PCR testing for students.

New guidance on quarantine for those exposed was issued and read for the School Committee.

The following was discussed at the most recent Reopening Oversight Committee meeting:

- As of November 17th, 187 students and staff had been tested for COVID.
- Middle and High School students and staff are prepared to go fully remote if the need arises. The elementary schools will have more of a challenge should they need to transition to remote.
- Tents at all schools will be removed on November 25th.
- There are concerns about the mental health of both students and staff. There has been an uptick in mental health cases not only in district, but statewide. Resources are available and are being shared with the school community.

- The facilities department has been working hard to ensure that all buildings are equipped with HEPA filters, univents are functioning correctly and thermostats are fixed.
- The Middle School is seeing an uptick in remote learning as parents are keeping their kids home when not feeling well.
- There is some concern about contact tracing at the elementary school level with kids and staff being closer together.
- The elementary schools are being impacted by the shortage of substitute teachers.
- Teachers have asked for a clear plan for a shift to a remote model and what that will look like. The Nimble Systems Committee, funded by a Paine Grant, has been tasked with developing a remote learning plan should the district need it.
- The food service department is looking to expand a la carte options at the middle and high schools. They are reporting that 40-50 meals are being delivered outside of school each day.
- It has not yet been determined whether winter sports will take place and if so, in what capacity.
- The weekly updates from the Superintendent have been received well by parents and the community.

Dr. Blake then responded to questions from the School Committee with regard to students who may be falling behind, not engaged or not completing assignments. He shared that the administrators, along with teachers and counseling staff are doing their best to keep up the students through weekly check-ins and conversations.

Dr. Blake also addressed the request for more in-person learning time on Wednesdays. Schools would need to first evaluate the number of students who would be attending and then the spacing requirements needed for those additional students in the building.

Dr. Blake then clarified for Lisa Ralph of Linebrook Road, that positive covid cases found in the school are being reported out to the district. If the positive cases are not in school, the district will not issue an announcement. All close contacts are notified.

F. Social Media Policy:

Ms. Gilliam first clarified that the document was not a policy, but a norms document for the School Committee to follow. The document was something the Communications Subcommittee had been discussing for a while. In an effort to broaden communication to the community and with an understanding that social media is the way a lot of people get their information, the subcommittee researched how members could use social media in a way that does not violate open meeting laws.

The draft document is outlined below:

Social Media Norms for Ipswich School Committee Members

All school committees in the Commonwealth are expected to adhere to the Code of Ethics from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC). This document states that a member stays “well informed concerning the duties of a Committee member on both a local and state level.” Recognizing that many of our constituents and community members utilize social media as a means to gather and discuss information about the school district, a School Committee presence on social media can be an important tool for carrying out this part of our positions as elected officials.

The Ipswich School Committee, in our role as advocates for The Public Schools of Ipswich, agrees to abide by the following social media norms:

1. Use social media as a communication tool.

- *As well-informed School Committee members, we are constantly in communication about our district. We gather information to inform our decisions, and deliver information to inform our constituents. Social media use by individual members of the School Committee is allowable to help maintain a high-functioning level of this two-way communication.*

2. Be clear that we communicate on social media ONLY as an individual.

- *In Massachusetts, School Committee members individually have no authority to speak on behalf of the district or of the committee unless specifically designated to do so (for example, the School Committee Chair). Be sure that it is clear in statements online and elsewhere that we speak only as an individual.*
- *In acknowledgement that it can be difficult to separate our personal vs. elected roles in the public eye, it's important to remember that our individual online activity will ultimately reflect on the School Committee and District overall.*
- *For practicality, School Committee members should consider:*
 - *Creating a School Committee member social media account, separate from a personal account.*
 - *Transition a School Committee candidate social media account to a School Committee member account.*
 - *Assign social media roles to a few select members. For example, one person to share the newsletters and meeting information; another person to answer questions.*

3. Avoid violating the Open Meeting Law.

- *Open Meeting Law (M.G.L. Ch. 30A, 18-25) applies to any quorum of a body deliberating about any matter under their jurisdiction. Any discussion amongst School Committee members is considered a public meeting if (1) there is a quorum, (2) there is deliberation occurring, and (3) the discussion is about something that is under the purview of the School Committee.*
- *Online, this can be innocuous as a post from a single Committee member expressing a view regarding an upcoming decision which is then "liked" by a majority of other members of the Committee. While we may be connected through social media to other members of the Committee, be very cautious with these interactions.*
- *Consider regularly reminding the public that the Open Meeting Law affects member participation on social media.*

4. Keep deliberations and decisions within the meeting.

- *The MASC Code of Ethics for members states "a member should not make statements or promises of how they will vote on matters that will come before the Committee." Our decisions should be made as a result of meeting deliberation. Avoid posting content that indicates that we have already formed an opinion ahead of a deliberation at a meeting.*
- *While we may use social media as one way of gathering input for upcoming decisions, we have a responsibility as a Committee member to make our decisions based on information given to us for deliberation. A Committee member should not make decisions based on social media popularity.*

5. Direct complaints or concerns to the appropriate channels.

- *Just as we would with a phone call or conversation in person, ensure that complaints and concerns are directed through the chain of command to the appropriate person in the administration.*

6. Be an effective online presence.

- *Share public information about our district. For example, invite the public to upcoming district events; share information about public hearings; link to the district budget. Let the community know about decisions the Committee has made. However, be clear that this sharing of information is being done by a singular member and not as an official keeper of records.*
- *Be timely and truthful. Should we see incorrect information in a post and have public district information that is correct, link it to the comments. Do not, however, get into an extended back-and-forth, as those rarely lead to any place productive.*
- *Be consistent in when and where we post information online.*
- *Keep messaging simple.*
- *Stay professional. Never post in anger or get personal with remarks, despite any provocation. The intent should be to factually de-escalate any combative messaging.*

- Consider the permanence of posting, as nothing ever disappears online. Despite any privacy settings, postings can be cached or captured by screenshot and taken public. Do not post anything on social media that is not appropriate to have publicly shared.

7. Remember Public Document Law and the Public's Right to Reach You.

- Recent federal court rulings have found that social media is a “designated public forum”; therefore, any online communication we as School Committee members have in our public capacity is subject to public document request. Private messages should be redirected to our School Committee accounts.
- There have also been several recent rulings in federal court that elected officials may not within a public forum block, or delete comments from, those with whom they disagree politically. However, it is acceptable to turn off notifications from a post, or “untag” ourselves from or “mute” a conversation.

8. Keep privileged information private.

- Information shared within executive sessions needs to be kept private unless and until it is reviewed and released as part of the minutes of the session, per M.G.L. Ch. 30A, 22f.
- Respect the negotiations process and remember that collective bargaining should not be discussed outside of our executive sessions for negotiations. Avoid direct negotiation-related questions from teachers online which could be a violation of labor laws.
- Be certain to observe all other applicable privacy laws, such as those surrounding student privacy. This applies not only to information about students, but also to their images. Be sure that public sharing of photos of students are covered by District release.

If the document is approved by the School Committee, then the Communication Subcommittee would then evaluate what social media would look like for the School Committee and who would be assigned the role to share information. It was made clear that this document and all social media posts would be done by an individual and not in a School Committee member capacity.

This norms document, if approved, would live in the New Member Orientation Packet, as well as on the School Committee folder.

Dr. O’Flynn moved to support the Social Media Norms document being adopted to the School Committee folder and as part of the New Member Orientation Packet, seconded by Ms. Cannon. This motion passed, 7 in favor, 0 opposed, by roll call vote.

G. NESDEC Enrollment Projections Discussion:

The School Committee reviewed the enrollment projections created by NESDEC from data given to them from the October 1 enrollment report done at the district level. There were questions about a potential error in reporting because the total number of students enrolled dropped by 103 from last year. Dr. Blake was going to follow up with NESDEC and report back.

H. Public Comment:

There were no public comments at this time.

V. School Committee Reports

A. Vouchers and Bills: All were reviewed and signed.

B. Subcommittee Reports:

1. **Athletics:** The next meeting is scheduled for December.
2. **Budget:** The group met with the Interim Director of Finance and Operations candidate and reviewed the budget calendar. They will be meeting with administrators on December 16th.
3. **Operations:** The group met and reviewed the Annual School Committee Calendar. The calendar will be used as a reference for members on decisions and events that take place each year. The group also reviewed the results

of the School Committee Self Evaluation and worked on a list of action items as a result of the follow up conversation.

- 4. Policy:** The group has begun year one of the three year review cycle. They have now reviewed all of Section H and Section A of the policy manual. The following policies had small revisions made to them: HB, HF, AC, ACE, ADC, ADDA and ADDA-R. The following policies were reviewed, but unchanged: HA, ADF, ACA, ACAB and AB.

Dr. O'Flynn moved to accept policies HB: Negotiations Legal Status, HF: School Committee Negotiations AC: Nondiscrimination, ACE: Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability, ADC: Tobacco Products on School Premises Prohibited, ADDA: Background Checks and ADDA-R: DCJIS Model CORI Policy as presented, seconded by Mr. Stevens. The motion passed, 7 in favor, 0 opposed, by roll call vote.

Ms. Gilliam moved to approve policies HA: Negotiations Goals, ACA: Nondiscrimination of the Basis of Sex, Gender, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation and AB: The People and Their School District, ACAB: Sexual Harrassment, and ADF: Wellness Policy as presented, unchanged, seconded by Dr. O'Flynn. The motion passed, 7 in favor, 0 opposed, by roll call vote.

- 5. Communications:** The November newsletter will be distributed tomorrow.
- 6. Mutual Concerns:** A meeting was scheduled, but then cancelled by the IEA president. At this time, the items that were to be discussed have been resolved.
- 7. Negotiations:** The IEA has reached out to begin negotiations. Both sides are working on dates to begin discussions.

C. Working Group Reports:

- 1. Race, Equity and Social Justice:** The group met via Zoom with members of the school community to discuss what has been done with regard to professional development and curriculum around race, equity and social justice. The HR department also discussed how the Town is working to update their hiring practices. The plan is to have another group discussion, this time inviting families and community members to participate, on December 15th at 4pm.
- 2. Vision 2030:** The group looked at the Secondary Education Plan and discussed the process to evaluate the framework.
- 3. Health and Safety Advisory Group:** The group has requested that the mental health resources document be shared with the district another time.

D. LIAISON REPORTS:

- 1. MASC Delegate:** Ms. Cannon participated in the MASC Delegate Assembly on November 7th. She reviewed each resolution and what the delegates final vote was.
- 2. SEPAC:** The group met via Zoom and discussed their relationship/role with the School Committee and how they would like to move the group forward. The hope is to advise the School Committee on special education issues. After the holidays, they hope to present to the School Committee.
- 3. Traverso-Weatherall Innovation Grants:** All grants have been approved and will be fully funded. Letters to the grant recipients have been sent out.
- 4. STEAM Team:** An early bird registration form has been sent to the district/community for a virtual STEAM Showcase in either April or early May.

- E. New Business:** There was no new business presented.

VI. Consent:

Mr. Whiten moved the Ipswich School Committee to accept a check in the amount of \$2,400.00 from the Ipswich Education Foundation for outdoor education at the Audubon, to be deposited into the Winthrop Student Activities' Account, seconded by Ms. Kneedler. The motion passed, 7 in favor, 0 opposed, by roll call vote.

VII. Adjournment:

Ms. Gilliam moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:27 PM, seconded by Mr. Stevens. The motion passed, 7 in favor, 0 opposed, by roll call vote.