

Ipswich School Committee
Thursday, October 1, 2026
MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich, MA 01938
7:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

JD called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

Present:	Andrew Bunnell (AB)	Dianna Freehan (DF)
	Jen Donahue (JD)	Haley Rist (HR)
	Jenny Connolly (JC)	Greg Stevens (GS)

Also Present: Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools (BB)
Tom Markham, Director of Finance and Operations (TM)

2. Citizen Queries¹

Kathleen Donaher Spinale, 27 Pleasant Street: Raised concerns about athletic cooperative procedures, including Policy JJIB, MIAA requirements, roster numbers, eighth grade waivers, allocation of budgeted funds, and the role of the School Committee. The speaker questioned the process for the Triton wrestling cooperative and the March 2026 Athletics Working Group, and also referred to emergency response planning and unresolved hate crime and data breach concerns.

Lisa Prater, 112 County Road: Raised concerns about the proposed wastewater pump station project and possible excavation near the Town Hall fields. Prater stated that she has no children in the district, her home does not neighbor the potential waste water land, but she is an advocate for environment and wildlife. She asked about historical land use, possible human remains or hazardous material, protections for students and the public, and which entity would bear responsibility if such conditions were found.

3. Reading of the District Mission Statement

Haley Rist read the district mission statement.

4. Announcements and Acknowledgements

- Brendan Sweeney, Town Manager, introduced himself to the committee. He discussed his first four months in the position, his interest in education, and his work with Superintendent Brian Blake, Director of Finance and Operations Tom Markham, and other district staff.
- The next School Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 15th at 7:00 PM in the MS/HS Ensemble Room.
- The Budget Subcommittee will meet remotely on Tuesday, October 6th at 8:00 AM.
- The Operations Subcommittee will meet remotely on Tuesday, October 13th at 8:00 AM. The Communications Subcommittee will meet remotely on Wednesday, October 14th at 8:00 AM. Mutual Concerns will be meeting on Tuesday (10/6) at 4:30 in the MS/HS Guidance Conference Room.

¹ Citizen queries are not a discussion, debate, or dialogue between individuals and the School Committee. It is an individual's opportunity to express an opinion on issues within the School Committee's authority. While the Committee and/or administrators will not typically respond during Citizen Queries, the Chair, as presiding officer of the meeting, may choose to if s/he seems it expeditious. Further, should the Chair believe that an issue falls outside the purview of the School Committee, s/he may request that citizens direct it to the appropriate person or body so that the matter is given proper consideration. Citizen queries are limited to three (3) minutes per person and a total of 15 minutes, overall.

5. Community Presentations

5A. Presentation- Water Pumping Station at Town Hall

Vicky Hallman, wastewater engineer, presented the Town's proposed pump station project. She explained that the existing Wharf station, built in the 1950s, is vulnerable to flooding and that failure could affect public health, the river, clam flats, and beaches. The proposal would place a larger replacement station near Town Hall and retain a smaller station serving the Wharf neighborhood. The project also involves buried infrastructure, connections along the Riverwalk, drainage and stormwater measures, and a proposed access route near the ANS property.

Ms. Hallman described site and access considerations, including service vehicles, maintenance visits, field use during construction, the existing ledge, parking, and the location of the proposed driveway. She said alternative locations would require more road construction or excavation and could create greater environmental and access impacts. The smaller Wharf facility would be designed with flood protection. Committee members asked about the footprint, fencing or buffers near athletics, truck access, environmental investigation, archaeological review, and effects on the fields. Ms. Hallman reported that the investigation to date had not identified findings requiring further study, while some design details remained under development.

Ms. Hallman reviewed grant funding and the schedule. The discussion referred to approximately \$7.2 million in FEMA funding, an additional grant of approximately \$3 million, and a June 2029 deadline for use of FEMA funds. She said the Town hoped to obtain required approvals, bid the project, and proceed with construction beginning in 2027. She cautioned that further delay could put grant funding at risk. The notes indicate that project costs would be supported by wastewater customers. Funding amounts, sources, and dates should be checked against the presentation before approval.

5B. Overnight Field Trip Requests: Ecology School/Washington D.C. (Taken Out of Order)

Middle School Principal, Peter Ginolfi, presented a proposed sixth grade trip to Ferry Beach in Saco, Maine, for four days and three nights. The estimated cost was \$415 per student, with financial assistance available to families who need it. The committee discussed the projected 85 to 90 students, chaperones, alternative activities in the area, and teacher costs of approximately \$100 per night or \$300 total.

- *Motion to support the Sixth Grade Trip was made by GS and seconded by HR. The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

Peter Ginolfi also presented a revised eighth grade Washington, DC, trip of three days and two nights instead of four days and three nights. The estimate was 90 to 95 students at \$1,195 per student. Mr. Ginolfi shared how flying the group of students down vs. taking a bus saves cost on an extra hotel night, allowing activities during the time when driving previously took place.

- *Motion to support the eighth grade trip was made by JC and seconded by GS. The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

5C. Review and Potential Vote: MS Handbook Change (Taken Out of Order)

Peter Ginolfi discussed adding a sentence to the MS Handbook's Attendance Policy. This additional language on letters and meetings with families of chronically absent students would cover the school policy-wise, but also would benefit a certain group of students, as there are some students who have already missed 5-6 days this school year. Peter Ginolfi considered beginning outreach before November.

- *Motion to support the attendance policy change was made by DF and seconded by JC. The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

6. Superintendent Administrative Report

The committee heard updates on subcommittee work, the football cooperative, weight room equipment, boiler and plumbing work, after school funding at the middle school, staffing, stipends, MTSS training, annual ALICE training, MCAS results, standard response protocols, technology and mandated training, professional development, and the

CREST Collaborative. Members also discussed the Special Education Working Group and transportation for students placed through regional collaborations.

7. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

Student Advisory Council and athletics updates included a student survey, bathroom improvements, the wellness policy, food service, scheduling conflicts, and girls soccer senior night. The committee discussed the turf field and field house project. TM said revised field house bids were expected during the month. Members reviewed available funds, prior unsuccessful bids, a possible phased approach beginning with the shell, and the need to decide the project's scope and funding. Phase 1: Shell of Fieldhouse. Phase 2: Inside work - plumbing, electrical work. Members discussed how there is no current plan for more funding. Possibility of scaling back the project?

9:21 PM | HR moved to recess, GS seconded. The meeting resumed at 9:28 PM.

9. Finance

TM noted that no monthly finance report was available and discussed the timing of future reports.

10. Presentations:

10.A. Discussion and Potential Vote STM Warrant Article 9 (Out of Order)

The committee then discussed Article 9 and the process for using land at the Town Hall fields. Chair Jen Donahue said records dating to the 1920s and committee actions in 2000 support the School Committee's position that the fields are in its care, custody, and control, although the Town owns the land. Members described differing opinions from Town counsel and school counsel. They emphasized that their concerns were procedural and that they supported the public infrastructure project and wished to protect its funding and schedule.

Members discussed whether the Select Board should formally request permission from the School Committee for use of the land, what action the committee might take before Town Meeting, and how to distinguish the proposed easement involving ANS from permission to use the fields. Mr. Sweeney, Town Manager, said the Town intended to maintain dialogue with the committee and was following Town counsel's advice. Select Board Chair Mike Dougherty committed to improving communication among the boards. Members asked counsel to communicate so the appropriate process could be clarified before the October 15 School Committee meeting or Town Meeting.

Stephen Wilson, 42 County Street: Abutor, asked for more communication about the project.

10.B. Policy Update

Members reviewed 12 policies which had no proposed changes. Members also considered revisions to Policy JJIB concerning approval of athletic cooperatives, including a process involving the Superintendent and Athletic Director that aligns with MIAA requirements.

- *Motion to approve the set of policies as presented was made by JC and seconded by GS. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

10.C. School Committee Goals and Potential Vote of Approval

The committee reviewed its structured annual goals and discussed removing recurring tasks from the goals document, avoiding overlap among subcommittees, and posting the goals on the district website. The draft notes indicate that responsibilities related to the Feoffees could be absorbed by the Budget Subcommittee.

- *Motion to approve the School Committee goals was made by GS and seconded by AB. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

10. D. Update and Next Steps for Superintendent Search

The committee discussed a liaison assignment related to the Superintendent search. JD states Mary Malone, representative for NESDEC, asked if she was taking on the liaison role - there was an informal, unanimous expression of support and a possible formal vote at the next meeting.

10. Consent Agenda

- *Motion to approve the consent agenda as presented made by HR, seconded by DF. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

11. Adjournment

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