

IPSWICH SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING  
APRIL 11, 2013  
MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL ENSEMBLE ROOM

**OPEN SESSION**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Dr. O'Flynn called the special meeting to interview a candidate for Superintendent at 7:05 p.m. with the following School Committee members present: J. Loeb, J. Bauman, S. Gresh, B. Hopping, R. Roesler.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Dr. O'Flynn made the following announcement:

There will be an Executive Session this evening to discuss strategy regarding negotiations with non-union personnel after which the meeting will adjourn.

**CITIZEN COMMENTS**

An audience member asked if the School Committee would take comments on the night of April 25. Mr. Loeb said there are feedback forms at each of the schools. On the 25<sup>th</sup> under Citizens' Comments, there will be an opportunity to weigh in. Also, emails may be sent to Mr. Hopping. Dr. O'Flynn commented that the School Committee welcomes all comments.

Dr. O'Flynn explained the procedure to the audience for three nights with three superintendent candidates. The third, Susan Viccaro, Superintendent in Regional School District 13 (Durham and Middlefield, CT) for nine years, visited for the day in the district schools, meeting with administrators, and had dinner with the School Committee. The question/answer format for the evening went as follows:

Gresh question: How do you collaborate with the town government, business or institutions, other school districts, and the majority of households in Ipswich which do not contain school-age children to garner support for the budget process, multi-year planning, program and budget development?

Susan Viccaro answer: You can't run a school district without citizens' questions. It comes from getting to know administrators in a district. I would do more listening than talking when coming into a district. In terms of staff in the buildings, I would try to meet with every employee in the first 90 days. I would listen to students and parents as well and meet with parents on a monthly basis somehow. I would suggest a Superintendent Advisory Council. Looking at the larger community in order to reach out to a group right away, I had met with selectmen of both communities which has led to bigger cooperation. I am a Chamber of Commerce member and we have a "manufacturing curriculum" because of the manufacturing in our area.

Loeb question: What do you see as the role of the School Committee beyond their basic statutory requirements? How do you describe, with some specifics, your preferred working relationship with the School Committee?

SV answer: All of the above. Also, the Board of Education (term for CT rather than School Committee) are cheerleaders of education and help to move the district forward. You are counting on your administrative team to advise you but it is imperative that the School Committee and leadership be on the same page.

O'Flynn question: Negotiation with educators' unions both establishes a level of trust and appreciation with your teachers and dictates the level of resources available to support the educational needs of the children in the district. Describe how you have balanced the competing needs of kids and teachers either in negotiations or other educational settings.

SV answer: Currently, I am not directly involved in negotiations except if there is an impasse. I think it is about trust in a relationship. If you have a positive and honest relationship with your staff, it is easier to see the realities. Both sides must be willing to give and take.

Gresh question: What are the two or three most important ways education is changing as a result of emerging technology innovations? Can you share a specific example with us from your current district?

SV answer: In my career as a teacher/administrator for the last 18 years, the technology that was used in the classroom then is very different from what I use now. It has opened up the world to kids. Primary source documents are available in a matter of minutes. Websites help with a math problem. A paradigm shift now exists in teaching. Teachers are facilitating learning now, and there is a need to be collaborating in the classroom. Technology has allowed us to gather information in a much faster way and to put it out there to students who might not have access to it at home. "Bring your own device" program at District 13 is a three-year technology plan. Instead of a set of history texts, we purchased tablets and covers for them—a rousing success which wasn't quite a "wash" in saving money. It has been so successful that we have an initiative in both buildings to expand.

Hopping question: How do you define student success and what specific evidence can you cite in your current district that demonstrates improved student growth and academic achievement during your tenure there?

SV answer: Tests scores for performance in so many different areas. Students organize a fund raiser and donate to a charity. Students who create an art project. There are other ways in which we can determine student success. What kind of children are we raising? We have five end values which include courage, kindness, honesty and respect—even Kindergarten kids know "courage." Over time it has really changed the culture. Academic achievement—AP consistently have scores of 3, 4, and 5. SAT scores continue to be at State average. We struggled with CAT scores in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. One of the reasons we think they were down is that we don't have remedial reading at the high school. There was a very broad range of readers at the ninth grade. It is in the budget for next year.

Roesler question: What strategies might you use to improve a school system such as Ipswich that is already viewed by many as a successful district? How do you balance sensitivity to the preservation of the elements that have made the system successful with the need to change and improve?

SV answer: You always need to be asking yourself why you are doing something. We use a process called "strategic planning." Every five years the entire administrative team and School Committee members, about 30 people, for 2½ days, work through a process where we examine mission, strengths and weaknesses—critical needs. Following that, we will have identified 5-6 areas and we develop an Action Planning Committee which facilitates and helps us identify special areas. We all come back together as a planning team to accept or not. We end up with 25-30 action plans to work on over the next five years. It helps us to prioritize with goals. We are always looking to get better at what we do. Right now we are working on a market strategy to demonstrate what the positive things are in District 13 and how to improve communication with our community.

Hopping question: Describe 2 or 3 learning activities you engage in regularly that provide a model of life-long learning for our staff and for the community outside of school. How do you make people aware of your ongoing learning activities and share your experiences?

SV answer: Last year I heard a man named Alan November speak. I was very impressed and spoke to my Executive Director saying how terrific it would be to bring this man to CT. Six of my staff including the technology director, integration specialist, and a teacher had four full-day sessions with him. He really pushed me to think about technology in different ways. The end result was that I decided I needed to push my leaders for every administrative council to Skype somewhere in the district and get a lesson from kids somewhere in the district. I purchased an iPad after they came out. I felt that I had to be the leader. It is important for the kids to see how we are using technology, being willing to learn new things. I have done 5-10 different professional development activities outside the ones that are in-district.

Bauman question: Although we have a full-time Director of Business & Finance, how do you see your role in the overall budget process and what would you identify as the most important school business function you will need to perform? What is your view of and approach to long range budgeting in today's fiscal environment?

SV answer: I am a long-range fan. I have to have a vision for where I am going—a capital plan, a technology plan. It doesn't mean that you can always stick to your budget. Even with a \$34 million budget, things happen that you don't account for. The more long-range work you do, the more likely you are to come close. I need that knowledge about the budget as much as the business manager, in my opinion. The School Committee would expect that I would have a very good sense of why things are in the budget and why the requests are there. When I have been developing a budget, I then present to the BoE and can be able to defend everything in that budget with an educational value. I need explanations from my staff.

O'Flynn question: Proposition 2½ dictates a level of budget restriction that prevents Ipswich from comprehensively meeting educational needs of our students. Describe your experience with either a prop 2.5 override or an equivalent campaign for an increase in resources for your district.

SV answer: We have an obligation to go before the public and present information to them and allow them to ask questions. An example would be my trying to bring a full-day kindergarten in for 8 years. It was cut out for 3 years in a row. With Common Core coming, I knew we had to do it.

Bauman question: Describe an innovative educational program that took shape in your district and the implementation and results of that initiative.

SV answer: When I was PPS Director and we were looking to provide a transition program for the 18-21 year old students, I approached nearby Wesleyan University to see if we could have a classroom on campus. The students got jobs on campus; college students supported our students. We got a couple of classrooms. Now we have a five-year lease on a house on campus, two full-time teachers, a computer lab, a van, and we collaborate with other districts in a phenomenal program. The state has used us as a model.

Roesler question: Can you describe a scenario you have encountered in your professional career which required you to handle a controversial or challenging issue? Specifically how did your response demonstrate your approach to solving an issue that might have had a negative impact on your school district and how did you respond to those who opposed your decision?

SV answer: We had the first case of swine flue in our district. I was unprepared for the vehement reaction in the district and involved the Department of Public Health to help. The student stayed out of school and the sibling came back, a very unpopular decision which I withstood because I wanted to do things for the kids. I was vindicated by a newspaper article. Seventy-five percent of the student population was healthy and coming to school and we didn't penalize them.

O'Flynn question: What are your general observations about the Ipswich schools based on what you experienced today? What strengths, weaknesses, or key challenges have you observed?

SV answer: I would certainly say that there is a pretty good environment. I observed that staff and kids are happy in all four buildings and it is obviously a great culture. The challenge: look at additional security measures. A buzzer system for entry into the buildings is needed.

Loeb question: When faced with real and perceived socio/economic and demographic differences between 2 buildings that serve the same grade levels, how do you determine the best way to allocate resources?

SV answer: You need to look at the needs of each individual building to make it equitable. You need to have public discussions with a complete district initiative.

Loeb question: You talked about use of tablets and iPad. How do you use technology for your personal use?

SV answer: I get 150 emails a day. My IT Directors are pushing me to Tweet. The increased use of Twitter among students and staff and "Bring your own device" and how kids use them has put that into focus. We redid our website on which I have a Superintendent's Corner. We have a calendar that parents can customize with two schools.

Roesler question: What is your view of the role of outside funds (e.g., grants, donation, etc.) in a school budget? What should the relationship and use be between outside funds and appropriated funds?

SV answer: An educated citizenry benefits everyone. The more we can get them into our schools to see what is going on in the classroom, the better. I am blown away by what these kids produce. The more we can expose the community-at-large to the great things that we do, the better. One of my obligations as a new Superintendent would be to get out into the community, offer a school to be open a day, and invite the public in. Partner the citizen with a student and let the student tell about school.

Bauman question: Have you dealt with accreditation?

SV answer: From a high school staff perspective, it is an exhausting process. I have been through it three times and have sat on accreditation committees. Sometimes it is hard to see the forest through the trees when you are going through it. It is nice to be commended for the nice things that you are doing.

O'Flynn question: Why did you get into education?

SV answer: I was born at Cable Hospital, grew up in Essex, and went to Gloucester High School. My grandmother was a first-grade teacher until age 72.

Gresh question: What do you believe are the top challenges facing special education and what are the most important things a school district should be doing to address these challenges?

SV answer: My background is SPED having been in the business for over 30 years. We know so much more now than I did in my first year as a SPED teacher, and we do a much better job today. No two kids on the autism spectrum are the same. Most of the time if you are meeting the child's needs, your school is the best place for them to be. I am a real believer in equipping to meet the needs of SPED children. There is a certain skill that meets the nuances of disabilities. The more you train them, the more the kids benefit.

Gresh question: Are there one or two questions you expected us to ask but didn't? Why do you want to come to Ipswich?

SV answer: Are you a Yankees or Red Sox fan? (Red Sox) My child is in college, my husband has a new job, and it made me think of stepping out of my comfort zone and taking a new challenge. I happened to see the advertisement for Ipswich, and it has always been my intention to move back here. Sort of like the stars aligned. Ipswich reminds me of where I now am.

Dr. O'Flynn thanked her and thanked the audience and the Search Committee.

Mr. Loeb moved, seconded by Mr. Hopping, to go into Executive Session at 8:20 p.m. for the purpose of discussing negotiations with regard to non-union personnel. IN FAVOR- Gresh, Bauman, O'Flynn, Hopping, Loeb, Roesler.