

Ipswich School Committee

MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
Thursday, November 4, 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, Ms. Kneedler, Mr. Poirier, Ms. Cannon, Ms. Eliot

Also Present: Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools; Cheryl Herrick-Stella, Director of Finance and Operations; 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 is scheduled for Thursday, November 18th at 7:00pm in the MS/HS Ensemble Room.
- The following subcommittees will be meeting:
 - Communications, November 16th at 5:00pm
 - Budget, November 16th at 6:00pm
 - Negotiations, November 17th at 3:45pm
- All schools and district offices will be closed on Thursday, November 11th in observance of Veteran's Day.
- An informational meeting on the override will take place Tuesday, November 30th from 6:30-8:00 PM at Town Hall

4. Special Acknowledgements-

Sue Markos won Coach of the Year in the CAL division for coaching the boys cross country team.

5. Citizens' Comments

- *Eric Josephson, Washington Street:* Said Bialek Park was in his neighborhood and therefore, he should have heard about something before there was an article in the newspaper. He talked about the consultant that advised the School Committee on beginning the school building conversation again. The consultant stressed the importance of transparency. Mr. Josephson felt the park was not a great location for a school. He asked the School Committee to table the issues and then reach out to the community for input.
- *Maria Wolters, Maple Avenue:* Felt like this was deja vu. She said she was standing before the School Committee four years ago and is not repeating the same thing. She said the School Committee could not have Bialek Park for four reasons. 1. It is a water sink. If a school is built at that location, the neighborhood would flood. 2. The park is the only public, open area for the most dense part of the city. There is no other park. She felt it was unconscionable that the community would entertain the idea to take this away. 3. The school building process years ago pitted the community against each other. 4. The Save Bialek Park Committee has agreed to challenge this in court. There was a similar challenge in another town and the townspeople won. She felt there were too many contingencies against the School Committee for this proposal to move forward. She begged the School Committee to figure out what the town wants before moving forward.
- *Irene Josephson, Washington Street:* Took issue with the agenda. She felt it was not clear what the discussion would entail and asked the School Committee to postpone the discussion until the community has been adequately notified.
- *Mark Allman, High Street:* Shared that he was a two school supporter. His decision came down to size and locations. While he felt he could compromise on one of those two issues, he could not compromise on both. He asked the School Committee to come up with a plan that looked different than what was proposed before. He felt that introducing the same

proposal will only reignite frustration. The School Committee needs to build support around the size and location before going to MSBA.

- *Jack Moon, Kimball Avenue*: Questioned why the School Committee thought Bialek Park was more appealing as a school site than Doyon.

6. High School Student Representative Report

Ms. Jepsen shared events and happenings taking place at the high school. Her report included:

- Fall sports were underway and all having excellent seasons
- There have been various volunteer efforts taking place throughout school
- An after school student investment club was introduced by HS math teacher, Tate Shippen

7. Presentations

A. High School Rankings

Jonathan Mitchell, High School principal, was asked to discuss Ipswich's ranking in a Boston Magazine's list of top schools. He said there were several people, including a group of students, that took a deep dive into the statistics used to determine these rankings. Based on their work, he felt the best predictor of how schools were ranked was a correlation between household income and where students ranked. He said there was little correlation between class size and how kids ranked. He asked the School Committee to review the rankings of school districts with similar median household incomes to Ipswich.

Mr. Mitchell said he was also a fan of AP exams. He said many higher ranked schools had more students who took AP courses. He, again, looked at schools with similar median incomes and how they performed on the AP exams. Compared to those schools, Ipswich was doing well.

After sharing some general statistics of where Ipswich was ranked in comparison to other Cape Ann League schools, Mr. Mitchell finished by sharing that he believes the takeaways from the article are that class sizes do not weigh heavily on rankings and there are no strong correlations between ranking and student/teacher ratios.

Lastly, he shared that the School Committee would see an increased emphasis on AP exams when the HS School Improvement Plan is presented. Mr. Mitchell then answered Committee questions. He shared that he hoped to offer more AP courses going forward.

B. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Ipswich Schools

Dr. Blake gave an overview of the district's work with regard to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. He shared that it is a goal of Ipswich Public Schools to be a place where all students, staff and families are valued and included. It is important to prepare students to be compassionate, civic-minded, and inclusive participants in environments more diverse than where they grew up. Dr. Blake said that he received letters from some alumni last year who stated that while they left Ipswich High School feeling prepared for college, they felt that Ipswich did not do enough to prepare them for a vastly different cultural experience in college or the workforce.

Dr. Blake then discussed the research the district has used to create a path forward. He said that learning from consultants with Learning for Justice and others, showed the district that anti-bias and cultural competency practices in classrooms must start with explorations of one's own identity. The district worked with a consultant to work with teachers and provide them with the necessary resources and support to think about their own privilege and identity to help prepare them to bridge into thinking about diversity, social justice, and action. A Compass group was also formed with teacher leaders in the 2020-2021 school year who regularly met with the consultant and the Director of Teaching and Learning to learn about and think through this work.

Dr. Blake then highlighted the DEI work that the district has done in the past 1-2 years and then what is currently taking place.

- The Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (M.A.S.S.) has developed a MASS REDI Strategy document that is in its first year of implementation. The North Shore Superintendents' Roundtable has monthly meetings to discuss the work going on in the districts and how we can support each other.
- Elementary PLC's focused on social justice questions, shared readings, and discussions
- Summer professional development with Learning for Justice, summer 2019
- Teachers attending workshops on DEI topics and reporting back, 2019-2020
- PD Day keynote and workshops on identity and cultural competence, 2020 and 2021

- PD Day 2020 Keynote and Workshop presenter: "I'm a Good Person. Isn't that Enough?" "Leveling the Playing Field" and "Transformational Conversations: Moving from Fear to Curiosity"
- PD Day 2020 workshops: "Building A Social Emotional Learning Practice That Supports All Learners" and "What Trauma-Informed Teaching Practices Look Like Virtually and In-Person" with LaQueshia Jeffries; "Restorative Justice" with Rich Catrambone; "Challenges of Students on the Autism Spectrum in the Gen Ed Classroom" with Kent Rude; "Teach Real History/Inspire Real Citizens: "Americans Who Tell the Truth" with Robert Shetterly
- PD Day 2021 workshops: "4 Levers for an Anti-Racist Classroom" with LaTrice Lyle; "Cultural Proficiency" with Cory Mashburn; "Students with High-Functioning ASD" with David Gotthelf.
- Workshops for teachers on having "difficult discussions" in classrooms, 2019-2021
- Debby Irving workshop for parents/guardians: "I'm a Good Person. Isn't that Enough?" March 2021
- Summer book club on *Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain*, summer 2021
- Social Justice Compass Subcommittee with teacher membership from all schools + Tracy Wagner and Kathy McMahon to look at national Social Justice standards and engage in professional learning with consultants. Here, we found that the national SJ standards were already aligned into the Massachusetts History and Social Science standards as well as the new World Language standards -- so we do not need to bring in a "stand-alone" Social Justice curriculum. Instead, we need to implement an HSS and WL curriculum that is standards-based.
- 8th grade Civics/Humanities course and 10th grade Social Studies course with student-led Civics projects (state law).
- Revised Objective 3 of the Strategy for District Improvement to specifically say we will "Build best practices to support diversity, equity, and inclusion," Summer 2021 ("IPS will ensure that all students will be prepared to face the challenges presented by an increasingly complex world that is more diverse than our immediate learning community").
- Last year we provided teachers with resource materials and discussion points around the passage of Juneteenth as a holiday. This year we will be able to prepare appropriate lessons to be taught toward the end of the year.
- This year we switched our focus from Columbus day to Indigenous People's day and worked with the staff to create appropriate lessons. We also developed resource material lists for each level.
- We also have a renewed focus on our English Learner Program so that we can adequately and appropriately work with the increase in our culturally diverse population and their families.

Dr. Blake then discussed the next steps for the district. He said the district plans to create a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Team to be composed of students and staff with varied backgrounds. The district also plans to:

- Using *Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain* with all middle and high school teachers through Secondary Learning Cycles, 2021-2022 school year Finishing curriculum writing and then starting implementation pilot of elementary Social Studies curriculum, 2021-2022 -- focus of (new this year) Elementary Learning Cycles where teachers will meet cross-district in grade-level teams
- Bring in PD to learn more about ways to best support LGBTQ students and staff.

Dr. Blake also shared that the Human Resources department continues to look at ways to increase diversity in the hiring process.

Ms. Cannon began the discussion, saying that she is hearing a lot of work done with a focus on "being white". She thought there needed to focus more on the families of color and ensuring their kids feel seen and heard; that their teachers are implementing curriculum that they are okay with. She said there is a lot of heartache among the community from the lack of diversity on the principal search committee last year. She thought families of color should have more contact with the schools when often difficult lessons are taught. She said it did not matter who was initiating the conversation with the families, but it needed to happen.

Ms. Eliot then asked if Dr. Blake was confident that there was enough English Learner staff in place to support the needs of this increasing population. He said the district was in the process of hiring additional staff.

C. School Committee Self-Evaluation Review

Each member of the School Committee took part in a self-evaluation. Results of the evaluation were shared and discussed.

GOVERNANCE

1. The committee's policies are clear and up-to-date.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
5	2	0	0

2. The committee has adopted a mission statement.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
5	2	0	0

3. The committee regularly evaluates its progress relative to the goals and objectives that have been adopted.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
2	4	0	1

4. The committee refrains from involvement in the administration of the school system.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
4	3	0	0

5. The committee members take part in educational workshops and conferences to help them make informed decisions.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
	3	4	0

In this section, there was discussion regarding the potential need for additional professional development. The Massachusetts Association of School Committees does offer a variety of workshops and professional development opportunities that members can register for on their own.

Operations

1. Roles of committee officers are defined in committee policy and understood by all members.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
4	3	0	0

2. New members receive introductory training and orientation when they join the committee.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
4	3	0	0

3. Procedures and protocols for committee operations are published and understood.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
2	5	0	0

MEMBER RELATIONS

1. Members treat each other with courtesy and respect.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
6	1	0	0

2. All members are encouraged to voice opinions and take positions on issues.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
5	2	0	0

3. Members respect the will of the majority and support decisions once they are made.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
4	3	0	0

4. Members share pertinent information with each other to prevent surprises and promote informed decision making.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
3	4	0	0

5. Members "do their homework" and come prepared to make decisions.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
3	4	0	0

6. Members understand the role of the individual as part of the whole group.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
2	5	0	0

COMMITTEE/SUPERINTENDENT RELATIONS

1. The committee regularly evaluates the superintendent using a mutually agreed-upon process.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
3	2	1	1

2. The types and frequency of communications are agreed to in advance.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
2	3	2	0

3. The superintendent is accessible to committee members.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
6	1	0	0

4. Committee members contact the superintendent when seeking information.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
3	4	0	0

5. The superintendent informs the committee of major personnel decisions.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
2	4	1	0

6. The superintendent and committee treat each other with mutual respect and professionalism.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
5	1	1	0

7. Both the committee and the superintendent operate on a "no-surprises" model.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
5	1	1	0

There was discussion about the format of the superintendent evaluation that some members felt was “weird”. They thought it was odd to have the superintendent set his own goals, provide his own evidence and then be rated on that evidence. Members felt it was important to have the ability to evaluate the work of the superintendent against the school community to see how it was implemented and if the work was successful. It was discussed that the evaluation process should be refined.

A discussion took place about communication with the superintendent. While it was agreed that members of the School Committee could communicate with the superintendent freely, the types and frequency of communication has never been discussed. Clarification was also made about when the superintendent would discuss personnel issues with the School Committee.

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND FISCAL MANAGEMENT

1. A long term, strategic plan exists and is regularly reviewed.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
2	4	0	1

2. All constituencies of the school district are involved in the strategic planning process.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
1	4	0	2

3. The budget process is documented and published.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
3	2	0	2

4. Budgets are developed based on needs, from the "bottom-up".

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
3	2	0	2

5. The committee, as a group, presents and advocates the budget to the community.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
3	4	0	0

6. The committee receives regular reports with budget and financial status for the school system.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
4	3	0	0

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

1. The committee has a public relations plan for the school system.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
3	2	2	0

2. The committee encourages the inclusion of community members in as much decision making as possible.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
2	4	1	0

3. The committee works cooperatively with other branches of municipal government.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
3	4	0	0

4. The school system regularly reports its own progress and accomplishments.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
1	6	0	0

Members were in agreement that communications with the community could be improved, especially around larger projects and initiatives.

CONDUCT OF MEETING

1. Committee members receive sufficient information far enough in advance to prepare for meetings.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
2	5	0	0

2. Public Input is welcomed, and is done according to an established policy.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
3	3	1	0

3. Full and sufficient debate is allowed.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
3	4	0	0

4. Discussion is focused on issues, not personalities.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
4	3	0	0

5. The physical setting is conducive to productive discussion and decision making.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
3	4	0	0

6. Meetings are frequent enough to prevent overcrowded agendas.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
4	3	0	0

There was a discussion regarding the public comment section of the meeting and the inconsistency of how it is handled. It was suggested that every meeting should adhere to the same rules and consistency that allows for the public to feel heard. Public comment should be a time for the community to address concerns. If the School Committee feels the concern should be discussed further, it would be added to a future agenda. It was agreed that public comment should not lead to an open dialogue between the community member and the School Committee and there should be time constraints on the public comment section.

D. Preparation for Select Board Meeting (taken out of order 7:39pm)

Mr. Whitten started by sharing that the School Committee would be going before the Select Board on November 15, 2022 to seek their approval to ask the community-at-large for permission to study Bialek Park for a combined elementary school project. If the School Committee agrees this is a preferred site and the Town votes a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority to release the park, the plan would be to present this as an option to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). The School Committee would like to seek community approval for the space prior to submitting a Statement of Interest (SOI) to the MSBA.

Dr. Blake stated that this is the very beginning of any conversation about a path forward for a new project. He then reviewed the past work done to study Bialek Park and the timeline around the location as part of the past attempt at an elementary school project. During the last project attempt, the Select Board refused to release the park and therefore, the community never had an opportunity to discuss it as an option. He felt the School Committee was doing its due diligence by seeking the community's thoughts on the space. Dr. Blake also recognized that there was a group of concerned citizens who did not want the park used for a

school project. He felt that the first steps to moving a new project forward was to hear from the community regarding Bialek Park. If the School Committee finds that this is not a viable option and not what the community wants, they need to move forward looking at the other limited options in town.

Mr. Whitten talked about the need to bring a new and different project to the MSBA in order to gain approval. They make it clear in conversations that presenting the same project that failed to gain community support was unlikely to move forward in the MSAB pipeline. He then reviewed the timeline for an SOI submission and stressed the importance of gaining community support for an education plan and site before moving forward.

Dr. O'Flynn asked for clarification on the process to release Bialek Park. Mr. Whitten said that those steps would be investigated if the Select Board approved the release.

Mr. Stevens stressed that this was the first step in the process for the School Committee to review viable locations for a school project. He said the School Committee needs to address the growing enrollment. He believes this is the first step to understanding what the town wants in terms of elementary schools. This process is not solidifying Bialek Park as a school site, but it the start of exploring all potential options.

Dr. O'Flynn shared his concerns. He said the School Committee already looked at way o rehab the two current schools, but it was very expensive. They then decided that a single school at Bialek Park would be a compromise. When the Select Board refused to release the park, the School Committee then had to shift plans and look for new sites. During that time, there had been several votes from the community. He felt that moving forward it was important to select a location and build a project around that site. The School Committee should not be changing plans based on who shows up to the meeting.

Mr. Poirier said he felt the community wanted to see all the options available prior to landing on one option. He said the School Committee needs to do more listening and acknowledge those in the community that are saying the process is moving too fast.

Ms. Cannon agreed that the School Committee needs to talk to the community, listen and move forward based on the feedback they have gathered. She said the community feels blindsided and that this process has been less than transparent. She said the community needs to understand what the options are realistically and needs to feel trust with the process. She acknowledged that the community is the most important piece to this building project and they are already starting to mistrust us.

Dr. O'Flynn felt frustrated with the idea that the School Committee talks about a site, then people show up to oppose it and the option is gone. He said the group moves from site to site at the will of the people who show up to the meetings

Mr. Stevens clarified that if the Select Board votes to not release Bialek Park at their meeting, the site will no longer be an option. If the park is out, the discussion changes.

Ms. Cannon felt the School Committee could strengthen its position by holding listening sessions. She felt that hearing from the community first would bolster a request for use of the park.

Mr. Whitten clarified that the School Committee is not currently asking for Bialek Park. They would be asking permission from the Select Board to ask the community if they want Bialek Park.

Ms. Eliot said the downside of listening sessions prior to the Bialek Park discussion would be that the community is potentially providing feedback on options that may not actually be viable. Mc. Cannon countered, saying that the community wants to be heard from the beginning.

Dr. Blake said that the listening sessions were "mission critical", but he did not want to repeat what happened last time. He does not want to talk about options that are not a possibility.

Ms. Cannon asked if the School Committee would move forward with a meeting with the Select Board if they knew the community was not in support. Mr. Whitten said they should not give the community false hope about a location without first hearing from the Select Board if they would consider releasing it.

Mr. Poirier shared his concerns about studying Bialek Park. He said from conversations, it sounds like the School Committee is

looking for a site for a single school. He thought it was important to look at all options.

Ms. Kneidler added that Bialek Park was not a final decision for a school site. It was just an option the School Committee and community has not had an opportunity to fully explore. She stated strong support for this site from the last project and thought this could be the potential site of compromise from the one school and two school proponents.

Ms. Cannon, again, shared her concern for engaging the community prior to this decision.

Dr. O'Flynn talked about his experience from the last building project. He said that people showed up for whatever site they did not want, but if you looked out to the broader community, there was support for Bialek. While people will claim to feel blindsided by decisions, the building project has been a conversation for over 10 years.

The discussion continued amongst members about the importance of listening to the community and gathering feedback. There was a disagreement as to whether community listening sessions should take place prior to asking for Bialek Park. Some stressed the importance that asking for Bialek Park does not mean that it will be the site moving forward, but rather part of a larger matrix to review.

Jack Moon, Kimball Avenue: talked about the Select Board's control of Bialek Park and the process to release the park for a potential school building site. He asked for clarity on whether the School Committee was going before the Select Board to release the park or to see if Bialek Park could be considered as an option for a school project.

Mr. Stevens explained that by asking the Select Board to release the park, the School Committee just wants the opportunity to see if this could be an option. Mr. Whitten added that the School Committee would like the Select Board to consider allowing them to ask the community if Bialek Park could be studied. Mr. Whitten said they did not want to waste the community's time discussing a location without first knowing if the Select Board would be in favor of releasing it.

8. Superintendent's Administrative Report

Dr. Blake reported on his work throughout the district in weeks since that last School Committee meeting. His report included:

- Attendance at a choral concert
- A meeting with the elementary principals
- An Ipswich Education Foundation meeting
- A TriBoard Chair meeting
- An Administrative Team meeting to review the Strategy for District Improvement plan
- A call with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner regarding the mask mandate
- A virtual meeting hosted by the Attorney General
- A Northshore Education Consortium board meeting
- Attendance at a Ipswich Library event
- Several subcommittee meeting
- An MSBA webinar
- A DEI Committee meeting
- A North Shore Superintendents Roundtable meeting
- Attendance at a High School Council meeting
- A meeting with the Ipswich Educators' Association president
- Finance meetings to review the budget

9. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- **Traverso-Weatherall Innovation Grant Committee:** The group met last night to review the fall cycle applications. The majority of the grants have been tentatively approved.
- **Feoffees Committee:** The distribution for this coming year will be presented soon. They are anticipating a distribution of roughly \$930,000 this year.
- **School Facilities Working Group:** This topic was already addressed as part of an earlier agenda item.
- **STEAM Team:** The group met with Jake Foster, a consultant brought in through a Paine Grant to do an assessment of the outdated lab spaces at the MS/HS.
- **Communications Subcommittee:** The group held a meet and greet today. The group is continuing to think of community outreach possibilities.

- **Policy Subcommittee:** The group has continued their policy work, this time looking at Section E: Support Services. Ms. Kneedler presented the following policies for approval: ECE, ECAC, ECAF, EDDBA, EDC, EEA, EEAA, EEAEA-1, EEAEAC, EEAG, EEAJ, EFD, and EIBA

Mr. Whitten asked that a policy approval agenda item be added for any future approval of policies.

- *Motion to approve the policies from policy section E: Support Services as presented was made by Ms. Cannon and seconded by Dr. O'Flynn. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

10. New Business*

Mr. Whitten shared that the Town has signed a Zero Carbon Resolution. He would like the Facilities Director to present at a future meeting on how the impact this resolution will have on school facilities.

11. Vouchers and Bills

All were reviewed and signed.

12. Consent Agenda

- *Motion to approve the consent agenda as presented was made by Mr. Poirier and seconded by Dr. O'Flynn. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

13. Adjournment

- *Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Dr. O'Flynn and seconded by Ms. Cannon. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***