

Ipswich School Committee

Thursday, January 16, 2025

MS/HS Ensemble Room

134 High Street, Ipswich

7:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

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

Present: Kate Eliot (KE) Haley Rist (HR)
Mat Perry(MP) Dianna Freehan (DF)
Jen Donahue (JD) Jenny Connolly (JC)

Also Present: Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools (BB)
Tom Markham, Director of Finance and Operations (TM)
Charlie Quimby, High School Student Representative (CQ)

2. Reading of the District Mission Statement

CQ read the mission statement.

3. Announcements and Special Acknowledgements

- The School Committee will meet on Wednesday, February 5th and 6th in the MS/HS Ensemble Room at 7:00 PM.
- The Communications Subcommittee will meet remotely on Thursday, January 23rd at 5:00 PM.
- The Policy Subcommittee will meet remotely on Tuesday, February 4th at 7:00 PM.
- All schools and district offices will be closed on Monday, January 20th.

4. Public Comments¹

No public comments were made at this time.

5. Community Presentations

A. Overnight Field Trip Request: France

Lauren Hover presented an overnight trip to France during April vacation in 2026, with the trip dates and itinerary reviewed. The same tour company that has been used for the previous trip will be utilized again. The trip is open to juniors and seniors taking French. The estimated cost per student is \$4000-\$4300. Ms. Hover confirmed that one chaperone is covered for every six students. Ms. Hover explained that they plan to apply for grants, including a Paine Grant used for the last trip. Ms. Hover shared that the trip would still be offered without the grant money, though fewer students might be able to attend. KE asked if a survey for student interest was conducted, and Ms. Hover shared that while no formal survey was done, the trip was discussed at a parent night.

- *Motion to approve the overnight field trip to France for spring 2026, for juniors and seniors between the dates of April 16, 2026-April 24, 2026 was made by JD and seconded by HR. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

B. Overnight Field Trip Requests: DECA Club

Tate Shippen presented the overnight field trip requests for the DECA Club, including trips to the state competition in Boston and

¹ Public comment is 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 Public Comment, 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. Public comment is limited to three (3) minutes per person and a total of 15 minutes, overall.

a second trip to Orlando. Nine students have qualified for the state championship in Boston. Jonathan Chouvelon, co-president of DECA, shared his experience and discussed the opportunities DECA provides, including scholarships and helping students focus on potential career paths. Mr. Shippen explained that students can qualify for the competition in Orlando through the state competition or by competing through the state DECA chapter. A certain number of spots are available for Florida, with the potential to increase the number if more students qualify. The Ipswich chapter of DECA currently has 27 members.

- *Motion to approve the DECA overnight field trip for three days, two nights in Boston on Feb 27, 2025 through March 1, 2025 was made by JD and seconded by MP. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***
- *Motion to approve the DECA overnight field trip conference in Orlando was made by HR and seconded by JC. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

6. Superintendent's Administrative Report

BB reported that in the past month, significant progress has been made on various initiatives and projects. The district was invited into the MSBA pipeline for a school building project at Doyon. BB met with contractors working on several ongoing school projects. The safety film for the school was successfully completed, and the rekeying of two elementary schools was finalized. The PAC hallway flooring is in progress, with the final phase of the MS/HS flooring project slated for completion this summer. BB was out of the office from December 8 to January 16 for knee replacement surgery. BB spent time visiting schools, meeting with the Athletic Director, and addressing ongoing facilities issues. Additionally, BB had discussions with Adam Mullen regarding personnel matters and reviewed departmental budgets with Tom. BB met with the Town Planner to discuss safe routes to school. Key meetings included subcommittee sessions, the Tri-Board meeting, and a Zoom call with legal to address a personnel issue currently under review.

BB addressed the recent closing of the Paul F. Doyon Memorial School due to heating issues. BB explained that both boilers had shut down, causing temperatures to lower to a point that school needed to be cancelled for the day. BB confirmed that the boilers were original to the building. BB also addressed the inconsistencies with heat at Doyon that is attributed to the length and design of the building.

BB also shared an update on the classroom at Winthrop with the foul smell. Facilities believe the origin of the smell has been identified and work is currently underway to address the issue and ensure that it does not happen again.

BB shared an update on the flooding in the MS/HS cafeteria.

7. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- **Budget Subcommittee:** Met with administrators to discuss the upcoming budget, focusing on the bigger picture.
- **Communications Subcommittee:** Reviewed the process of releasing newsletters. Because the School Committee will not meet again before the release of the January newsletter, DF reviewed the potential newsletter topics and asked for an informal approval of the newsletter. There was a discussion about the communication plan surrounding the elementary building project.
- **Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board:** met. The group met and discussed the upcoming hearing on Tuesday regarding the Five Corners area. Great information and questions were raised, and discussions are ongoing.
- **Strategic Planning Committee:** Rick Clark (DPW) raised concerns about the cost of some items, such as roofs and boilers, thinking they were low. BB will revisit the numbers. The group also questioned the assumed MSBA reimbursement rate, suggesting it be based on the rate from the last project instead of historical data. Clarification is needed on the origin of these numbers. JC asked when the reimbursement percentage will be known, to which KE replied it will be far down the road and very specific. KE emphasized the need to align dates now that there are firmer dates from MSBA and Whittier.
- **Feoffees Policy Working Group:** Met tonight and reviewed a new application form, and discussed moving the timeline. HR inquired about communication between the Paine Grant Committee and the School Committee. The working will review the rubric at the next meeting. The working group also discussed end of year reporting.

8. High School Student Representative Report

CQ reviewed results from a student survey distributed by the Student Advisory Committee. The largest concerns noted were around school lunches, bathrooms, HVAC system, school culture and athletics/gym. CQ then highlighted common themes around students' favorite parts of school, which included R Block, music and fine arts, friends, school events, AP classes, and sports.

9. Finance Report

TM reviewed the year-to-date spending report, noting that the budget is on track with 53% spent, including retro pay for school-based staff and 5 out of 6 bargaining units. As of December, revolving/gift account balances remain strong, with 40% of the accounts actively used. TM discussed the new accounting system for Feoffee funds and indicated that he would share a monthly report for Feoffee Grant spending going forward. TM reviewed an updated FY26 budget timeline, noting that the public hearing has been moved to February 27th. A brief discussion occurred around the budget process, timeline for the presentations to the Finance Committee and what will eventually be voted on at Town Meeting. Lastly, TM reported that the school department had no findings in their most recent audit.

10. Presentations

A. Tri-Board Recap

DF reviewed each agenda item at the most recent Tri-Board meeting, seeking feedback from the committee.

- **Whittier Tech Project:** The Whittier School Committee representative is doing a good job with communication.
- **Water Treatment Facility Plan:** HR noted the social media outreach and communication plan.
- **Noresco Project Next Steps:** JD shared that the town plans to move forward with smaller-scale items, excluding the solar panels for the carpools. DF acknowledged that while the three boards had supported the full project, and she still stands by the original plan, she is happy to see a revised proposal. HR expressed that the Select Board should have sought feedback earlier before making a decision. It would have been helpful to understand the reasoning behind the decision to move forward with a scaled back plan for NORESCO. KE raised concerns about how the project would be funded.
- **MSBA Update:** BB mentioned that the dates shared at the meeting were from the letter received from MSBA after the acceptance, with additional dates coming from the MSBA website. HR asked if there was a bulleted list of talking points. BB explained that notes were written based on the MSBA letter. KE clarified that while the town was accepted, the process doesn't start for Ipswich until July. HR pointed out that Whittier follows a different timeline. DF confirmed that the town has been assigned a liaison at MSBA. BB had a meeting with an MSBA representative to review the timeline ahead of the tri-board meeting. It was confirmed that the town will vote on funding for the feasibility study at STM in October. BB added that the MSBA needs confirmation that the town has the funding for the feasibility study before they vote to move Ipswich forward in the process. HR asked if speeding up certain tasks would be beneficial as a show of good faith. BB responded that it's unclear whether speeding up the timeline would benefit the town, as some tasks may be quicker, while others will take more time, and there's no way to jump ahead in the process.
- **Strategic Planning:** As the Strategic Planning Committee nears the end of their work, there was a discussion at the Tri-Board meeting about whether to focus on all the proposed projects or prioritize the eight most urgent ones. A new approach was suggested, considering the tax burden on taxpayers and exploring whether there is an appetite for tax increases. The group was asked if there should be a cap on the maximum increase, with an exercise presented for those willing to participate. The School Committee was reminded that, as part of the committee, they should focus on school-related priorities and consider these through the lens of the school's needs. If any members wished to fill out the form provided to the committee at the Tri-Board meeting, they should submit the completed form to KE.
- **General Fund:** No feedback was provided.

B. Policy Update

DF presented policies that were reviewed and updated by the Policy Subcommittee. Those policies included:

ECAC, ECAF, ECF, EDBA, EDC, EEA, EEAE, EEAEA, EEAEA-1, EEAE, JICC, EEAG, EEAJ, EFC, EFD, EFE, EHAA, EHB, EIBA, GA, GBA, GBEA, GBEB, GBEB, GBEB, GBEB, GBEC, GBED, GBEE, GBGB, GBGF, GBI, GBJ, GBK, GCA, GCBA, GCB, GCBC, GCC/GDC, and JICJ.

- *Motion to approve the updated policy revisions made by the Policy Subcommittee as discussed tonight was made by KE and seconded by HR. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

11. New Business*

No new business was presented.

12. Consent Agenda

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

13. Executive Session:

- *Motion to enter into executive session pursuant to M.G.L. chapter 30A, sec. 21(a) for the following purpose (2)To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for contract negotiations with non-union personnel was made by JD and seconded by KE.*

Roll Call

Motion passed unanimously

Return to Open Session

13. Adjournment

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

Meeting adjourned at 10:29 PM.