

**IPSWICH SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING  
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2020  
7:00 PM**

**MIDDLE/HIGH ENSEMBLE ROOM**

(School Committee Members only, public participation through Zoom Video Conferencing)

**Minutes**

**I. Call to Order**

Mr. Whitten, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

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

Also Present: Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools; Bill Frangiamore, Interim Director of Finance and Caroline Jepsen, High School Student Representative

Ms. Jepsen read the District Mission Statement.

**Announcements:**

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on January 7, 2020 at 7:00pm.
- Schools will be moving to a Remote model on Monday, December 21st and Tuesday, December 22nd.
- There will be no school December 24th through December 31st for the Winter Holiday Break. School will resume in a hybrid model on Monday, January 4, 2021.
- District Offices will be closed on Friday, December 25th and Friday, January 1st.

Mr. Whitten also shared that this meeting would be Ms. Gilliam's last, as she submitted her resignation ahead of her family's move to California. Committee members thanked Ms. Gilliam for her service to the school community and wished her well.

**Citizens' Comments:**

There were none at this time.

**Special Acknowledgements:**

Dr. Blake acknowledged the Facilities Department for their outstanding job keeping the buildings clean.

**High School Student Representative Report:**

Ms. Jepsen shared an update on activities and events happening throughout the high school which included:

- Orchestra cancelled their concert
- The start of winter sports was pushed back a week
- Clubs are meeting monthly via Zoom
- The Jingle Bell Drive-Thru fundraiser was a success
- The Green Team is working on a project called "Hello Neighbor Fridge" that will place refrigerators filled with food in the community for those who need it

Ms. Jepsen also shared feedback from students that included:

- Remote students feel they are not incorporated into their classes effectively and often feel ignored

- Some remote students feel that it can be challenging to get feedback from teachers
- Most students surveyed are pleased with the progression of the school year

**A. Superintendent’s Administrative Report (taken out of order):**

Dr. Blake shared a detailed report of his schedule over the weeks between tonight’s meeting and December 17, 2020. His report included the following:

- Meetings to deal with several personnel issues
- Meeting with the school nurses to review COVID issues and contact tracing
- A conference call with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (M.A.S.S.) to discuss time on learning issues seen throughout the state.
- A School COVID Oversight Committee meeting
- An administrative team meeting
- An Ipswich Aware meeting
- Participation in the toy drive hosted by Senator Bruce Tarr
- A Race, Equity and Social Justice Subcommittee meeting and public forum
- A walkthrough of the high school locker rooms to review plans for their renovation
- A Nimble Systems meeting
- A North Shore Superintendents Round Table (NSSRT) luncheon
- A meeting with the Facilities Director to review expenses and the preliminary budget for FY22
- A meeting with Tracy Wagner to review the Remote Learning documents drafted by the Nimble Systems Committee
- Participated in a CREST Collaborative Board meeting
- Participation in several subcommittee meetings

**II. School Committee Presentations:**

**B. High School Student Request for Open Campus:**

Three members of the High School Class of 2021 presented a proposal to introduce an option for an open campus as an incentive for seniors who display good citizenship, meet academic goals and are in good standing with the school.

Mr. Mitchell, High School principal, shared his support of the proposal. He felt that if you give students responsibility, they most often rise to the occasion. A program like this would foster independence and good decision making.

Details of the proposal were shared with the Committee and included the following:

- Seniors in good standing would have the ability to leave during S-Block, a 55 minute period in the middle of the school day where students are assigned to a classroom to complete work or visit a teacher for help.
- Used as an incentive program for students, a list of criteria was established to determine who qualifies for the privilege.
- Students would not be able to leave without prior parental consent.
- Eligible students would first check in with their S-block teacher.
- The main office would have two QR codes for students to scan- one to check out and another to check in when returning.
- All students who meet mandatory requirements for eligibility will have a sticker on their badge.
- A form will be created for students to complete prior to leaving campus that includes their name, date, phone number, time out and anticipated destination.

- The permission slip completed by parents would be pre-approved by the School Committee and would mirror a permission slip used for off site field trips.
- School rules would still apply to students who are off campus- no vaping, drinking, drug use, texting while driving, vulgarity, etc.
- In this COVID era, students would be required to be either alone or with a family member if using a car. All CDC guidelines should be adhered to while off campus.
- Other area schools have similar programs established.

The students then addressed questions from Committee members:

- If approved, the school and students would work together to spread the word about the program, criteria and consequences through email and meetings.
- Currently, about 65% of the senior class qualifies for this program. That could change, however, depending on additional criteria.
- Good grades do not necessarily correlate with good character, therefore there would be an appeal process that would go through High School administration for students who may not meet all criteria.

Overall, the Committee spoke positively about the proposal. It was suggested that if this moves forward, there should be a policy written around the program.

- *Dr. O'Flynn moved to accept the proposal for an open campus for seniors as presented, seconded by Mr. Stevens. The motion passed unanimously in favor by roll call vote- 7 YES, 0 NO.*

### **C. Secondary Education Plan Final Draft Discussion/Vote:**

Tracy Wagner, Director of Teaching and Learning, along with Jonathan Mitchell and Kathy McMahon presented the final draft of the Secondary Education Plan for approval. This latest version took into account questions, comments and suggestions previously presented to them from School Committee members. The document was originally shared with the School Committee at their meeting on December 3, 2020.

- *Dr. O'Flynn moved to approve the Secondary Education Plan as presented, seconded by Ms. Gilliam. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote- 7 YES, 0 NO.*

### **D. Secondary School Improvement Plans:**

Ms. McMahon, Middle School principal, shared an overview of the Middle School Improvement Plan. Her original School Improvement centered around four goals, however with the changes this past year, two goals were put on hold and an additional two were added. Areas of focus in the revised plan include:

- The Humanities Model
- Self-Management
- Ipswich Middle School (IMS) through COVID- Supporting the Community
- Illustrative Math Adoption

#### **Goal 1: Humanities Model**

The middle school will study the effectiveness of the newly developed model of Humanities, integrating Social Studies and English/Language Arts curriculum standards in grades 6-8.

Action Steps for Goal 1 include:

- Conduct comprehensive examination of current model

- Locate and visit other local middle schools who have implemented Humanities model
- Examine reading and writing instruction within the model to determine the amount and effectiveness of each strand
- Investigate and choose school-wide reading assessment tool
- Coordinate with Compass work for standards alignment
- Use data from MCAS testing and other sources to determine and support individual needs of students
- Analyze reading selections at each grade level for diversity
- Connect to work from 6th grade Interest-based PLC

#### Goal 2: Self-Management

Acknowledging the increase of anxiety and depression among students, the middle school staff will examine, plan, and implement ways to address these needs.

Action Steps for Goal 2 include:

- Examine Social-Emotional Learning curriculum models to make informed decisions about the adoption of a program across three grade levels
- Use data to address school and student needs
  - Youth Behavior Survey
  - VOCAL survey
  - Attendance
  - Student support
  - Accountability Data
- Research presenters to address student and family needs
- Bring mindfulness exercises to faculty and students
- Examine Health and TAG curriculum experiences
- Connect work to Interest-Based Professional Learning Community

#### Goal 3: IMS during the Pandemic 2020-2021

- Provide support to students, parents, and staff with the emotional stress of this unique school year.
- Support IMS staff as they teach in a hybrid and/or remote model and adapt lessons and curriculum to this mode of learning.

#### Goal 4: Illustrative Math Adoption

- Provide professional development to prepare for the 6-8 adoption of the Illustrative Math Program.
- Create a timeline for implementation.
- Budget for materials and additional training and resources.

Ms. McMahon then answered questions from the Committee. She first explained that while not having MCAS results from last year is difficult, the Middle School relies on several other forms of assessment other than MCAS to help evaluate students.

Both Mr. Whitten and Ms. Gilliam shared how important self-management goals are and the continuation of supporting the social-emotional needs of students.

➤ *Ms. Gilliam moved to support the Middle School Improvement Plan as presented, seconded by Mr. Nylen. The motion passed unanimously in favor by roll call vote, 7-Yes, 0-No.*

Jonathan Mitchell, High School principal, then presented the High School School Improvement Plan. He began by stating that “Ipswich High School is a collaborative community that fosters equity among learners. We engage in the personalized acquisition of the skills and knowledge essential to becoming successful, contributing and responsible citizens.”

He then explained what became of the goals he presented last year. Due to COVID and the school closure that took place in the spring, the goals were not able to be met in the way he had hoped. Mr. Mitchell went on to discuss the goals for 2021 and beyond.

Goal 1: Provide students with alternative coursework that will prepare them for livable wages without college matriculation.

Action Steps for Goal 1 include:

- Increase student enrollment in new tech pathways courses
- Clarify language included in the student handbook
- Create a stipend position for a Pathways Coordinator

Resources and Supports for Goal 1 include:

- Grant-funded technology like the CNC machine purchased through a William Paine Grant
- Teacher professional development
- The Bridge Program for students to participate in internships spring semester of their senior year
- Supplemental curriculum
- Pathways Coordinator to oversee the certificate programs

Goal 2: Improve the transition between 8th and 9th grades.

Action Steps for Goal 2 include:

- Develop student mentoring program
- Improve student preparation for increased academic demands

Resources and Supports for Goal 2 include:

- Training for high school mentors
- Vertical department alignment
- Professional development for teachers

Goal 3: Address the recommendations as highlighted in the 2018 Decennial Visit Report from NEASC.

Action Steps for Goal 3 include:

- Better integrate the Successful Habits of Mind into daily lessons
- Update curriculum documents to include objectives centered on the Successful Habits of Mind

Resources and Supports for Goal 3 include:

- School Council, Department Heads and NEASC Steering Committee
- Rubrics for student self-assessment
- The Two Year Report
- Time allocated on Wednesdays for curriculum work during department time

Goal 4: Earn 4 out of 4 accountability points in Advanced coursework completion category for the 2021 IPS Profile.

Action Steps for Goal 4 include:

- Increase the number of students enrolled in AP courses by 25% by September 2022
- Increase dual enrollment opportunities for students

Resources and Supports for Goal 4 include:

- Seek grant funding to train teachers in Pre-AP strategies
- Send teams of teachers to AP summer institutes 2021
- School counselors will educate the 9th grade students on their caseloads about AP
- College Board's "AP Potential" data from PSAT to identify student candidates

Mr. Mitchell then addressed questions from the Committee. He went on to explain that the high school is

working on better ways to promote the pathways program to incoming freshmen. He talked about the potential to collaborate with local businesses to offer internships for students.

Dr. O'Flynn expressed his appreciation for the emphasis on AP coursework, sharing that he felt taking AP courses in high school pays off later by saving money on the college end.

Mr. Mitchell finished by explaining that he wants to create alternatives for students other than college because college is so expensive. People are starting to more closely look at their return of investment when it comes to the price of college.

➤ *Ms. Gilliam moved to support the High School Improvement Plan as presented, seconded by Mr. Stevens. The motion passed unanimously in favor by roll call vote, 7 YES, 0 NO.*

#### **E. Financial Update:**

Bill Frangiamore, Interim Director of Finance and Operations, presented a financial overview to the Committee which included an outline of year-to-date spending and the status of the various revolving accounts. The FY21 budget is currently in good standing and all revolving accounts have healthy balances. All COVID grants will be spent by December 30, 2020.

#### **F. School COVID Oversight Update:**

Dr. Blake first shared the most recent COVID-19 statistics for Ipswich. While the town continues to see an uptick in positive COVID cases, there is no data to support that there has been any in-school transmission.

Dr. Blake then outlined information discussed at the most recent School COVID Oversight Committee meeting:

- The school nursing staff and Public Health Director, Colleen Fermon, continue to do an incredible job tracking all cases and close contacts.
- With an increased number of positive COVID cases, it was decided that one email would be sent to the district each week with an update on positive cases rather than when each individual case occurs. All close contacts would be notified immediately.
- The deadline to receive the flu vaccine is December 30, 2020. School staff are working diligently to get that messaging out to families and identify who still needs to be vaccinated. If students are not vaccinated by that state mandated deadline, they will transition into remote learning.
- There is some concern about student engagement on Zoom. School counselors and staff are working with families to address any issues.
- Teachers are tired, but hanging in there. There is growing concern about the increase in cases.
- There is still a lack of substitute teachers throughout the district. Should a classroom or school need to go remote, it would more likely be due to a lack of staffing than a surge in positive cases.
- Winter athletics were scheduled to start on December 14, 2020. The start date has been postponed a week because a number of potential athletes were isolating at home due to potential exposure.

Dr. Blake then addressed questions from the Committee. When asked what differentiates Ipswich from other area schools who are going remote, he replied that the number of cases, the difference in Memorandums of Understanding with the unions and the makeup of the different school committees were all factors. If there is a need to switch models, he would rather look at it by class or school rather than the whole district.

Dr. Blake was asked if he has given thought to decreasing the spacing of desks from 6ft to allow for more students in the classrooms. While he thinks about it often, he believes that it could be a “hard sell” for many people as numbers continue to rise in town.

**G. Public Comment:**

There were no public comments at this time.

**III. School Committee Reports:**

**A. Vouchers and Bills:** Reviewed and signed

**B. Subcommittee Reports:**

- a. **Athletics:** Have not met
- b. **Budget:** The subcommittee met the night prior to this meeting with the administrative team in an effort to understand what the team is considering for their individual budgets. A lot of what was mentioned also appears in their School Improvement Plans.
- c. **Operations:** Have not met
- d. **Policy:** Ms. Gilliam shared two policies that had been reviewed by the Policy Subcommittee at their most recent meeting. Policy AA: School District Legal Status was presented unchanged and policy AE: Commitment to Accomplishment was updated with language from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC).

➤ *Mr. Nylan moved to support policy AA: School District Legal Status as presented, seconded by Dr. O’Flynn. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote- 7 YES, 0 NO.*

➤ *Mr Nylan moved to support policy AE: Commitment to Accomplishment as presented, seconded by Dr. O’Flynn. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote- 7 YES, 0 NO.*

- e. **Communications:** The subcommittee will need to select a new chair in Ms. Gilliam’s absence. A schedule for social media postings was drafted. A newsletter is scheduled to go out on January 22, 2021.
- f. **Mutual Concerns:** Have not met
- g. **Negotiations:** The first meeting for the group will be in January.

**C. Working Groups**

- a. **Race, Equity and Social Justice:** The subcommittee met twice. The first meeting was to discuss the upcoming public forum. The second meeting was a public forum for the community and parents. There were 48 people in attendance via Zoom and about a dozen participated in the conversation. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and several people expressed interest in becoming more involved.
- b. **Health and Safety Advisory Group:** The group met on December 14th and discussed the HVAC work that has been completed at the building level, as well as concerns about windows being left open and the sensitivity of the thermostats. There was a conversation about stress amongst students and staff and ways to address that.

**D. Liaison Reports**

- a. **STEAM Team:** The group met on December 8, 2020. With Ms. Gilliam stepping down, there will be a School Committee liaison position available. The next meeting is in January.

- b. Ipswich Education Foundation (IEF):** The next meeting is scheduled for December 28, 2020. There is an opening for School Committee liaison now that Mr. Gilliam is stepping down.

#### **E. New Business**

Mr. Whitten suggested that the Committee begin drafting interview questions for the new School Committee member candidates prior to their joint meeting with the Select Board on January 4, 2021.

#### **IV. Consent**

- *Ms. Gilliam moved to accept the School Committee Open Session meeting minutes from Thursday, November 19, 2020, seconded by Mr. Nylan. The motion passed unanimously in favor by roll call vote- 7 YES, 0 NO.*

#### **V. Adjournment**

- *Ms. Gilliam moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Nylan. The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands- 7 YES, 0 NO.*