

Mission

Ipswich Public Schools aspires to empower ALL students to be global citizens who are effective communicators, analytical problem solvers and savvy consumers of information. We propose to do this through an emphasis on communication, critical thinking, creativity, self-management, perseverance and collaboration. Students will be active partners in authentic learning, offering voice and choice in demonstrating competency.

Ipswich School Committee

MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
Thursday, September 23, 2021
7:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Mr. Whitten called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

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

Also Present: Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools; Cheryl Herrick-Stella, Director of Finance and Operations; and Caroline Jepsen, High School Student Representative

2. Reading of the District Mission Statement

Ms. Jepsen read the mission statement.

3. Announcements

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, October 7th at 7:00 PM
- Special Town Meeting will be held on Saturday, October 16th at 9:00 AM

4. Special Acknowledgements

Ms. Eliot talked about the high school curriculum night and how impressed she was with the teachers' passion and ability to connect with the students.

5. Citizens' Queries

Amanda Orlando, Old Essex Road: Discussed the issue of masking students in schools. With the CDC claiming a high survival rate for children with COVID, she asked if the mask mandate was for the students or to protect the adults. She felt that masks were a barrier to education and asked Ipswich to eliminate the mandate for students.

6. High School Student Representative Report

Ms. Jepsen shared that the theater group was working on a collection of one-act plays. Sports are returning to normal and athletes are thrilled to have spectators again. Clubs are beginning to meet for the first time this year. Students are adjusting to their new schedules and are happy to return to a more regular routine.

7. Presentations

A. Superintendent Administrative Report

Dr. Blake reported on his schedule over the two weeks leading up to this meeting. His report included the following:

- A meeting with parents regarding COVID concerns
- A meeting with the Director of Finance and Operations
- A North Shore Superintendents Round Table planning meeting
- A Professional Development (PD) Committee to finalize the details of PD Day
- An Ipswich AWARE meeting
- A Northshore Education Consortium Board of Directors meeting
- A CREST Collaborative Board of Directors meeting
- A meeting with the elementary school math coaches to review benchmarks for testings and plans for the Illustrative Math program
- Regular meetings with the building principals
- Working on the ESSER III submission
- Reviewed MCAS data with the Director of Teaching and Learning
- Introduced the new ALICE Training suite to staff
- Participated in an Administrative Team meeting

- Dealt with ongoing staffing issues and vacancies that are difficult to fill
- Working with the Administrative Team on OPTIC training regarding the educator evaluation system
- Participated in several subcommittee meetings
- A Educator Evaluation Committee meeting to discuss the evaluation process for the year
- Attended a webinar for English Language Learner (ELL) reporting

Dr. Blake then shared an update on COVID numbers within the district, as well as updated the School Committee on the percentage of staff and students who are fully vaccinated. He did clarify that while the district is collecting vaccination data, students and staff are not required to provide that information.

There was a discussion about the collection of vaccination data and the ability to meet the 80% threshold for vaccinated staff and students set by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). At this point, DESE has determined that if a school district has 80% of staff and students vaccinated, they may petition for a waiver to eliminate the need for masks. At this time, Dr. Blake said he was still in support of mask wearing in the schools.

Ms. Cannon then asked about learning for students in quarantine. At this time, DESE is not allowing districts to utilize a remote learning model. Teachers are asked to provide educational opportunities for students that are absent for COVID-related reasons; however, they provide work as they see fit. Dr. Blake did clarify that DESE is not issuing accountability data for this year, so any absence is not recorded to the state. He also shared that with the new protocols in place, there are significantly less students quarantining than last year.

Mr. Whitten then asked about the staffing and hiring issues the district is facing, specifically the need for additional support in kindergarten at Winthrop. Dr. Blake shared that the district is monitoring enrollment at Winthrop and is considering adding additional support staff to the classroom. Dr. O'Flynn shared that in past years, the district has seen larger class sizes in kindergarten.

Ms. Cannon asked about the increasing ELL population at Winthrop School. Dr. Blake shared that the district has posted for a 0.5 FTE ELL teacher. They hope to fill that position quickly.

B. Student Assessment/District Ranking

Dr. Blake felt it important to address questions about student assessment data recently published in the Boston Globe Magazine. He shared the most recent MCAS data, stating that results in Ipswich were down in grades 3-8. Ipswich scores are inline with testing across the state. Dr. Blake reviewed a number of reasons that students were scoring differently on these assessments and offered to have Tracy Wagner, Director of Teaching and Learning, present an indepth look at MCAS scores at the next meeting.

There was discussion about how the scores may reflect how the education of students was handled during the pandemic. Dr. Blake felt that while there was some degree of learning loss, the way in which students were taking the test varied and could have affected their outcome.

Dr. O'Flynn felt the results of these tests were valuable and wanted to see how Ipswich compared to surrounding schools. Dr. Blake disagreed. He felt because most students did not take a complete test that covered all standards, there was information missing. He said benchmark assessment done throughout this year will provide better indicators for student performance and learning gaps.

Dr. Blake then talked about the Boston Magazine school rankings and said that the district is looking at the data used to generate these rankings. A presentation on this information would be forthcoming.

C. Finance Update

The Director of Finance and Operations reviewed the year-to-date financial report. She said all salaries have been encumbered at this point. She clarified that Central Office encumbers salaries, while the schools encumber supplies and other expenses.

Ms. Herrick-Stella talked about the need to withdraw from savings to cover the cost of long term subs. There was also a need to use ESSER funding for summer programming.

Dr. Blake wanted to confirm with the School Committee that the district is utilizing the appropriated budget as intended. The district is fortunate to have the ESSER funding to support some additional positions and needs.

Ms. Herrick-Stella shared that the overall budget was in good standing.

D. 2021-2022 School Committee Goals

Mr. Whitten presented the 2021-22 School Committee goals for approval. The goals are presented below:

1. Support rebuilding and maintenance of academic and extracurricular programs that were put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic
 - a. Focus on running as many programs as possible while keeping our staff and children safe.

- b. Oversee spending of federal money for COVID relief to ensure it has positive impacts on students and programs.

2. Budget

- c. Facilitate a successful operational override in spring 2022
 - i. Have SC member serve as liaison on Override steering committee
 - ii. Work with Finance Director, Finance Committee, and Override committee to determine reasonable number to ask for in override
 - iii. Provide data and stats as needed to Override committee
 - iv. Work together with the Override committee to ensure transparency, accuracy of information, and integrity of campaign

3. Communications

- d. Short-term goal: continue to provide access to timely information about Ipswich Public Schools for the community-at-large throughout the 2021-2022 school year.
- e. Long-term goal: 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.
- f. Increase general outreach to community that was not possible in 2020-2021 due to the pandemic
 - i. Community outreach to local groups such as Rotary Club, and Council on Aging quarterly.
 - ii. Hold informal monthly “office hours” for SC members around town to improve transparency and accessibility to the committee.
- g. Distribute bi-monthly newsletter to school community and community-at-large.
 - i. Targeted publish dates October, November, January, March, May/June
 - ii. Focus on communication and transparency about operational override, school building project, and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in the district.
 - iii. Broaden and increase communication on social media channels. Post events and dates in a timely and accurate manner on platforms.
 - 1. Post every SC meeting, superintendent coffee hour, and SC office hours throughout the school year..
 - 2. Increase posts on school-related social media pages such as FRIES pages, to increase awareness of SC goals, initiatives, and meetings.

4. Implement Vision 2030

Complete Vision 2030 Plan by June 2022 including the following actions:

- 1. Conduct assessment of lessons learned under COVID response which should inform Vision 2030 and adjust plan accordingly, completing by December 2021.
- 2. Integrate framework components, with input from the admin team, by March 2022.
- 3. Publish and distribute plan by June 2022

5. Massachusetts School Building Administration (MSBA) Process

- h. Facilitate submission of Statement of Interest (SOI) to for elementary building project to the MSBA in spring 2022
- i. Host several public listening sessions for the Ipswich community with the goals of listening to citizen concerns, ensuring transparency around the process, and gaining consensus around a new project.

Mr. Stevens felt that adding measurables into the goals would help the School Committee remain accountable.

Ms. Eliot shared that the School Committee will plan to review these goals mid-year. The goals presented are broken down into subcommittee groups, so they can be revisited throughout the year.

Dr. O’Flynn thought these led to a good cascade of goals from the School Committee, to superintendent, to schools.

Mr. Poirier appreciated the firm dates included in the goals. He felt it would help the School Committee stay on track and provide benchmarks for accomplishment.

- *Motion to approve the 2021-22 School Committee Goals as presented was made by Mr. Stevens and seconded by Mr. Poirier. The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

E. 2021-2022 Superintendent Goals

Dr. Blake shared his 2021-22 Superintendent Goals with the School Committee for approval. His goals are presented below:

Student Learning Goal: Instructional Leadership

Standard: 1:A Curriculum
Goal: Unpack and develop the ELL Curriculum and program district wide in light of new staffing and increasing populations
Action Items:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet regularly (bi-weekly) in September and October, then monthly thereafter with EL staff • In conjunction with EL staff, develop an immediate list of curriculum needs. • Through the Compass Committee, unpack and review the long term curriculum needs for our EL population` • Establish school/community events to help integrate EL families into our schools throughout the year • By end of year, publish revised EL program guide for district use.

Professional Practice Goal: Management and Operations

Standard: 2:A Environment
Goal: Ensure successful integration of new elementary administrators into the Ipswich Public Schools
Action Items:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide formal mentoring support for new administrators • Introduce both principals to Rotary and other community groups • Attend at least 3 faculty meetings throughout the year in each building • Attend at least 3 school council meetings in each building • Utilizing OPTIC and Teachpoint, work with administrators to ensure understanding of the educator evaluation process in Ipswich
Goal: Facilitate the Comprehensive District Accountability Review by the Office of District Reviews and Monitoring/DESE
Action Items:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare documentation required by the Office of District Reviews and Monitoring (DESE) • Coordinate site visit with the Office of District Reviews and Monitoring (DESE)

District Improvement 1: Family and Community Engagement

Standard: 3:A/C Engagement and Communication
Goal: Provide opportunities for unifying the elementary school community around the elementary education plan as well as the Vision 2030 documents.
Action Items:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish expectations of collaboration between the two schools • Facilitate meetings (bi-weekly) between the two principals to discuss curriculum/community and staffing issues • Meet with both principals specifically to discuss the elementary education plan and what it looks like in each building • Develop a timeline in conjunction with the SC subcommittee for the dissemination of the Vision 2030 documents
Goal: Facilitate the submission of a new SOI to the MSBA in Spring 2022
Action Items:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a timeline for moving toward an SOI submission in the Spring

- Work with the SC to facilitate community forums, listening sessions, etc.
- Provide leadership around the need for moving forward with a building project to include community messaging, videos, interviews, social media posts, etc.
- Write and revise the SOI document in conjunction with the School Committee

District Improvement 2: Professional Culture

Standard: 4:B Cultural Proficiency

Goal: Actively lead the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee established this year within the school district. (Advisory group to help move from pockets of self identified interest in DEI to district wide learning practices.

- In conjunction with the Leadership Team, establish parameters for the Committee by September 15
- Solicit participation from staff in each school, and high school students with diverse backgrounds
- Set schedule for the first meeting in October. Date TBA
- Report out monthly to the School Committee on the activities of the group.

Ms. Cannon shared her concern that the goals, as presented, did not address issues the district is facing like increased class sizes, staffing shortages, ELL needs and Special Education. She felt it was important to consider the environment at the elementary schools beyond the new principals. Given the past year of pandemic learning and the need to focus on closing learning gaps created as a result of last year, Ms. Cannon was surprised that Special Education was not included in the goals.

Dr. Blake explained that the goals were not meant to be all-inclusive. As a superintendent, he is not limited by these goals and the issues raised by Ms. Cannon are still going to be addressed.

Dr. O’Flynn said that generally speaking, a superintendent only identifies 3-4 goals each year. While he doesn’t have a specific goal related to bringing the district back after the pandemic, the School Committee is still going to judge him on the response. He felt the goals presented were good.

Ms. Cannon felt it would not be fair to judge the superintendent on areas that were not included in the goals and covered under the standards.

Ms. Eliot felt the public would appreciate more detail about the specifics on how these goals will be accomplished. Dr. O’Flynn reminded members that Dr. Blake will present a mid-year review and then a binder of evidence at the end of the year.

Dr. Blake hoped that if there were issues that needed to be addressed over the course of the year, the School Committee would bring those to his attention prior to his end of year evaluation. He said the goals presented were his focus for the year to meet the requirements set forth by DESE. There is a lot of work to be done in the district outside of the goals.

- *Motion to approve the 2021-22 Superintendent Goals as presented was made by Dr. O’Flynn and seconded by Ms. Kneedler. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

F. Budget Update

Mr. Stevens began the conversation by reviewing the discussion from the last Budget Subcommittee meeting regarding the need for an operational override. While the district has been fortunate to have the Stabilization Fund to draw from, without an override the fund will end. For FY23, the subcommittee was estimating a \$1.9 million withdrawal from the Stabilization Fund; however, the amount was adjusted to \$1.3 million due to ESSER funding. The district is fortunate to have a cushion in the Stabilization Fund that will allow for an additional year’s withdrawal, but after that and with no additional funding, the district will approach a financial cliff. Without an override, the district could be looking at a \$2 million shortfall and will need to make drastic cuts to the budget. Based on the Town’s Strategic Plan, the goal is to approach the Town for a \$2 million the year before the district exhausts the Stabilization Fund. That \$2 million would extend the budget for at least five additional years.

There was a discussion amongst the Budget Subcommittee about the timeline of an override. Ms. Eliot felt it was important the public know that the timing of the override was discussed at length. While it may seem difficult to ask for an override when the district still has healthy

account balances, it was decided that it would be beneficial to the district and the continuity of learning to receive funds before they reach a financial cliff.

Ms. Eliot also stressed the importance of this override coming from the community. An operational override must be community driven. The School Committee's role is to support the steering committee and provide data to support their mission. She felt it was important to get early support from each of the boards in Town and build out a team. The subcommittee felt that November would be an appropriate time to start. There would be work done through the winter behind the scenes and then the committee would go public with its campaign in the spring.

Dr. O'Flynn and Mr. Stevens reviewed the budget calculator. Dr. O'Flynn shared that if the district were to put the \$2 million from an override back into the Stabilization Fund in FY23, the appropriated budget would remain at baseline. Without the override, there is no backup plan for funding. He said that anything the district is considering for growth initiatives would come secondary if there is no budget to support them.

Both Dr. Blake and Dr. O'Flynn talked about programming that was cut when the last override failed that has still not returned to the district. Dr. O'Flynn felt that having financial stability gives the district the ability to grow and progress.

Ms. Eliot added that it was important to reassure the community that the School Committee will make financial sound and responsible decisions to ensure that any additional funds will last as long as possible. Dr. O'Flynn added that the longevity of an override is often dependent on negotiations with the various collective bargaining units.

8. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- **Communications Subcommittee:** Ms. Eliot was elected the Chair. The group has decided to schedule monthly meet and greet opportunities with the community through the school year with the intent to build support and increase transparency. The first newsletter will be sent out on October 8th.
- **Budget Subcommittee:** Covered during an earlier agenda item
- **SEPAC:** Both Mr. Poirier and Ms. Cannon attended the first meeting of the school year. They discussed the goals for this year, as well as set up a "Basic Rights" presentation for families. There was a discussion about SEPAC presenting to the School Committee.
- **School Council:** The group discussed the School Improvement Plan for the high school. They also discussed milestones and goals related to AP courses and testing. There was a discussion about changing the current hat policy in the student handbook.

9. New Business*

Dr. O'Flynn shared that both the field hockey team and volleyball team are currently undefeated.

10. Vouchers and Bills

All were reviewed and signed.

11. Consent Agenda

Move to support. Chub.PK. Unanimous

12. Adjournment

- *Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mr. Stevens and seconded by Ms. Eliot. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

The meeting adjourned at 8:54 PM.