

Ipswich School Committee

MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
Thursday, May 19, 2022
6:30 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Mr. Stevens called the meeting to order at 6:31 PM.

Present: Greg Stevens, Kate Eliot, Pavica Kneedler, Jeff Poirier, Emily Cannon, Jen Donahue, Dianna Freehan

Also Present: Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools and Caroline Jepsen, High School Student Representative

Absent: Cheryl Herrick-Stella, Director of Finance and Operations

2. Executive Session:

- *Motion to enter into execution session for the following reason: (2) to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel was made by Ms. Cannon and seconded by Ms. Eliot.*

Roll Call

The motion passed unanimously

3. Return to Open Session

The meeting returned to open session at 7:25 PM

4. Reading of the District Mission Statement

The district's mission statement was read by Ms. Jepsen.

5. Announcements

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on June 2nd at 7:00pm.
- There is a Communications Subcommittee meeting on Tuesday, May 24th at 5:30pm.

6. Special Acknowledgements

Mr. Stevens thanked Ms. Jepsen for her work as the High School Student Representative. This was her final meeting.

Dr. Blake and members of the School Committee thanked the Override Steering Committee and the community for their support of the operational override.

Dr. Blake shared that the district was named a 2021-2022 District of Excellence by the Illustrative Math parent company.

7. Citizens' Comments

Irene Josephson, Washington Street: Asked for details regarding the time and location of the School Committee Retreat. Mr. Stevens shared that the meeting is typically held in August and is posted in accordance with Open Meeting Law requirements.

8. High School Student Representative Report

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

- The high school's performance of Beauty and the Beast was a success
- IMADA has announced their summer scholarship program is open
- There is a high school art show on Monday
- There will be a Poetry Coffeehouse event held at the high school tomorrow
- A review of the spring sports standings
- The Green Team held a successful garden dinner

9. Presentations

A. New Member Welcome

Mr. Stevens welcomed two new members to the School Committee. Both Dianna Freehan and Jen Donahue were elected as members of the School Committee with three year terms ending in 2025.

B. Student Handbook Approval

Mr. Fitzgerald, Middle School Assistant Principal, discussed the proposed changes to the Middle School Student Handbook. Changes included:

“Beginning with the 2022-23 School Year

- Page 3 Attendance Procedure:
 - 3rd paragraph, add after the first sentence: *“Students who are absent more than 10% of the accumulated school days are considered chronically absent by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Administration has the right to exclude chronically absent students from school-based activities and events in order to make up any missing school assignments.”*
 - Same paragraph, add a final sentence: *“The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education does not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences when considering a child’s attendance record.”*
- Page 5 Cell Phones and Electronic Devices:
 - 1st sentence, add that use of cell phones and *non-school issued electronic devices* is prohibited.
 - 3rd sentence, add *wireless earbuds, smart watches...and any device that can be used to connect to the internet...*
- Page 5 Dress Code
 - Delete “Leggings...” from the list.
- Page 8 Bullying/Cyber-bullying
 - Add the following paragraph at the beginning of the section: *“As student cell phone use and social media have become increasingly important aspects of students' lives, Ipswich Middle School encourages parents to implement measures to monitor their children's posts and the content they consume. We remind students and families that once a message, picture or video is sent or posted, the child loses control of who sees it and the consequences can be widespread and long lasting. Incidents that occur outside of school via cell phones and social media between children can negatively impact student learning and the school community. Ipswich Middle School's role is to support students in feeling comfortable and ready to learn and will support parents in their efforts to teach children how to access technology responsibly and safely.”*
- Page 9 Technology in the School
 - 1st paragraph, add the following sentence to the end: *“Damage to a school-issued device, either intentional or by negligence, may result in the need to charge for family for repair or replacement.”*”

There was significant discussion regarding sections of the dress code. Ms. Cannon asked that the Middle School ensure the dress code is regulating the clothes that students wear and not a student's body type. She explained that clothes wear differently on different and changing body types.

Mr. Fitzgerald confirmed that the middle school administration wants to ensure students feel comfortable in school and that the dress code is enforced equitably. He did acknowledge there is always room for improvement and discussion.

Members of the School Committee did ask for ongoing work towards re-evaluating what they felt were antiquated dress code rules.

- *Motion to accept changes to the Middle School Student Handbook, with a request that the dress code be continually worked on, was made by Ms. Kneedler and seconded by Ms. Cannon. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

C. Paine Grant Committee Member Approval: Elementary and Secondary Teacher Representatives

The Paine Grant Committee Chair, Heather Leonard, notified Mr. Stevens and Dr. Blake of vacancies for the Elementary Teacher Representative and the Secondary Teacher Representative on the grant committee. Susan Moore, teacher at the Paul F. Doyon Memorial School and Deb Davidson, teacher at Ipswich Middle School, have expressed interest in filling those positions.

- *Motion to accept Susan Moore and Deb Davidson as the Elementary Teacher Representative and Secondary Teacher Representative to the Paine Grant Committee was made by Mr. Poirier and seconded by Ms. Eliot. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

D. Town Meeting/Election Debrief

Mr. Stevens began by thanking the community and members from both the Select Board and Finance Committee for their support of the override. He shared that the School Committee will continue to put forth budgets within the projected increases of the override, as they have done in the past in an effort to extend the override for as long as possible.

Ms. Poirier felt that criticism of “one issue” community members who left prior to the end of the Town meeting were unfair. Ms. Eliot agreed that while it was unfortunate so many people left, the issue is not limited to this past Town Meeting. There have been several issues over the years that have brought larger crowds. It was agreed by members that the timing of Town Meeting is often difficult for parents.

Ms. Eliot did share that the School Committee must be cognizant that the override was not supported by everyone in town. While it may be a win for the district, she recognizes that increased taxes can be a stressor for many people in the community. It will be important for the School Committee to take the school budget seriously.

Mr. Stevens felt the budget process in place now is good and stressed the importance of transparency in the process. He hoped that they would begin to see more community members in attendance at the public hearings on the budget to really dig in and ask questions.

Ms. Eliot finished by sharing that the impression of the community was that the override campaign was well run, honest and transparent. She wants to ensure that same sentiment carries into other larger issues coming forward from the School Committee.

E. FY24 School Calendar

Dr. Blake presented two versions of the 2023-2024 academic calendar. The first option had students beginning school before Labor Day and the second option had students starting after Labor Day. Both draft calendars were shared with the Ipswich Educators’ Association (IEA) ahead of tonight’s meeting. The IEA collectively voted in favor of starting before Labor Day.

Discussion regarding the start date took place amongst members. Concerns were raised about the later start date for kindergarten and how that may create childcare issues from some families.

- *Motion to support the 2023-2024 academic calendar with a start date before Labor Day was made by Ms. Cannon and seconded by Ms. Kneedler. **The motion passed with 6 in favor and 1 opposed.***

F. Early Education Space/Staff Needs Update

Dr. Blake reviewed the space and staffing needs to accommodate the early childhood programs in the district. An additional preschool classroom was added to the Paul F. Doyon Memorial School for the upcoming school year to accommodate an increase in enrollment. A preschool teacher is needed for that space. Winthrop School is hiring an additional Grade 1 teacher due to the addition of a Grade 1 section. At this time, the district is putting an additional section of kindergarten on hold. They will continue to watch for any increase in the kindergarten enrollment numbers and adjust accordingly should there be a need.

G. End of Year Assignments

Members reviewed the list of end of year events taking place across the district as the school year closes. Members discussed which events should have School Committee representation and assigned members to attend those events.

H. Vote on Administrator Contracts

- *Motion to accept the administrator contracts as presented in executive session was made by Ms. Eliot and seconded by Ms. Kneedler. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

10. Superintendent’s Administrative Report

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

- The Extended Day Program registration process has begun for new and returning families
- The district is busy preparing orders, posting positions and organizing resources for next year
- A review of Feoffees grant applications
- Attendance at the kick-off meeting for the Paine Grant Committee

- A meeting with the Chair of Ipswich Aware regarding the launch of a campaign addressing substance abuse prevention and mental health awareness
- Attendance at a BeSafe training to help map out and reference critical information needed in the event of a school emergency
- A meeting with the ELL team to review and finalize their website for EL resources for teachers
- The handling of several HR/personnel issues

Dr. Blake then reviewed the current COVID positivity rate and number of positive cases within the school community.

11. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- 1. Operations Subcommittee:** The group is scheduled to meet with new members next week.
- 2. Negotiations Subcommittee:** Negotiations are ongoing.
- 3. Communications Subcommittee:** The group will meet next week to discuss the final newsletter and talk about listening session dates.

12. New Business*

There was no new business presented.

13. Vouchers and Bills

All were reviewed and signed.

14. Consent Agenda

- *Motion to approve the consent agenda for May 19, 2022 as presented was made by Ms. Cannon and seconded by Ms. Kneedler. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

15. Adjournment

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

The meeting adjourned at 8:36 PM.