

Ipswich School Committee
MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
Thursday, January 20, 2022
7:15 PM

AGENDA

Call to Order

Mr. Whitten called the meeting to order at 7:17 PM.

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

Also Present: Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools and Cheryl Herrick-Stella, Director of Finance and Operations

Reading of the District Mission Statement

Mr. Whitten read the mission statement.

Announcements

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 2, 2022. The FY23 Budget will be presented for the first time at this meeting. There is an additional meeting scheduled for Thursday, February 3rd at 7:00pm should it be necessary.

Special Acknowledgements

Dr. Blake acknowledged the student athletes and families that were in attendance.

Citizens’ Comments

There were none at this time.

High School Student Representative Report

Ms. Jepsen submitted her report ahead of the meeting for Mr. Whitten to read in her absence. Her report included the following:

- Midterms were going well
- Winter sports were off to a good start
- Most clubs were taking a pause to accommodate midterm schedules
- The Green Team is working on promoting the No Idling Law
- Four seniors, including Ms. Jepsen, received the Presidential Award for volunteer hours

Presentations

A. Fall Sports Awards

Tom Gallagher, Athletic Director, recognized the students that participated in fall sports this year and their accomplishments throughout the season.

B. School Committee Reorganization: Vote on Chair and Vice Chair

As the senior member of the School Committee, Dr. O’Flynn explained that he has the duty of executing a Committee reorganization. Mr. Whitten has stepped down from his position as Chair therefore, a new Chair needs to be appointed.

Mr. Whitten nominated Mr. Stevens as Chair.

Mr. Stevens felt that his time working as Vice Chair had prepared him for the position as Chair. He promised to represent the School Committee as best he could.

- *Motion to nominate Mr. Stevens as Chair of the School Committee was made by Mr. Whitten and seconded by Ms. Kneedler. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

As the newly appointed Chair, Mr. Stevens then began the discussion of the Vice Chair and asked if there were any interested parties. Both Ms. Eliot and Ms. Cannon expressed interest in the position. Ms. Cannon felt there had already been a discussion and offer made to Ms. Eliot for the Vice Chair position and asked to discuss the process.

Mr. Stevens said that in an effort to be transparent, he wanted to ensure that no deals were made behind the scenes and ahead of the meeting.

Dr. O’Flynn asked for clarification on the role of the Vice Chair. He suggested that there be two Vice Chairs to help take on the burden and responsibility the Chair faces. He felt that giving another person additional learning and leadership opportunities would only be beneficial to the Committee. Mr. Stevens agreed that he would be willing to work with two Vice Chairs.

There was some discussion about the role of the Vice Chair at agenda planning meetings.

Mr. Poirier said that while he was not interested in serving as the Vice Chair now, he did appreciate the discussion. He felt the process lacked transparency and that the current conversation would help bolster the trust of the entire committee.

Dr. O’Flynn said that he had never seen a contested election for Chair of the School Committee. He agreed that the process lacked transparency because of the individual conversations that take place amongst members. Oftentimes, he explained, someone who has experience and interest in the position will speak privately to the current Chair and other members. Any inkling of interest in leadership positions should be expressed. Dr. O’Flynn agreed that the Committee often deferred to seniority.

Ms. Cannon agreed with Mr. Poirier. She felt that as a new member, you often do not realize how this process comes off. With little discussion ahead of time, the election feels more like an anointment. Ms. Cannon felt there were conversations ahead of time within certain circles and instead, all Committee members should have been made aware that the Chair was stepping down together.

Ms. Kneedler agreed with Dr. O’Flynn that through tradition, there has been a push for seniority. She had been approached multiple times for leadership roles because of her seniority.

Ms. Cannon agreed that there appeared to be a history of seniority, however she was skipped. She expressed the importance and value of a process to avoid what feels like backroom politizing.

Dr. O’Flynn said the lack of transparency is a result of not talking much outside of these committee meetings. He felt that if people were interested in positions, they needed to have those conversations individually first and in advance.

Ms. Cannon asked for the process to be reassessed so all members know what the expectation is and that everyone should be asked what their interest level is ahead of the meeting.

Mr. Whitten nominated Ms. Eliot for Vice Chair.

Ms. Kneedler then nominated Ms. Cannon as Vice Chair. Ms. Cannon withdrew her nomination.

➤ *Motion to nominate Ms. Eliot as Vice Chair was made by Mr. Whitten and seconded by Dr. O’Flynn. **The motion passed with 5 in favor and 2 abstentions.***

C. Field Trip Request: Racing Challenge

Mr. Gallant outlined the Racing Challenge program. He shared that throughout the year, students would work on projects to gain points for their team. The teams who receive the most points get invited to a final competition the last week of May. Historically, the IHS Racing Team has been invited to attend, so Mr. Gallant is proceeding with the field trip request in hopes they make the finals again.

Mr. Gallant reviewed the details on the overnight trip including dates, cost, hotel and transportation information and meal plans. Approximately 30 students participate on the trip along with three chaperones. The cost per student is approximately \$300-\$400. Scholarships are offered so any student interested in attending can do so. He explained that fundraising will help cover the cost of the chaperones.

- *Motion to support the Racing Challenge overnight field trip request was made by Dr. O'Flynn and seconded by Ms. Cannon. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

D. Superintendent Mid-Year Review

Dr. Blake reviewed each of his approved goals for the 2021-2022 school year and discussed the progress and status of each goal.

Standard: 1:A Curriculum

Goal: Unpack and develop the ELL Curriculum and program district wide in light of new staffing and increasing populations

Dr. Blake shared that he spent the early part of the year understanding the EL department needs, looking at schedules and assessing the needs of the department. As a result, new curriculum materials were ordered using ESSER funds for the new staff members to ensure continuity across the two elementary schools and the middle/high school and to support the needs of students. Dr. Blake, along with the EL team, met monthly as the Compass Committee to continue to unpack the EL standards using the WIDA standards. They also developed professional agreements with the general education teaching staff. Dr. Blake explained that EL programs need to be integrated with all classes in order for the EL students to be successful. In addition to the Compass meetings, Dr. Blake has also met monthly with the EL staff to review cases, discuss schedules, organize the Access testing for students, and continue to re-design the program given the new staff and their experiences. During these meetings the team spent time discussing new students moving into the district and how to best support them.

Dr. Blake then discussed a community event held at Zumi's led by a middle/high school EL teacher that showcased EL student work. COVID had prevented other activities from taking place at this point. Outside of the EL meetings, Dr. Blake has connected with community members to discuss the needs of our newly arriving EL population and how the school district can assist them in integrating into the community. Dr. Blake and the EL team have also worked diligently to increase the district's translation services available to families in all district communication. This had been lacking in the past. Dr. Blake felt that he will complete all his action items related to this goal by the end of the year.

Ms. Cannon asked for specifics related to Dr. Blake's work with community partnerships.

Dr. Blake shared that he has been in connection with a family in town who is working directly with incoming families from a particular culture. He is also reviewing the enrollment process to ensure that we are meeting the needs of families and working to get students into the schools with as much ease as possible.

Dr. Blake also shared that the new EL teacher was hired.

Standard: 2:A Environment

Goal: Ensure successful integration of new elementary administrators into the Ipswich Public Schools

Goal: Facilitate the Comprehensive District Accountability Review by the Office of District Reviews and Monitoring/DESE

Dr. Blake shared that both new principals are formally being mentored by Kathleen McMahon who meets with both of them on a regular basis. In addition to Kathy's formal mentoring and induction meetings, Dr. Blake also meets on a weekly basis with each of the new principals. During these meetings they discuss all aspects of the school environment from School Council and FRIES to classroom observations, staffing issues and navigating the school year. The two principals attended a Rotary meeting in the fall with Dr. Blake where they each talked about their backgrounds, experiences, and initial impressions of the school system and their buildings. The presentation was very well received and the Rotarians offered their support as they settled into their positions.

Dr. Blake has been able to attend several School Council meetings, as well as faculty meetings. Dr. Blake explained that the purpose in attending is to participate in the discussions as appropriate and follow up with the administrators.

Dr. Blake then shared that one of the Administrative Team meetings each month is spent utilizing the state OPTIC system to view and discuss teacher observations. He explained that the OPTIC system helps to ensure calibration among the administrators conducting observations. Early in the school year, the Educator Evaluation Committee reviewed the evaluation process with the Administrative Team. The Administrative Team have had several follow up conversations during their meetings.

Dr. Blake then discussed his work around the Comprehensive District Accountability Review and shared that the work on this goal is just getting started. Prior to the holiday break, Dr. Blake attended a webinar that outlined the process and potential timeline for the on-site review. DESE has contracted with a company called AIR (American Institute for Research) to conduct a “district level review that assesses district systems, enabling district leaders to reflect on progress and strengthen performance.” The review will be looking at the systems, policies and practices that drive the day to day operations of the district. AIR reached out to Dr. Blake last week to introduce themselves and to begin the conversation about the site visit. Dr. Blake picked the week of April 11, 2022 for the onsite to take place. Over the next two months the Administrative Team will be gathering, reviewing, and uploading the required documents ahead of the visit as required. There will be a call in the coming weeks to identify the interview groups they would like to see, set the schedule, and answer any questions that we may have. Dr. Blake is confident this goal will be accomplished by the end of the year.

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.
Goal: Facilitate the submission of a new SOI to the MSBA in Spring 2022

Dr. Blake shared that early in the school year he met weekly with the two new principals and also facilitated meeting times with the Director of Teaching and Learning, Tracy Wagner, to build the collaboration between the elementary schools. He shared that this year there has been a significant increase in collaboration and communication between the two schools. Examples include the joint efforts to produce one report card for the elementary schools, the new math coaching model between the buildings and the beginnings of learning cycles across the two schools. In the early meetings, Dr. Blake and the principals discussed the history and background of the elementary education plan for the district and how it fits in with the secondary plan. Additionally, Dr. Blake explained, the Administrative Team spent time reviewing and revising the Strategy for District Improvement documents and set expectations for the year. The Vision 2030 subcommittee has not met.

The goal to submit an SOI by Spring 2022 will only be partially completed, Dr. Blake shared. He said the early timeline that was established with the School Committee was not feasible given the sequence of events surrounding Bialek Park. The revised timeline for an SOI submission in 2023 was far more achievable. Dr. Blake worked with the School Facilities Working Group and presented to the School committee two contracts that were approved at our last meeting: one for an in-depth demographic study of the community so that we have a more accurate picture of our student and future student populations, and the other to contract with the Logue Group to facilitate listening sessions with the community around a potential building project. It was made clear through the School Committee’s initial work with the Logue Group that the listening sessions should be facilitated by someone who is detached from the community. Dr. Blake felt that once the listening sessions take place in the coming months and based on the outcome of those conversations, the rest of the items in this goal will be completed. He shared that the SOI submission will not be completed this year.

Ms. Cannon asked Dr. Blake if he felt it was prudent to review the Vision 2030 document, as well as the Elementary Education Plan in light of COVID. She felt the supports and goals may need adjusting prior to sharing the Vision 2030 plan with the community. Dr. Blake agreed that the Vision 2030 group should meet to review.

Mr. Stevens then asked what the next steps are with the Logue Group. Dr. Blake explained that a contract has been signed and Bill Logue is now working on a calendar to review in order to move forward.

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 October, the newly created DEI Team held their first meeting. Dr. Blake shared that the group is currently made up of representatives from each building as well as five high school students, all with diverse backgrounds. The group spent considerable time exploring ideas and developing a vision statement. Dr. Blake shared the group's vision statement, "As the IPS Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, we believe that a community is stronger together. Our vision is to create a district of learners dedicated to amplifying marginalized voices. We will prepare students to become compassionate and active global citizens. We will celebrate the diversity within and beyond our community while confronting issues of equity and inclusion in our practices and learning environments."

Dr. Blake shared that the students on the committee have an active voice and have helped guide the work of the committee. Recent meetings have been focused on tangible projects that the group can accomplish during the year. Each meeting has an agenda and notes are taken. The first project that the group is tackling is a website form where anyone in the school community can report any issues or concerns anonymously to the administration for follow up. The group is striving to keep the form general enough to not limit what can be reported, but not so broad as to dissuade people from reporting concerns. Dr. Blake shared that the group is also actively looking at resources from the anti-defamation league, specifically the "No Place for Hate" initiative and their peer mentoring program.

Other work completed toward this goal included finishing a course for administrators entitled *Supporting Culturally Responsive Classrooms and Schools*.

Ms. Cannon asked where complaints or concerns go should they be about the Superintendent. Dr. Blake said they would be directed to the School Committee Chair.

After completing his review, Dr. Blake asked the School Committee if there were things they would like to see from him.

Dr. O'Flynn asked Dr. Blake if some of the mentoring of the new principals lead to his support of a new assistant principal at the elementary schools, as well as the addition of new teachers in the budget? Dr. Blake answered that the addition of the Assistant Principal and teachers was part of the budgeting process. Positions like the Assistant Principal have been discussed for years and have often been included in the early stages of the budget. Those types of positions have never made it through.

Ms. Cannon asked that given this year, were there any goals or actionable items that Dr. Blake felt were an overreach. Dr. Blake said that there was a lot of work that needed to be done and that despite a challenging year, the district is making great strides towards a return to normalcy.

Ms. Cannon then asked if Dr. Blake was soliciting feedback from staff and leadership within the schools about the new principals and how their transition into the district has been going. Dr. Blake shared that he has participated in several meetings through this school year both addressing concerns and hearing praise. Both the good and bad are brought to the attention of the new administrators.

E. School Choice: Vote to determine number of open seats

Mr. Stevens began the discussion by highlighting the dramatic drop of recommendations for open seats at both elementary schools. He asked if there was going to be any discussion amongst leadership about moving the "gray zone" to compensate for the increasing enrollment at Winthrop.

Dr. Blake felt that the “gray zone” warranted a more in depth conversation, as it has been extremely difficult to navigate.

Mr. Whitten looked at the open Choice seats from last school year compared to the number filled. He said that his experience with School Choice is that slots are not filled from year to year.

Dr. O’Flynn said the goal of the administrator is to look at class sizes to ensure they can accommodate the students they currently have any additional students they recommend. If there is an opportunity to cut a section, the district would do that over adding additional students. The goal is for the School Choice program to be a money maker and not cost the district.

Dr. Blake talked about years past when the School Choice program in Ipswich was increasingly popular. During that time, surrounding districts had older schools, holes in their programming. As surrounding towns began to build new schools and improve curriculum, the interest of families in School Choice in Ipswich lessened.

Mr. Whitten talked about the Choice Fund and its healthy account balance, stating that outside of the Stabilization Fund, the Choice Fund has the largest account balance.

After members reviewed the October 1st enrollment data and evaluated class sizes across the elementary schools, they took votes on the Choice seats at the elementary school level.

- *Motion to support six (6) Grade 4 School Choice students at Winthrop was made by Mr. Whitten and seconded by Ms. Kneedler. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***
- *Motion to support eight (8) Grade 2 School Choice students at the Paul F. Doyon Memorial School was made by Mr. Whitten and seconded by Ms. Kneedler. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***
- *Motion to support ten (10) Grade 3 School Choice students at the Paul F. Doyon Memorial School was made by Mr. Whitten and seconded by Ms. Kneedler. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

Dr. O’Flynn then began the discussion regarding middle school Choice seats. Total class sizes are hovering around 120 students per grade. He reminded the committee that the middle school will lose students to private and vocational schools. Dr. OFlynn then clarified that the humanities and civics model at the middle school is based on smaller enrollment at each grade level.

- *Motion to support the Middle School recommendation of eight (8) School Choice students per grade was made by Dr. O’Flynn and seconded by Ms. Cannon. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

The high school Choice recommendation included 25 seats for no particular grade. It was explained that students are able to take courses outside of their grade levels and teachers are assigned to classes based on interest. By voting on Choice seats that are not grade specific, the high school can maintain a more flexible model.

- *Motion to support 25 flexible School Choice positions at the High School was made by Dr. O’Flynn and seconded by Ms. Cannon. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

F. Finance Update

Ms. Herrick-Stella reported that FY22 continued to track on budget. She shared that the percentage of funds utilized is showing lower because the collective bargaining contracts have not been settled. If those contracts and percentage increases were factored in, the budget would be right on track with last year.

Ms. Herrick-Stella then reviewed the account balances in both the revolving accounts and Stabilization Fund.

Mr. Poirier asked how the Extended Day Program revenue was tracking. Ms. Herrick-Stella responded that the program was tracking close to where it had been prior to its shutdown last year. Dr. Blacked added that the program was able to take more students than in years past with additional staff in place. While new programming has been introduced, COVID is still impacting some programs.

Ms. Herrick-Stella then addressed the food services programs sharing that they are almost fully funded through outside funding at this point. There is some discussion about whether the free lunch program will continue for all students, but nothing has been decided at this time. The biggest concerns in the food services department are supply chain issues.

Dr. O’Flynn asked about revenue generated from the rental of the turf field. Dr. Blake shared that a flag football program rented the field this past fall. He is hopeful this will result in a long term relationship.

Superintendent’s Administrative Report

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

- A review of the current COVID numbers and positivity rate
- A review of the new testing program released by DESE
- Reviewed the new testing program for schools
- A Budget Subcommittee meeting with the Administrative Team
- Ongoing negotiations with several collective bargaining units
- A meeting to review the science classroom spaces at the middle/high school
- An Ipswich Aware meeting
- An Educator Evaluation Committee meeting
- A meeting with Mr. Dolan to review the schedule of music teachers in the district
- Address changes to the Human Resources department and the transition back to Central Office
- Administrative Team meeting
- A DEI Team meeting
- A CREST Collaborative Board of Directors meeting
- A Middle School faculty meeting

Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- **Budget:** The group held a meeting to review the FY23 budget ahead of the presentation to the School Committee. Dr. O’Flynn reviewed some of what the administrators are bringing forward in their budgets including an Assistant Principal at the elementary level, additional ELL personnel, and an extra section of preschool through grade 1 at Winthrop. Highlights of the budget also included moving all out of district placement to the Central budget and out of individual school budgets and using ESSER funding to cover positions. Ms. Cannon added that the administrators and School Committee need to be clear about what is being funded and why. Mr. Whitten added that at some point, the district needs to address what will not be funded should an override not pass.
- **Communications:** The next installment of the newsletter will be sent out tomorrow afternoon. The subcommittee is planning to attend School Council and FRIES meetings in the near future.
- **Steam Team:** The group continues to plan for the STEAM Showcase.
- **School Council:** The conversation centered around COVID mitigation especially in the cafeterias.

New Business*

Ms. Eliot shared information regarding the High School Council Meetings and encouraged anyone interested in participating to reach out to principal Jonathan Mitchell for the login information.

Vouchers and Bills

All were reviewed and signed.

Consent Agenda

- *Motion to approve the Consent Agenda for January 20, 2022 as presented was made by Mr. Stevens and seconded by Dr.O’Flynn. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

Executive Session:

- *Motion to meet in executive session pursuant to M.G.L. chapter 30A, sec. 21(a) for the following purposes: To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares was made by Mr. Stevens and seconded by Dr. O’Flynn.*

Roll Call

The motion passed unanimously in favor

Mr. Stevens announced that the School Committee would now meet in executive session pursuant to M.G.L. chapter 30A, sec. 21(a) for the following purposes: To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares. They would be reconvening in Open Session for the sole purpose of adjourning the meeting.

Adjournment

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

The meeting adjourned at 9:53 PM