

Ipswich School Committee
MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
Thursday, March 23, 2023
7:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

KE called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

Members Present: K. Eliot (KE) J. Poirier (JP)
 J. Donahue (JD) D. Freehan (DF)
 P. Kneedler (PK) E. Cannon (EC)

Also Present: B. Blake, Superintendent of Schools (BB)
 T. Markham, Director of Finance and Operations (TM)
 J. Bornstein, High School Student Representative (JB)

2. Reading of the District Mission Statement

JB read the district mission statement.

3. Announcements

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, April 6th at 7:00 PM in the MS/HS Ensemble Room.
- The Feoffee Policy Working Group will meet on Monday, March 27th at 4:00 PM at Central Office, 1 Lord Square.
- The Policy Subcommittee will meet on Thursday, March 30th at 5:00 PM in the MS/HS Guidance Conference Room.
- The Mutual Concerns Subcommittee will meet on Thursday, April 6th at 5:30 PM in the MS/HS Guidance Conference Room.

4. Special Acknowledgements

BB acknowledged the High School Math Team for their first place finish in the Cape Ann League. BB then acknowledged the High School Jazz Ensemble who won gold in their recent competition, advancing to the state level competition. BB also mentioned the news article on substitute teacher, Mr. Seely.

5. Citizens' Comments

Alicia Thomas, IEA Vice President: Read a statement from the preschool teachers of Ipswich Public Schools on the future planning of preschool.

Seamus Kelley, High School Student: Spoke about the theater program and his dissatisfaction with the School Committee and their decision to cut the theater classes. He said the students concerned about the cuts never asked for sympathy, but instead wanted a reconsideration of the decision made to cut the theater classes.

6. High School Student Representative Report

JB's report included:

- Interact Club held a successful blood drive
- Interact Club had breakfast with the Rotary Club
- The Student Advisory Council met and began working on improved communication between the administration and students.
- Students events including Model UN and Student Government Day in Boston.

JP asked if there was a faculty liaison for the Student Advisory Council and whether this group needed a School Committee liaison, as well. It was confirmed that the HS principal was the faculty liaison. BB added that he believed JP is supposed to be the School Committee liaison for the Student Advisory Council, rather than the liaison to the High School Council.

7. Presentations

A. Winter Sports Awards

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

B. Overnight Field Trip Request: HS Robotics Team

Scott Jewell and members of the High School Robotics Team presented their overnight field trip request to potentially attend the District Championship in Springfield, MA from April 5-8, 2023. Team members highlighted the accomplishments of the team so far, noting that this is the team's most successful season to date. They have one more competition to determine if they will qualify for championships. Should they qualify, the team would travel to Springfield to compete. The trip would be funded entirely by the team through fundraising and grant money. The group would be supervised by 3-4 chaperones.

- *Motion to support the High School Robotics Team's overnight field trip request as presented was made by EC and seconded by JD. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

C. Bean Counting Debrief

KE asked for feedback on Bean Counting and the most recent Tri-Board meeting.

The School Committee heard messages at Bean Counting about how they are adding positions and the effect those additional positions will have on the override calculator. There were also discussions about the ESSER funded positions and what happens to those once the grant funding has ended. JP noted that the School Committee and administration are not just looking at those specific positions, but where cuts can happen based on student need and other funding sources. JP felt the budget was put together thoroughly and while JP understands the concern from other boards, he feels that now is the time to focus on meeting student needs.

DF asked for clarification on what would happen if either the Finance Committee or Select Board chose not to support the school's FY24 budget. KE said that both boards act in an advisory role and that approval of the school budget is done at Town Meeting. KE added that she was in agreement with JP that both boards seem to overall support the budget, but do share in concerns over sustainability of the budget. The School Committee is committed to maintaining the length of the override and will face some difficult decisions over the next few years. The Select Board and Finance Committee would like the School Committee to present a long term plan for positions, programming, etc., but KE felt that was difficult to do. JP added that the School Committee's messaging around the budget at Town Meeting was very important.

EC felt that the role of the Finance Committee is something lost on her. The advisory piece, EC felt, was warranted. EC wondered if there is a place for them or the public to have a seat in the planning process. It may be helpful to make them aware of the budget process sooner and allow them to sit in on some of those early discussions. KE added that the Finance Committee is not advisory to the School Committee, but advisory to Town Meeting. KE added that she spoke with the Chair of the Finance Committee about better communication around the budget calendar. KE also added that it may be helpful to give a better outline of the budget process and rationale behind the budget during the budget presentations. Explaining the pros and cons, as well as how the decisions were made, could make a difference.

PK talked about the history of budget planning. Prior to the override and COVID, the School Committee would give the administration a number to back into. Post override, the School Committee has asked the administration to tell them what is needed to educate students and meet their needs. As times get tighter, the School Committee may need to consider going back to a number or specific percentage increase. TM agreed that the budget is representative of teaching and learning needs with an eye on the future and collapsing ESSER funding. The administration and School Committee are forward thinking and forward aware. It will be important, TM stated, to start the budget process earlier next year.

KE added that the School Committee will discuss the Town Meeting warrant articles at their meeting on April 6th. KE agreed that the School Committee will need to discuss messaging on the budget ahead of Town Meeting.

D. Discussion and Vote to Authorize the Superintendent to Submit Two SOIs to the Massachusetts School Building Authority

KE shared that the superintendent will be submitting two SOIs to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). As part of the submissions, the Select Board and School Committee must vote to have the superintendent submit those SOIs. KE and EC went to the Select Board on March 20, 2023 and received unanimous approval from them to submit the two SOIs.

KE read the following resolution:

“Resolved: Having convened in an open meeting on March 23, 2023 , prior to the SOI submission closing date, the Ipswich School Committee, in accordance with its charter, by-laws, and ordinances, has voted to authorize the Superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated April 2023 for the Winthrop Elementary School located at 65 Central Street, Ipswich MA which describes and explains the following deficiencies and the priority category(s) for which an application may be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the future. Priority 2, Elimination of Severe Overcrowding (Elimination of Severe Overcrowding including inadequate classroom sizes and gym space, and open spaces for delivery of special education and ELL services), and Priority 7, Replacement of or addition to obsolete buildings in order to provide for a full range of programs consistent with state and approved local requirements (Current limitations include barriers to a safe, comfortable, and appropriate learning environment, insufficient gross motor and aerobic activity, limited healthy, nutritious school meals, and inadequate delivery of services to students requiring special education services and ELL services.); and hereby further specifically acknowledges that by submitting this Statement of Interest Form, the Massachusetts School Building Authority in no way guarantees the acceptance or the approval of an application, the awarding of a grant or any other funding commitment from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, or commits the Town of Ipswich to filing an application for funding with the Massachusetts School Building Authority.”

- *Motion to approve the resolution authorizing the Superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated April 2023 for the Winthrop Elementary School was made by PK and seconded by EC. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

KE then read the following resolution:

“Resolved: Having convened in an open meeting on March 23, 2023, prior to the SOI submission closing date, the Ipswich School Committee, in accordance with its charter, by-laws, and ordinances, has voted to authorize the Superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated April, 2023 for the Paul F. Doyon Memorial School located at 216 Linebrook Road, Ipswich MA, which describes and explains the following deficiencies and the priority category(s) for which an application may be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the future Priority 2, Elimination of Severe Overcrowding (including lack of addition learning spaces beyond the general classroom setting, and open spaces for delivery of special education and ELL services), and Priority 7, Replacement of or addition to obsolete buildings in order to provide for a full range of programs consistent with state and approved local requirements (Current limitations include barriers to a safe, comfortable, and appropriate learning environment, subpar conditions for integrated preschool, and inadequate delivery of services to students requiring special education services and ELL services) ; and hereby further specifically acknowledges that by submitting this Statement of Interest Form, the Massachusetts School Building Authority in no way guarantees the acceptance or the approval of an application, the awarding of a grant or any other funding commitment from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, or commits the Town of Ipswich to filing an application for funding with the Massachusetts School Building Authority.”

- *Motion to approve the resolution authorizing the Superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated April, 2023 for the Paul F. Doyon Memorial School was made by PK and seconded by EC. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

E. Discussion and Potential Vote on Ballot Questions

KE began by sharing feedback the School Committee received from the Select Board and Town Manager. The Town Manager and Select Board had reservations on the ballot questions because they did not include information about the cost of the proposed projects or about MSBA support. Timing of the sequential projects was also missing from the ballot questions. Overall, the Select Board’s concern was that the questions may “muddy the waters”, potentially backfire and provide the School Committee with “bad data”. Several Select Board members questioned why the community would not just simply vote for two schools when presented with the option with no cost or timing associated with the projects. It was also suggested that the first sentence on the ballot question include information that the non-binding ballot questions will guide the School Committee. KE and EC’s response to the Select Board’s concerns was that the ballot questions were an opportunity to reach more community members and let voters know where the School Committee was in the school building project process.

EC talked about the “bad data” comment, sharing that data is data and what makes it good or bad is how you apply it. EC felt that people were nervous about repeating what happened during the last attempt at an elementary school building project and creating

intense divisiveness in town. The point EC and KE tried to make at the Select Board meeting was that the ballot questions are an attempt to take the temperature of the town. These questions are non-binding and may inform decisions down the road. EC and KE also stressed the point that a feasibility study and cost will ultimately drive the project unless the town strongly desires to pay for a project on their own. The data collected from the ballot questions can be used in similar ways that data from the listening sessions and survey are used.

KE added that the timeline to submit the final language for the ballot questions to the Town Clerk is April 3rd. The Select Board will vote to add it to the ballot at their April 10th meeting. KE shared that while the Select Board had a lot of concerns about the questions, they would ultimately support the School Committee's decision to utilize the ballot questions. The Select Board saw value in what the School Committee was trying to accomplish with the questions and acknowledged that it was something that had not been done previously. The Select Board and Town Manager did suggest wordsmithing the questions, however some of the information that was suggested to add is information the School Committee simply does not have or know at this time.

DF felt that the Select Board and Town Manager had expressed a lot of concerns over the ballot questions and thought the questions could be misleading to voters. Not listing a cost associated with the projects was a concern. DF felt the School Committee was making a lot of assumptions that could create confusion. The MSBA decides what the focus of the feasibility study will be. It could create confusion if what the town votes in support of is not included in the feasibility study. KE added that if the ballot questions move forward, the School Committee will have an article and communication ready to push out the day of the election with messaging that the results are not necessarily shaping what the School Committee will do going forward, while also recognizing that cost was not included in the questions, but will play a big factor moving forward.

The discussion continued about the possibility of adding a cost to any of the scenarios listed on the ballot questions. It was suggested that the School Committee may be able to come up with a reasonable assumption of cost for a new project, but in no way could estimate repairs. Some members felt that even estimating a cost for a new project was not a good idea at this point.

The discussion then turned to the purpose of the ballot questions at this point in time. Some members felt that this was an opportunity early in the process for voters to have their voice heard. The questions/scenarios came from a collaborative effort by the School Committee through meetings and workshops to vet possible solutions to the elementary school building project. While the information is non-binding, the data could be used as part of the decision making process moving forward. Concern was also raised about the School Committee's inability to educate the community on the process ahead of the vote. JP added that the questions could be a consensus builder and not a divider. The design of the building(s) could be determined by the information gathered through these ballot questions.

DF asked if the School Committee could delay these questions until the district is accepted into the MSBA pipeline. KE said that the School Committee had voted at an earlier meeting to move forward with these questions. Tonight's discussion was to address the additional feedback from the Select Board and Town Manager and to discuss possible revisions to the questions.

PK suggested tweaking the language on the ballot questions based on feedback from the Select Board and Town Manager. DF added that she was not in support of all four options on the ballot; however, KE reminded her that the options came out of the School Committee workshops and were voted by the majority of the School Committee to move forward.

The School Committee collectively worked on wordsmithing the introductory statement on the ballot questions in an effort to clarify that the vote is non-binding and options may be dependent on acceptance through the MSBA and the results of a feasibility study. Each question was then reviewed and discussed.

- *Motion to accept the ballot questions with the amended language from March 23, 2023 as written was made by EC and seconded by JP. **The motion passed with 5 in favor and 1 opposed.***

8. Superintendent's Administrative Report

BB's report included:

- Several subcommittee and working group meetings
- An update on the last day of school for students (June 16th), as well as the date for High School graduation (June 4th)
- Kathy McMahon, Middle School principal, is retiring at the end of the school year
- The district is working on details to administer the Youth Risk Behavior Survey

9. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- **Vision 2030 Working Group:** The group believes their work has been completed for the year. No new meetings have been scheduled.
- **Policy Subcommittee:** Meeting scheduled for March 30th. There is a renewed interest to have a searchable Policy Manual online. The current policy manual is not searchable. The Massachusetts School Committee Association (MASC) will host the online manual for a fee. KE felt the searchable database warrants a larger discussion.

10. New Business*

No new business was presented.

11. Vouchers and Bills

All were reviewed and signed.

12. Consent Agenda

The Elementary Building Project Working Group has a set of minutes to approve, but will not be holding another meeting this year. The group, consisting of EC, KE, and DF, asked to approve their working group's meeting minutes at this meeting. Only members of the working group will be voting on the approval of these minutes.

- *Motion to approve the Elementary Building Project Working Group meeting minutes from December 7, 2022 was made by KE and seconded by DF. **The motion passed unanimously with 2 in favor.***

13. Adjournment

- *Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by PK and seconded by DF. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

Meeting adjourned at 9:06 PM