

**IPSWICH SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 2021
6:00 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 6:03 PM.

Present: Mr. Whitten, Mr. Nylén, Mr. Stevens, Dr. O'Flynn, Ms. Kneedler, Ms. Cannon and Ms. Eliot

Also Present: Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools and Bill Frangiamore, Interim Director of Finance and Operations

Mr. Nylén moved to meet in executive session pursuant to M.G.L. chapter 30A, sec 21(a) for the purpose of conducting strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel, seconded by Dr. O'Flynn. The motion passed unanimously in support by roll call vote: 7 YES, 0 NO.

The Committee returned to open session at 7:10 PM.

Ms. Jepsen, High School Student Representative, joined the meeting and read the District Mission Statement.

Announcements:

- The next School Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 1, 2021 at 7pm.
- There is a Negotiations Subcommittee meeting on Tuesday, March 23rd at 3:30pm.
- There is a Budget Subcommittee meeting on Tuesday, March 23rd at 6:30pm.
- There is a Communications Subcommittee meeting on Wednesday, March 24th at 3:00pm.
- There is an Athletic Subcommittee meeting on Wednesday, March 24th at 6:00pm.
- The School Facilities Working Group will meet on Thursday, March 25th at 5:00pm.
- The Policy Subcommittee will meet on Wednesday, March 24th at 4:00pm.

Citizens' Comments:

There were none at this time.

Special Acknowledgements:

Dr. Blake acknowledged the staff for their continued hard work throughout this challenging year.

High School Student Representative:

Ms. Jepsen reported on the activities and events taking place at the high school, which included:

- The theater program is working on the production of *Mama Mia!*, which they are scheduled to perform in May.
- The Fall 2 sports season is off to a great start.
- The Model UN Club is preparing for their virtual conference.
- The chorus performed a concert outside.
- The Interact Club hosted a successful blood drive.
- The Robotics Team is working on a new robot.

- The Environmental Club installed a new waste station at the high school to help with the sorting of trash and recyclable or compostable materials.
- The Green Team is maintaining *Hello Neighbor* refrigerators at various locations throughout town.

According to a survey sent to all high school students, some students feel that their motivation and mental health is declining as the year progresses. Others feel that the school year is getting easier as they adapt to the new schedule. There are mixed feelings about returning to full, in-person learning.

IV. School Committee Presentations:

A. Paine Grant Committee: New Member:

Johann Knets, a parent and Ipswich community member had submitted an application to be a member of the Paine Grant Committee. Mr. Knets is an educator in the Hamilton-Wenham school district, as well as the parent of a Doyon student.

The Committee thanked Mr. Knets for his willingness to serve on this Committee.

Dr. O'Flynn moved to support Johann Knets as a member of the Paine Grant Committee, seconded by Ms. Cannon. The motion passed unanimously in favor by roll call vote: 7 YES, 0 NO.

Mr. Whitten informed the School Committee that the Finance Committee has supported Rob White to represent them on the Paine Grant Committee. Mr. White had previously served on the committee and welcomed the opportunity to continue.

Dr. O'Flynn moved to support Rob White as a member of the Paine Grant Committee, seconded by Mr. Stevens. The motion passed unanimously in favor by roll call vote: 7 YES, 0 NO.

B. Winter Sports Awards:

Tom Gallagher, Athletic Director, recognized the students that participated in the winter sports season. Sports played included gymnastics, swimming, hockey and basketball.

Mr. Gallagher then thanked a number of people throughout the district, including students and families, for their work to make the winter sports season a success during unprecedented times.

All award recipients were named. Mr. Gallagher applauded their efforts to keep themselves and their teammates safe this season.

C. Finance Committee Presentation Debrief:

The Committee felt that the budget presentations to the Finance Committee (FinCom) went well. While the conversation and questions were not budgetarily focused, it still made for a pleasant and productive meeting. The FinCom was appreciative of the work of the administrators and the thoughtfulness going into next year.

Some FinCom members had asked for clarification on some items in the budget presentation. Information and answers will be provided, if not already done.

At their meeting on Tuesday, March 16th, the Finance Committee had a lengthy discussion about the Town Strategic Plan with a focus on the schools, the zero-carbon resolution, waterways and the public safety building. They voted to support the Strategic Plan as a living document at that meeting.

D. Elementary Principals/Director of Finance Hiring Process:

Dr. Blake reviewed a proposed timeline for the hiring of both the Director of Finance and Operations, as well as the two elementary school principals.

The timeline for the Director of Finance and Operations search consisted of the following:

- A paper review of applicants,
- An initial search committee meeting to review applications and determine a scoring rubric
- A second search committee meeting to review the scoring rubric and determine applicants to interview,
- First round interviews,
- A third search committee meeting to determine finalists,
- A meet and greet with the leadership team, Town Hall employees, and the School Committee
- An announcement of the new hire

The Director of Finance and Operations Search Committee includes Janet Higgins, Sarah Johnson, Jon Mitchell and Brian Blake. Dr. O'Flynn volunteered to participate as School Committee member representation, as did Mr. Nysten.

The timeline for the elementary school principal search included:

- A paper review of applicants
- An initial search committee meeting to review the list of applicants and determine a scoring rubric
- A second search committee meeting to review the scoring rubric and determine a list of applicants to interview
- First round interviews with the search committee
- A third search committee meeting to discuss the interviews and determine finalists
- A meet and greet with each finalist at each elementary school
- A meeting between Dr. Blake and each finalist
- A final search committee meeting to discuss the site visits and wrap up any outstanding business
- An announcement of the new hires

The Elementary Principal Search Committee will include a total of four parents (two from each school), four educators (2 from each school), Kathy McMahon and two School Committee members. Dr. Blake asked that there is one School Committee member that represents each school. It was decided that Ms. Kneeder and Ms. Cannon will represent the School Committee.

The School Committee then acknowledged that they were considering a split configuration at the elementary school level going forward. While nothing has been decided, the conversation is beginning. They anticipate that a subcommittee will be formed next year to explore that idea.

E. Superintendent's Administrative Report:

Dr. Blake shared his schedule in the weeks leading up to tonight's meeting. Events included:

- A meeting with the Director of Teaching and Learning, along with the middle and high school principals to discuss the expansion of computer science offerings
- An administrative team meeting to review and prepare for the budget presentations to the Finance Committee
- A webinar hosted by the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents regarding effective communication
- An Ipswich AWARE meeting

- Three nights of Finance Committee meetings
- A Negotiations Subcommittee meeting with the Ipswich Educators' Association (IEA)
- A termination hearing
- Working on a survey to parents regarding plans to return to full, in-person learning
- A North Shore Superintendent's Round Table (NSSRT) planning meeting for an upcoming legislative breakfast
- Meetings with staff regarding the elementary school principal search
- A Triboard Chair meeting
- Facilitating a presentation by Debbie Irving
- A CREST Collaborative Board meeting
- A School Reopening Oversight Committee meeting
- Ongoing conversations about the vaccine rollout and the full return to school

F. School COVID Oversight Update:

Dr. Blake first reviewed the most recent positivity rates for Ipswich. While Ipswich continues to remain in the "yellow" category, the positivity rate has increased since the last report.

There was a large conversation around the availability of COVID vaccines. Although the District has been unable to organize a vaccine clinic at a local pharmacy, they have been presented with numerous opportunities and hundreds of appointment times for staff to be vaccinated elsewhere. Dr. Blake reported that at the time of the meeting, 268 staff members were either partially or fully vaccinated or had their first appointment scheduled. He said that given the number of opportunities out there, any staff member who would like to be vaccinated should not have a problem scheduling an appointment.

The Massachusetts Travel Order has been downgraded to an advisory. Dr. Blake is recommending that the District continue to enforce their current protocols around travel.

A survey was distributed to all parents regarding their families' learning model going forward. A total of 66 families have indicated that they will have their children remain in a remote model through the end of the year. The District is now working on a plan for those students.

All schools are preparing for a full return. Staff are working to get additional furniture into the buildings, supplies are being ordered and schedules are being created. Tents will return to all buildings on April 5th.

The Food Services department is ready to welcome more students into the building. Some staff are returning to accommodate the influx of students. There are also repairs being made to some equipment that had not been used.

The Fall 2 season is underway. Due to restrictions on the number of spectators, games are being filmed and streamed through Facebook. There is also a pre-registration system so that the District has information for contact tracing.

Dr. O'Flynn reviewed the number of current hospitalizations at Beverly Hospital. He shared that while the number of COVID patients are decreasing, there is a significant increase in hospitalizations for youth dealing with mental health crises. There are a significant number of youth awaiting psychiatric bed placements across the state. Some hospitals are converting COVID floors to accommodate this influx.

Mr. Nysten thanked Dr. Blake for remaining focused on the vaccine rollout and working to get as many opportunities for educators to be vaccinated as possible.

G. School Reopening Plans:

Dr. Blake shared that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Commissioner and Governor Baker have mandated that all elementary schools open fully by Monday, April 5th. As a result, the District is working diligently to make plans to open safely and effectively.

Dr. Blake reviewed some of the updated guidelines which allow for masked students and staff to be within 3ft of each other. When unmasked, students and staff should remain at least 6ft apart. He also shared that vaccinations do not preclude students and staff returning to school.

There are many logistics to sort out prior to the full return. Furniture will be moved out of storage and into the buildings. Impact bargaining will take place with the IEA. The District is looking to utilize two prep days the last week of March that were left from the beginning of the year to give staff time to set up their elementary classrooms. The same time would be given to the middle and high school staff after April vacation and prior to the return of their students.

Dr. Blake shared that the expectation going forward is that students who choose to return in person must remain in person for the remainder of the year. The same goes for students who choose to continue in the remote model.

Ms. Cannon asked if there is an expectation that remote teachers will return to their classrooms. Dr. Blake said teachers are working remotely for a number of reasons and their return to the classroom will be based on individual need/accommodations. Overall, the expectation is that teachers will be returning to in person teaching.

Dr. Blake also explained that there is a potential need for some staff to rearrange classrooms/classes to accommodate in person learning. Depending on the number of remote students and their grade configurations, teachers may be shifting classes.

Dr. Blake finished by saying there are still a lot of logistics to work through. Once finalized, details will be shared with families.

H. Financial Update:

Mr. Frangiamore presented the March budget report, stating that the District is in good shape.

The Food Services program is also in good shape. Sales are up, revenue is up and the department is in a position to make a profit. School cafeterias will open fully once students return to the building, so staff are being asked to return.

Lastly, Mr. Frangiamore shared the quarterly report, highlighting the interest accrued in both the Stabilization Fund and the Special Education Stabilization Fund.

I. Public Comment:

There was no public comments at this time.

V. School Committee Reports:

1. **Vouchers and Bills:** All were reviewed and signed.
2. **Subcommittee Reports:**

- a. **Athletics:** Scheduled to meet next week
 - b. **Budget:** Scheduled to meet next week
 - c. **Operations:** Have not met
 - d. **Policy:** Scheduled to meet next week
 - e. **Communications:** Scheduled to meet next week
 - f. **Mutual Concerns:** Have not met
 - g. **Negotiations:** Scheduled to meet next week
3. **Working Group Reports:**
- a. **Climate Resiliency Committee (CRC):** There is a meeting scheduled next week to discuss the electrification of systems at the middle and high school.
 - b. **Health and Safety Committee:** Staff are working to get vaccinated. There are some problems being reported with the heat in buildings, but the Facilities Director is working hard to resolve them.
 - c. **Race, Equity and Social Justice Working Group:** Scheduled to meet
4. **Liaison Reports:**
- a. **Feoffees Trust:** The group is going to present the 2021-2022 distribution amount in late April. There is still a substantial balance left in this year's distribution.
5. **New Business:**

Ipswich Public Schools is fortunate to be the recipient of an educational gift from Christine McGuire and her daughter. They have offered 3 [owl](#) devices to the district for use in the classrooms.

The Meeting Owl Pro is a premium 360-degree camera, mic, and speaker combined into one easy-to-use device. It creates the experience of in-person participation for hybrid teams and integrates seamlessly with our conferencing platforms.

The devices are worth \$999 each for a total donation of \$3000 worth of equipment, and will be used in all buildings.

Dr. O'Flynn moved to accept the donation of three Meeting Owl Pro devices to be used in all buildings, seconded by Ms. Cannon. The motion passed unanimously in favor by roll call vote: 7 YES, 0 NO.

VI. Consent:

Mr. Whitten moved the Ipswich School Committee to accept the Open Session meeting minutes from February 25, 2021 and to accept the Open Session meeting minutes from March 4, 2020, seconded by Ms. Kneeder. The motion passed unanimously in favor by roll call vote: 7 YES, 0 NO.

VII. Adjournment:

Mr. Whitten moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:48 PM, seconded by Ms. Cannon. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote: 7 YES, 0 NO.