

FINANCE COMMITTEE/SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUDGET PRESENTATION
MARCH 17, 2015
TOWN HALL, RM. A

OPEN SESSION

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Mitch Feldman, Finance Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:39 p.m.

Finance Committee members present: M. Swan, R. White, K. Murphy, M. Schaaf, J. Clements-Skelton, R. Howard, I. Miles

School Com members present: B. Hopping, H. O'Flynn, J. Bauman, S. Player, S. Gresh (9 p.m.)

Administrators present: Superintendent W. Hart, Finance Director J. Cuff, Director of Pupil Personnel Services B. Hegedus, Principals D. Fabrizio, S. Conley, S. McAdams, and Ass't. Principal J. Carovillano.

CITIZENS' COMMENTS

Dana Allen, Birth to 3 Director, asked what happens if the Birth to 3 program goes away.

Scott Jewell, Middle School Technology teacher, related his data re MCAS testing: MCAS testing scores dropped by 10% after 2010 when his class sizes jumped to an average of over 30 students.

Julie Benedetti, IMADA supporter, believes in a strong, high-quality music program. Encouraging a unique set of skills, Fine Arts cultivate a finer motor sense, and technical ability, promoting the students' own vision for becoming powerful learners. Once cut away, this learning and the ability to become innovative thinkers and learners will be diminished.

FY15 SCHOOL BUDGET PRESENTATION: DISTRICT OVERVIEW

Mr. Hopping spoke to the three-night agenda of budget presentations announcing that David Dalton, HS Principal, is out of the country with students.

Dr. Hart, mentioning that his Powerpoint presentation is also available on the website for clearer viewing of his data, expressed the budget upon his arrival as superintendent as being fairly cut-free because of deep expenditures from Choice and Circuit Breaker funds. That money is gone now. When people ask why the district can't live within its means, he explained that there are lots of areas beyond control—health insurance expense, special education increases just under \$6 million now for FY2016 up from \$4 million. As a way of normalizing between school districts, he showed the per pupil expenditures by district, 2005-2014. Georgetown is the only district below Ipswich, and Ms. Cuff, perplexed at this, researched to find that Georgetown gets \$2 million more Chapter 70 funds than Ipswich, and the Town of Georgetown picks up school-employee health insurance and the cost of utilities. \$250,000 granted to Georgetown became part of their annual base whereas Ipswich's \$300,000, withdrawn last year from Free Cash, was a one-time figure.

In the 2014-15 review, with less than 2,000 students, Ipswich had to cut 18.5 staff, Middle School being the hardest challenge and difficult to keep the Middle School model which has been in place for several years. Mr. Howard commented that he totaled the numbers of special education cuts at 10 (of the 18.5), and Dr. Hart responded that there are far fewer adults with more children. \$500,000 worth of budget cuts are necessary just to keep things the way they are now to go on to next year; level service is not possible with the money projected for FY'16. User-fee increase for sports participation will be somewhere from \$200-\$300. Mr. Hopping mentioned a loss in participation as user fees go up; Ms. Miles said there is a greater cost to the community when children are not being served. Mr. Howard commented that this is a **public** school and fees should not be creeping up. The Athletic Director's goal is to allow every child to participate in sports without fees. Mrs. Swan inquired and Ms. Cuff responded that the budget currently carries a salary for the bus driver (Salter bus line) for the athletic use busses for FY'16.

Target budget reductions for the four schools and Central office were reviewed and discussed: music, art and drama, support staff in instruction and clerical, physical education, coaching salaries. The non-override FY'16 budget cuts amount to 12.2 FTE (fulltime teacher equivalents).

Finance Committee members had questions. Mr. Howard asked about class size; Dr. Hart and Mr. Hopping explained that elementary and middle school classes run from the high 20s to the 30s. The growing population of ELL students coming into Ipswich has necessitated the addition of two ELL staff. Mr. Feldman commented that the academic year has already begun sometimes before the figures for staffing are accurately known. He asked about head-count numbers in a 5-year trend. Mr. Schaaf asked about Ipswich class size compared to the State average. Dr. Hart gave the example during the Winthrop building project, that 23 students per class is recommended. When MSBA personnel viewed the Doyon, the conclusion became that, not only are there high numbers in sections, but there are small spaces. The current education process is hands-on, participatory and collaboratively based. Learning needs and challenges for special education students take place with high numbers in small spaces. Mr. White asked if the addition of two full time ELL teachers would lower special education needs costs next year; the answer was no. Buildings/Grounds addition is shared with the Town on a 50/50 basis. There was discussion of the preferred number of students per class—some school districts set a number not to exceed 20 in the lower elementary, 24-25 in the higher. Mrs. Clements-Skelton asked about enrollments in different subject areas such as STEAM. The use of tools in a technology class of Middle School students would warrant smaller numbers. Mr. Murphy quoted MSBA at 24 lab seats in a classroom. Mrs. Roesler spoke of her 6th grader (her third child) who must now go online with her teachers in the evening to get the assistance that her other children had while in the classroom, and this, while teacher numbers are higher (from 80-90 students each) to 110 and up.

MIDDLE SCHOOL BUDGET PRESENTATION

Mr. Fabrizio, Principal, outlined the Middle School goals: lower class size and preservation of the MS model. Thirty-two adults have been lost in a five-year period—the adults who made connections with these Middle School kids. He described Middle School values as educating the whole child on a team approach which necessitates common planning time for staff. He described the new structure (made necessary by personnel cuts) which is creative, emotional and taxing, and presently in flux. He described the Middle School atmosphere as one of building relationships with students who can then transition smoothly at a higher academic success rate and a lower dropout rate. There was concern over the growing numbers of 8th graders wishing to Choice out. Fourteen students transitioned to Whittier, 7 to Essex Tech. Special education summer programming required by the State exists; by keeping them at home, it is cheaper with more continuity.

There was discussion of MCAS levels and below-average science scores. Mr. Fabrizio mentioned that Common Core is moving to a spiraling over a three-year program to continue to review 6th, 7th, and 8th grade science curriculum.

Because no teacher applicants with French teaching knowledge came forward, Spanish is the world language at the Middle School. Mrs. Swan asked about chorus; Mr. Fabrizio responded that there won't be personnel to work with the students.

Mr. White urged a marketing process at the High School in an effort to retain Ipswich students. Mr. Fabrizio offers students a visit to Whittier Tech. Mr. Schaaf asked about district-wide trends of students leaving Ipswich schools.

Mr. Feldman asked if desired class size might eventually be achieved by constraints and head count drops. Dr. O'Flynn replied that class size has been balanced by drops at the High School, but a huge opportunity is lost because a \$9,000 sum is available from the State for each student who comes in. There are opportunities for us to retain and grow the numbers and sustain the schools. The loss is a true negative which doesn't allow the opportunities for kids in sports and musicians. Quality and quantity are related. It is the depth of the education that dissolves as resources erode.

BUDGET PRESENTATION: HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. Carovillano, Asst. Principal, spoke about program erosion in the past with two social studies teachers down since 2010 and staff in ELA, foreign language, etc. cut. Students can only get their third or fourth choice of subject because the programs have been cut. Mr. Carovillano showed impact to AP sections and trade-offs with Honors classes up versus college prep classes down. He questioned maintenance of programs, let alone moving forward.

Mr. Krieger, social studies teacher, spoke of the skills for teaching today—not only in reading, math, and science, but also it is education for leadership. He pointed out research on the green crab problem in the ocean waters of Ipswich, sea level FIN change, “The Coyote Wars,” Project Adventure, boat building course, racing cars at

the National STEM League, digital design in fine arts (Zoe Gillette has received Gold Key awards for her digital art). RTI (Response to Intervention) has had a positive impact on the 2013 and 2014 numbers of graduating seniors to four-year and two-year colleges. The four-year graduation rate from high school is continually in the mid-90th percentiles while the dropout rate is .2%. Based on junior year PSAT scores, Ipswich continues to have National Merit recognition.

Colleen Werner, Math Dept. head, spoke of the “tipping point” reached in 2009 when she was speaking of the future. The budget-driven goals are to (1) preserve the core academic programs and relevant elective options and (2) maintain reasonable class sizes in core disciplines. Of the \$5,900,000 budget next year, 36% goes to special education, 2.5% to athletics and 4.5% to supplies and other expenses. French is being phased out although it is still in second place in Massachusetts schools. Art is down by .4FTE--meaning no visual communications program; physical education is down to one teacher--meaning the elimination of Project Adventure and larger regular PE classes. One RTI (academic support teacher) will be leaving—two teachers at the high school has allowed meeting the gaps with the lower kids and will drop IHS from a Level 1 school. Varsity coaching salaries are eliminated, thus increasing athletic user fees. Fewer clubs and after-school groups will run unless fees are instituted. Special education costs are up over \$500,000; virtual high school membership (vital to those who want courses not available within the high school) increased \$2,350.

The questions put out there again are: Do the students have equitable opportunities for engagement? Will our students be able to compete with students from surrounding communities?

Trina Schell, IMADA president, is concerned with high school cuts to drama and art. Mr. Carovillano spoke of the fact that, having seen other schools, Ipswich is light years ahead of what others can do. International students are being used as a model—they remark about the quality of the music and art programs in Ipswich.

Mr. White asked how 8th graders are told of the high school opportunities and Mr. Carovillano said that Mr. Dalton speaks to the students at curriculum night, is always open to one-on-one conversations and has a website for communication. Mr. White criticized the lack of marketing the product of the high school; that is, the colleges IHS students get into and the drama/art available.

Mr. Feldman mentioned the challenges when Finance Committ sets a 3% increase but the school budget rises by 4-4.5%. Funding mismatches always exist and the cuts are particularly insidious but not readily apparent to all outside the school system. A lot of what is going to happen has not yet happened because of the most poignant happenings which are present and future. They probably don't realize what is happening to the Town. The resolution is an override. Large segments deal with challenges of high taxes. It becomes a very intense discussion about community values and goals. What does it mean to the community long term? Test stats are really reflecting a pool of students who have moved through the system. Now we don't know what will happen and it might be reduced talent in music and the arts and all the reduced sections in time to come that affect the test

statistics. We appreciate the School Committee telling the story clearly with meaning. Mr. Howard feels that maintaining the vibrant quality is essential not only for the parents but the whole community. Businesses need to be informed of the school district situation and young parents should be encouraged to have their children stay in public schools. Ipswich's reputation and statistics should be given to all these constituents. That has got to be part of the message for the override.

Mr. Hopping remarked that he heard a comment that every year it is the Town against the schools. The concern should be not the children now attending high school but the students of tomorrow who will not be able to go to the best colleges. Currently, it is due in large part to our personnel and the stick-to-it-iveness of the kids. That is not going to go on forever with the down turning situation. He expressed appreciation for Finance Committee support.

Meeting adjourned at 10:30 p.m.

