

Ipswich School Committee

MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
Thursday, February 3, 2022
6:00 PM

MINUTES

Call to Order

Mr. Stevens called the meeting to order at 6:06 PM.

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

Absent: 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

Executive Session:

- *Motion to meet in executive session pursuant to M.G.L. chapter 30A, sec. 21(a) for the following purposes: (1) To discuss the reputation, character, or complaints brought against a public officer, employee, staff member or individual and (3) to discuss strategy with respect to and in preparation for collective bargaining with the AFSCME Bargaining Units because an open discussion may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Committee was made by Mr. Stevens and seconded by Mr. Whitten.*

Roll Call

The motion passed unanimously in favor

The School Committee then entered into executive session pursuant to M.G.L. chapter 30A, sec. 21(a) for the following purposes: (1) To discuss the reputation, character, or complaints brought against a public officer, employee, staff member or individual and (3) to discuss strategy with respect to and in preparation for collective bargaining with the AFSCME Bargaining Units because an open discussion may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Committee. The Committee would return to Open Session.

Return to Open Session

The School Committee returned to their open session meeting at 7:02 PM.

Reading of the District Mission Statement

Ms. Jepsen read the mission statement.

Announcements

- The School Committee will meet on Thursday, February 10th at 7:00pm in the MS/HS Ensemble Room. Included in this meeting will be the FY23 Budget Hearing.
- The Athletic Subcommittee will meet on Monday, February 7th at 5:30pm in the MS/HS Guidance Conference Room.

Special Acknowledgements

Dr. Blake thanked Ms. Herrick-Stella for her work on the budget. He also acknowledged the work the EL team continues to accomplish this year as the EL population continues to increase in the schools.

Citizens' Comments

There were not at this time.

High School Student Representative Report

Ms. Jepsen reported on the happenings within the high school. Her report included:

- Winter sports continue to go well
- Intramural volleyball just started
- The National Honors Society is selling fudge as a fundraiser
- The Green Team is planning a garden dinner for May

- Five students received scholastic book awards
- The AP Literature class will be hosting a poetry event outside Gathr

Presentations

A. Special Education Audit Presentation (Remote Presentation)

Dr. Hegedus, the Pupil Personnel Services Director, presented on the findings of the recent program review of the Ipswich Special Education programs for students with ASD and Dyslexia.

What was the review

- Dr. Hegedus shared that the district contracted with Academic Discovers, LLC the service delivery continuum for students with ASD and Dyslexia
- This group was chosen because the principal evaluator, Dr. Nadine Ekstrom, brings expertise at multiple special education levels including training for DESE and tenure as Executive Director of EDCO Consortium.
- Dr. Hegedus stressed that this was not a required review.

Why was it undertaken

- There was a desire for unbiased feedback regarding Best Practices in meeting the needs of our students.
- The review provided input regarding whether the district is achieving what we intend in programmatic offerings.
- The district would like to avoid any confirmatory bias that the program is effective simply “because we say so”.
- The review helps to continue parent trust in our professionalism.

Rationale for Particular Focus

- ASD
 - This is the most vulnerable population and the related services are highly individualized.
- Dyslexia
 - This is in response to the newly issued (2021) DESE guidance on meeting the needs of Dyslexic students.

Components of the Review

- Observations
- Record review
- Interviews included parents, students, related service providers, SEPAC and School Committee representatives, a sampling of general education and special education teachers, and the administrative leadership team
- Literature review regarding the most effective interventions for students in the disability categories

Essential Questions

- Examining how IPS provides a learning environment to address student needs in the two populations
- Asking if services are being provided in least restrictive settings
- Investigating whether supports are effective in enhancing performance of the specific populations
- Ensuring that interventions sufficiently address presenting student needs and develop student skill sets, yet also challenge students and develop independence in order to provide for later success in the community

Recommendations- Dyslexia

- Praised the quantity of highly trained staff and their level of training throughout the district
- Noted the district’s programming alignment with both DESE guidance and literature best practices
- Recommended developing graphs/charts for understanding student reading capabilities and how needs are addressed in tiered supports
- Encouraged partnering with medical professionals for mutual understandings when medical and educational terms differ
- Urged annual training for all staff in supporting Dyslexic students
- Advocated general education protocols for archiving general education student interventions

Recommendations- ASD

- Stated “IPS could be recognized as a model district in supporting students with autism in a public school setting”
- Praised staff training, inclusivity and individualization, and high expectations for students
- Noted that, although detailed transition plans are provided to families, parents could benefit from additional training in understanding the plans
- Suggested making information about the breadth of programming available online

- Recommended a flow chart delineating how transitioning is planned for beyond age 22

Next Steps and Deliverables- Dyslexia

- Systemwide professional development on Dyslexia was offered in two separate sessions in October 2021, as well as follow-up on Professional Development Day with Dr. Melissa Orkin of Crafting Minds, who participated in the creation of the DESE guidelines, and who has served as Director of the Tufts University Center for Reading and Language Research
- Development is currently underway regarding charts and graphs which can help families in understanding student reading progress
- Preliminary research completed on Aspen modules which may have the capacity of archiving general education intervention progress

Next Steps and Deliverables- ASD

- Outreach to physician groups is planned for April in coordination with Northshore Educational Consortium Director's Group
- The district is planning a soft launch next week for a Google site linked with the HS homepage that would include information regarding staff, post-22 transition, and additional community connection resources

Mr. Poirier asked if there was annual training for ASD that all staff were receiving. Dr. Hegedus responded that the district offers various trainings on specific areas of need throughout the year including targeted training on addressing needs of students.

Mr. Poirier suggested that there is an increase of referrals for children with ASD and Dyslexia at the preschool level. He then asked how the district is preparing for the influx of need. Dr. Hegedus outlined the screening measures and methodologies the district uses for Tier 1 supports. She also noted that the Heggerty phonics program is infused into the curriculum at the preschool level.

B. COVID Update

Dr. Blake began by discussing the current positivity rate in Ipswich, as well as the number of positive cases within the district. He then reviewed the testing program that began the week prior and shared that with this new program, contact tracing would be eliminated. This change would drastically reduce the caseload for nurses. The district would continue with symptomatic testing.

There was a discussion about the current mask mandate and plans to revisit the discussion once the DESE Commissioner releases his updated guidance towards the end of February.

C. FY23 Budget Presentation Discussion

Mr. Stevens started the discussion by acknowledging the significant needs at both elementary schools. While he appreciates the need for an Assistant Principal at the elementary level, he also recognizes the need in the classrooms. Mr. Stevens said he struggles with allocating resources towards another layer of administration when the students continue to struggle post-COVID. He said he was not comfortable taking those resources out of the classroom. Mr. Stevens felt the ESSER funding should go directly into the classroom.

Ms. Cannon agreed with Mr. Stevens' concerns. She said there was no secret as to why the Special Education outplacements were decreasing when there is such a strong push for co-teaching at the elementary and middle school level. She said she does not support adding an Assistant Principal at the elementary level when the needs of students are acute and real. Ms. Cannon felt what is happening in the classroom requires the attention of the School Committee. She does not want to see cuts made to educators and resources for students to instead fund an additional layer of administration.

Ms. Kneedler also agreed with what had been discussed regarding the Assistant Principal position. She felt it would be difficult to justify going into an override, especially because most districts do not have this type of position at the elementary level.

Dr. O'Flynn reminded the committee that the elementary schools have been asking for the Assistant Principal positions for years. The principals struggle with the educator evaluations and are overwhelmed by the current circumstances. The district has never experienced this level of crisis and the principals are struggling to meet the demand of the job. He felt that adding an Assistant Principal is a wise investment to help with educational management that should have been added years ago. Dr. O'Flynn then expressed his concern over using ESSER to fund positions that could end up in the appropriated budget. These grant funded positions will be a concern for the Finance Committee.

Mr. Whitten talked about the additional FTEs at Winthrop. He also felt that adding an Assistant Principal at the elementary schools was not favorable in an override year.

Dr. O’Flynn talked about how this was an unusual override year. If the override does not pass, the Assistant Principal position would still be funded through ESSER.

Dr. Blake felt that Ms. Sullivan presented her argument for additional staffing well during her presentation. There are more teachers at the elementary level than the middle school. He explained that the Assistant Principal position would take on educator evaluations at both elementary schools for staff that have PTS. This would allow the current principals to work more closely with new teachers. He felt this would also help with the continuity and collaboration between the two buildings.

Mr. Stevens asked why the Director of Teaching and Learning could not take on educator evaluation. Dr. Blake responded that her position is not a supervision and evaluation role. The Director of Teaching and Learning works with educators around curriculum.

Ms. Cannon said that she wanted to see how the principals were doing in their current roles as they were hired to do. She felt that putting a layer between the administrators and educators would not help relationships in each building. She reiterated that students should remain the top priority.

Mr. Stevens echoed Ms. Cannon’s thoughts and said that additional funding should be allocated to more resources for students as a response to loss of learning through the pandemic.

Dr. O’Flynn supported the Assistant Principal position, but felt it should be in the appropriated budget and not funded through ESSER grants. He recognizes there is a need for additional administrative support.

Mr. Whitten then asked if Dr. Blake had discussed the increased enrollment at Winthrop and ways to address the spacing needs. Dr. Blake responded that if the projected enrollment at Winthrop materialized, the district would have difficulty finding room for everyone at that school. There is always the possibility that additional kindergarten students would go to Doyon. If the numbers do not materialize, the district would not hire for the additional sections they are requesting.

A discussion took place about enrollment at both schools and the different scenarios that would lead to some incoming students moving to Doyon should there be a need for additional space.

Mr. Poirier asked for clarification on why Special Education transportation is increasing while out-of-district placements have decreased. Ms. Herrick-Stella shared that transportation is extremely expensive depending on student need and the location of placements. All transportation is put to bid.

Dr. Blake asked the committee to review the budget over the weekend and bring any questions to Cheryl ahead of the Public Hearing on February 10th.

Ms. Cannon asked if the Assistant Principal position would be left in the budget. Dr. O’Flynn answered that it would be left in the budget for now.

Superintendent’s Administrative Report

Dr. Blake outlined the new COVID testing program that recently began in the district. As part of this program, students and staff may opt in to receive an at home COVID testing kit every two weeks. Those who opt-in should take a test weekly and report a positive case.

Dr. Blake has spent significant time working with the Administrative Team to develop the FY23 budget and budget presentation.

Earlier in the day, Dr. Blake met with Facilities Director Chris Rais to discuss work taking place throughout the district. In that meeting they discussed the water usage at Winthrop, ongoing issues with heat at the middle/high school and drain issues. They also discussed concerns over the roofs at each elementary school.

Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- **Audit Committee:** There were no findings. Both the Town and school district are in a good place.

- **Policy Subcommittee:** The group reviewed Section I. They are working to rewrite Policy IB.
- **Race/Equity Working Group:** The group reviewed policy IDEA. It was suggested that the School Committee may want to hold a public hearing on the newly created policy. Ms. Cannon asked that the agenda topic is clear on the agenda and the committee holds an extended public comment during the meeting where the policy is discussed.

Mr. Poirier asked if there had been any follow-up conversations with Bill Logue. Dr. Blake responded that they have not finalized the details.

New Business*

Mr. Whitten discussed the progress of the Override Committee that has formed in Town. Mr. Stevens has volunteered for the Steering Committee in an advisory role. Mr. Whitten stressed the importance of how the School Committee advocates for the override. All override meetings are held remotely and participation is encouraged.

Ratification of AFSCME Custodial Collective Bargaining Unit

- *Motion to accept the AFSCME Custodial Collective Bargaining Unit Contract was made by Ms. Cannon and seconded by Ms. Kneidler. **The motion passed with 6 in favor and 1 abstention.***

Vouchers and Bills

All were reviewed and signed.

Consent Agenda

- *Motion to accept the Consent Agenda from Thursday, February 3, 2022 as presented was made by Mr. Whitten and seconded by Ms. Cannon. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

Adjournment

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

Meeting adjourned at 8:49 PM