

Ipswich School Committee

MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
Thursday, January 6, 2022
7:00 PM

MINUTES

Call to Order

Mr. Whitten called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

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

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

Reading of the District Mission Statement

Ms. Jepsen read the mission statement.

Announcements

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, January 20th at 7:00 PM.
- The Communications Subcommittee will meet Tuesday, January 11th at 5:00 PM.
- Schools and district offices will be closed on Monday, January 17th.
- Kindergarten Roundup has started. If you have a child who will be entering kindergarten in September, please complete the Kindergarten Roundup Form. A link to the form can be found on homepage of the district website: www.ipsk12.net
- The Budget Subcommittee will meet on January 20th at 6:00 PM.

Special Acknowledgements

Dr. Blake thanked the principals for their help in distributing the testing kits and masks to staff on the Monday after winter break. He also thanked nurse Jen Reed for her continued work throughout the pandemic.

Citizens’ Comments

Jason Keough, North Main Street: Speaking on behalf of his daughter, Mr. Keough was seeking clarification from the district on the MIAA waiver process for middle school students to play on a high school team. Mr. Keough believes his daughter, who currently plays hockey as a middle school student for Marblehead, would benefit from the waiver process in Ipswich. He asked the School Committee to provide clarification on the following:

1. Why has Ipswich not utilized the waiver process before in an attempt to stabilize team rosters?
2. Is there a written policy against the use of waivers for middle school students?
3. Who is taking part in the discussion around waiver usage in the district.

Dr. O’Flynn shared that Ipswich has used waivers many times in the past, but exclusively for teams whose existence would be threatened for lack of players. He said it is often difficult to determine need when the team, like hockey, is not based in our school system. If Beverly did not notify Ipswich that they were in need of additional players, the Athletic Director would not have known to apply for the waiver. It appears that Beverly and Danvers were aware they needed players, but Ipswich was not and therefore did not request a waiver. Dr. O’Flynn said it was the responsibility of the host town to reach out to the Athletic Director. He also shared that it may be difficult to address need when you cannot determine the number of players a team will have so far in advance.

Rob Donahue, High Street: Shared his frustration over the definition of “need” Ipswich uses when addressing the waiver process. Mr. Donahue shared that other teams implement waivers to build their teams. He felt that if Ipswich were to have waivers, perhaps they could have more teams and build the program.

It was agreed that this topic should go before the Athletic Subcommittee as soon as possible.

High School Student Representative Report

Ms. Jepsen reported on the activities taking place throughout the high school. Her report included the following:

- A review of winter sports scores
- The newly formed Ski Club trip was canceled due to COVID
- The Environmental and Sustainability Clubs were hosting a coat drive
- There is some increasing concern over the COVID numbers at the high school

Presentations

A. School COVID-19 Update

Dr. Blake shared that all schools were closed on the Monday directly following winter break. The time off was used to organize and distribute KN95 masks and COVID tests for all staff. Staff were asked to take a COVID test on Monday and report the results on Monday night. On Tuesday, school opened with minimal staff reporting positive cases from their Monday test. Dr. Blake then reviewed the COVID numbers over the span of the last two weeks.

Mr. Poirier shared that some parents had expressed concern over returning to school after the break. He suggested additional district-wide communication about the precautions in place at the schools.

There was a discussion about the high school midterm schedule taking place in-person.

B. Electric Vehicle Charging Station Project Presentation

In an effort to encourage students, faculty and members of the community to purchase electric vehicles, members of the Sustainability class at Ipswich High School were presenting a request to install a dual-port electric vehicle charging station at the high school. This port would be installed on the left side of the high school, near the newly constructed condominiums where SpaTech once was. This charging port would have the ability to charge two cars at a time.

The charging ports would utilize the ChargePoint app, which allows patrons to reserve times to use the charging port and then pay for the service online. The app also has a dashboard feature that allows students to analyze the charging data. The price for the charging station is approximately \$13,500, along with an additional \$5,000 for the 5 year Cloud Network plan needed for the ChargePoint app. The Sustainability class is going to cover the \$5,000 expense for the cloud network and will then fundraise for the additional money needed to purchase and install the charging station.

It was discussed that students and staff utilizing the charging station during school hours would not be charged for the service. Any community member using the station outside school hours would be charged the current Town rate.

The students explained that the Town is in support of this project and will help with the installation. After speaking with the electric department, the transformer and conduit needed for this charging station will also have the ability to support future expansion and additional stations.

Dr. O'Flynn shared his concern about the expense of the project. Several members suggested leveraging the town electric department in an effort to help fund the project.

- *Motion to support the Sustainability Class' goal for placing one electric vehicle charging station with dual ports at the High School was made by Dr. O'Flynn and seconded by Ms. Kneedler. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

NESDEC Demographic Study Proposal

Each year, the district receives enrollment projections from NESDEC that utilize data from the birth rates, census, etc. The current report does not provide the level of detail the district is going to require in the upcoming years as the Town weighs the need for an override and school building project. In talking with NESDEC, they are able to do a more in-depth demographic study that could provide the detailed information needed by the district for these upcoming projects. As part of the proposal, NESDEC has outlined various stakeholder groups they will talk to which include the Town Planner and local realtors. They will analyze enrollment data, current and future building projects and recent home sales to provide a more accurate report of changing demographics in Ipswich.

Dr. O'Flynn felt that the NESDEC enrollment projections they receive annually have been accurate. He felt that regardless of what the School Committee does and the data they present, there will always be people who push back on a project.

Mr. Poirier thought it was important to see a report utilizing “on the ground” knowledge gathered from planners, realtors and others who could provide their professional input. Mr. Stevens agreed.

Other members also expressed their support for this report.

- *Motion to support the NESDEC Demographic Study proposal, to be funded out of Choice Funds, was made by Mr. Stevens and seconded by Mr. Poirier. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

Bill Logue Proposal

In an effort to continue the conversation around the new school facilities project with the community, Dr. Blake and the School Facilities Working Group had a phone conversation with Bill Logue of the Logue Group, LLC. Presented tonight was a proposal regarding listening sessions and engaging the public about the new school facility project. The proposal includes a number of tasks that will carry forward through the spring, along with the associated costs of these sessions.

After reviewing the proposal, Ms. Kneedler said that she appreciated the Zoom sessions. She felt that hybrid options should be made available for these meetings in an effort to increase participation.

There was some discussion about the importance of having these sessions in person. With the recent spike in COVID cases throughout Ipswich, it was suggested to delay the start of these listening sessions by about a month.

It was decided to vote on a number “not to exceed” for the proposal, knowing that with COVID things are likely to change.

- *Motion to support the Logue Group, LLC proposal with a number not to exceed \$25,450, to be funded by Choice Funds, was made by Ms. Eliot and seconded by Mr. Stevens. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

School Choice 2022-2023

Mr. Whitten outlined the School Choice process with the Committee, sharing that they take two votes- 1. Does the School Committee want to continue to participate in the School Choice program and if yes, 2. How many open seats will they open? Mr. Whitten explained this vote typically takes place in late spring, but the district would like to move the vote earlier in hopes of receiving more applications.

The district currently has 45 Choice students. While the total number of Choice students has decreased over the years, the program continues to be a great revenue source for the district. Currently, the Choice Fund has the largest balance outside of the Stabilization Fund. Mr. Whitten explained that the Choice program brings in roughly \$5,000 per student per year. Funding from this program allows the district the opportunity to enhance programs.

Dr. O’Flynn talked about the number of reasons that students seek out Ipswich as a Choice school including the music programs, athletics and the rigor of academics. He felt that the Choice program has added to the diversity and success of the school community.

Ms. Eliot said that while she supported the program, she wanted to be careful of the number of open seats offered. She did not want to overwhelm classrooms with additional students.

Dr. O’Flynn clarified that if the School Committee were to decide to continue with the Choice program, the principals would bring forward a recommendation for seats based on current and projected enrollment numbers at each grade level.

- *Motion to support the School Choice program for the 2022-2023 school year was made by Mr. Stevens and seconded by Dr. O’Flynn. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

Policy Approval

Ms. Kneedler presented a series of School Committee policies from Section G that were recently reviewed by the Policy Subcommittee.

- *Motion to approve the Section G policies as presented was made by Ms. Eliot and seconded by Dr. O'Flynn. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

Superintendent's Administrative Report

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

- Weekly meeting with each building principal
- Several subcommittee meeting
- Completion of a course supporting culturally proficient classrooms and schools
- Attendance and the winter concerts
- Continued monitoring of the kindergarten numbers throughout the district
- Attended the first meeting on the Executive Board for the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents
- Continued work with the ELL program
- A DEI Team meeting DEI Team to discuss plans throughout the year
- Met with administrators and the Budget Subcommittee to begin planning the FY23 budget
- Continued monitoring of COVID numbers and protocols

Dr. Blake also shared that the full time ELL position at Winthrop School had been filled.

Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

1. **Athletics:** The group met prior to the winter holiday break. In that meeting, they discussed the enrollment and results of the fall sports teams. The next meeting will focus on waivers to better understand that process.
2. **Budget:** The group met with the Administrative team to review the initial budget and their requests. There is a concern over increased enrollment and the need to add additional staffing. The proposed budget will be built off of a challenging year and the Administrative Team will need to do their best to justify each of their budgets.
3. **Communications:** There is a meeting scheduled for next week.
4. **Negotiations:** Negotiations for several of the collective bargaining units are ongoing.
5. **Operations:** There is a need to meet to discuss the mid-year review of the Superintendent.
6. **Policy:** This subcommittee discussed their work earlier in the meeting.
7. **Race/Equity:** This group has met twice and updated a few policies that are now moving forward to the Policy Subcommittee for review.
8. **STEAM Team:** There is ongoing work with this group ahead of the STEAM Showcase this spring.

New Business*

Mr. Whitten shared that the School Committee would be participating in a Roles and Responsibilities of the School Committee workshop at their next meeting.

Mr. Whitten announced that he will be stepping down as Chair of the School Committee at the next meeting citing a number of personal commitments that would make it difficult for him to be as present for the School Committee as needed from a Chair. He asked for support in nominating Mr. Stevens as the next Chair and then asked the Committee to support whomever Mr. Stevens nominated as Vice Chair.

Vouchers and Bills

All were reviewed and signed.

Consent Agenda

- *Motion to approve the consent agenda for Thursday, January 6, 2022 as presented was made by Mr. Whitten and seconded by Mr. Poirier. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

Adjournment

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

Meeting adjourned at 8:46 PM