

Ipswich School Committee
Thursday, December 12, 2024
MS/HS Ensemble Room
134 High Street, Ipswich
7:00 PM

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

DF called the meeting to order.

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

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

2. Reading of the District Mission Statement

CQ read the mission statement.

3. Announcements and Special Acknowledgements

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, January 16th at 7:00 PM in the MS/HS Ensemble Room.
- The School Committee will not be meeting on December 19th or January 2nd.
- The following subcommittees will meet:
 - Budget Subcommittee: December 17th at 4:00 PM
 - Policy Subcommittee: December 17th at 5:30 PM
- Schools will be closed Monday, December 23rd through Wednesday, January 1st for Winter Break. School will resume on Thursday, January 2nd.
- BB acknowledged fall sports accomplishments.
- JC acknowledged the Middle School chorus concert.
- JC acknowledged the Green Team's toy and clothing swap.
- The Ipswich Interact Club has their annual Jingle Bell Walk this weekend.

4. Public Comments¹

DF read the statement of public comment. There were no public comments.

5. Community Presentations

A. Middle School Handbook Update

Middle School principal, Peter Ginolfi, discussed an update to the Middle School Student Handbook. This policy discussed inappropriate physical contact. The update states that should inappropriate physical contact occur, the following consequences would be in effect:

1. First Offense: Parent notification, restorative justice intervention, possible detention
2. Second Offense: Parent notification, possible loss of privileges, detention, restorative justice intervention

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.

3. Third Offense: Parent notification, school detention, loss of privileges, possible in-school suspension

Mr. Ginolfi clarified what restorative justice interventions are and that students are not singled out during restorative justice circles. Mr. Ginolfi explained what horseplay is vs. inappropriate physical contact. Inappropriate physical contact is when students are angry and there is an act aggressive in nature with each other, but not to a point of a full blown fight. In the handbook, this new language would be included between horseplay and physical fighting.

➤ *Motion to support the change in the Middle School Handbook as presented was made by KE and seconded by JD. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

B. Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Group Presentation

Chris Chapman, member of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board, gave a brief update on the work of the board.

- Since the last SC presentation, there was a grant window opportunity run by the Mass DOT Safe Routes to School Program. Unfortunately, the advisory board did not apply for any projects within that grant window. The board identified that the 30 day grant window was not enough time to identify an issue and get the grant application submitted.
- In order to prepare for the next grant cycle, the advisory board needs to have a list of priorities that is communicated with and agreed to by the Select Board, School Committee, and DPW. These priorities need to be pre-quoted so the next time the grant window opens, the advisory board will be ready to submit a grant.
- The advisory board has been proactively working with Dr. Blake and the Planning Board to get feedback from the town about what are some priority areas that people would like to bike or walk to school, where people are trying to cross the road or are there areas where the sidewalks have fallen into disrepair.
- There is a preliminary list that has been shared with the Planning Department.
- The advisory board heard there is a walkability audit that the state is trying to run. They are looking to pull in nearby town resources to use as training sessions. If we go to apply for grant funds, having the results from that walkability audits helps determine how the state will respond to grant applications. The audit is taking place in Beverly, but it will be used to train people on how to do audits in their own communities.
- The advisory board has heard from the Winthrop School Council that they are preparing for a bike rodeo in the spring. There are state resources that can be brought in to help conduct the bike rodeo. Bringing this up for awareness for the school committee and that the advisory board is here to help support similar events at Doyon, the middle and high schools.

Mr. Chapman confirmed that it is important to the grant application process that there is support from the Town/boards. As volunteers, the advisory committee cannot write the grants or allocate town funding, but they can help facilitate. Mr. Chapman also shared how the community can connect with the advisory board.

Mr. Chapman answered questions about the Mass DOT grant application process and timing. He also talked about additional grant opportunities. He then talked about how projects and concerns are being prioritized.

6. Superintendent's Administrative Report (Taken out of order)

BB presented his administrative report which included:

- Working with contractors that will be beginning work on various projects over winter break
- Participated in two REDI sessions presented by the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents
- Attended an Administrative team meeting that included budget preparation and a review of the new collective bargaining unit contracts
- The work in the Winthrop classroom has been completed and students are not back in the classroom
- DEI Team meeting
- Various subcommittee meetings
- Ipswich Aware meeting to discuss programming for next year
- Ipswich has been invited to participate in the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) Board meeting on 12/13 which is a hopeful sign that Ipswich will be invited into the MSBA pipeline

There was a brief discussion on what could be next steps if Ipswich is invited into the MSBA pipeline and how those decisions are made.

BB talked about the Capital Plan request process, what was included in the Capital Plan and next steps. KE asked if the Budget Subcommittee could have access to the Capital Plan.

7. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports

- **Budget Subcommittee:** The group has a meeting planned with the Administrative Team to discuss the FY26 budget planning.
- **Communications Subcommittee:** The group prepared the newsletter for this month. The contents of the newsletter was reviewed. It will be sent out next Tuesday.
- **Feoffee Policy Working Group:** The group is making good progress reworking the process. We think the process will inform that policy.
- **Elementary School Building Project Working Group:** Have not met. SS reiterated that the School Committee intends to study model schools in partnership with MSBA as part of the normal vetting process should Ipswich be invited into the MBSA. Next steps, if invited in, is getting familiar with next steps and timelines. HR asked for members to think about FAQs around the building project.
- **Ipswich Education Foundation:** The group met last Monday and continues to do some work filling in gaps for funding. They are going on a big fundraising push and are also looking for new members.
- **Strategic Planning Committee:** Met on the 10th. KE reviewed changes to the model and projects. The SPC wanted to check in with the School Committee regarding some items that seem redundant.

8. High School Student Representative Report

CQ reported that students are looking forward to winter break. The Student Advisory Council plans to do a survey for students ahead of break.

9. Finance Report

- TM reviewed the operating budget monthly report, the revolving, gift, and stabilizing fund report, as well as the budget timeline. TM shared that the FY25 budget is progressing well and as planned. As of this meeting, 46.5% of the budget has been expended. The revolving and stabilization balances remain healthy and as planned. The budget calendar was reviewed.

10. Presentations

A. Elementary School Building Project Discussion and School Tour Recap

SS reviewed the general guidelines the School Committee used when touring the newly built elementary school in Swampscott. Those guidelines included:

- Flexible and adaptive environments
- Safety, security, and accessible
- Design and aesthetic

MP: This was the first time that I've seen a building/project that is more in line with what Ipswich may be facing in terms of school size, challenges, etc. The building was large from the outside, but the inside felt warm and comfortable. Loved how they did the neighborhoods and had spaces that could be used for multiple purposes. The superintendent was helpful in discussing the challenges they had to go through both from a town perspective and bringing together different cultures. They have a parking problem that they are trying to solve. This was a school/feeling that I thought could connect back to us.

JD: Felt this was what we needed to see. Liked the neighborhood hallways and themes they had. Liked the conference room/lobby access in proximity to the classrooms. Liked the stage and cafeteria and convertible seating that was centrally located in the building. Liked the gym, but also on the dislike list. I disliked the scale of the building and the common areas in the neighborhoods. The overall size for a K-4 was interesting. Nine sections per grade seemed like a lot. I thought the cafeteria was large and having 400 students per lunch period is not where I think kids should be having lunch. There was no grass area outside for the students. The media center was cool, but seemed empty. The lobby, although well thought out, felt large. I loved the kindergarten classrooms with restrooms inside. I liked the instrumental rooms being separate. I liked the large gym. I liked the bullet proof glass on the lower level and the security system was excellent. I liked the superintendent. It was obvious she brought the leadership the community needed. My take home is that the MSBA works with each town to get what is best for each town.

HR: Liked the neighborhoods. Having flexible space in the center and smaller groups within the pods created unique opportunities for learning. Having cubbies in the rooms made sense. Seeing the bullet proof glass and both entryways having vestibules felt secure. I liked how the administrative offices were laid out. Like how the superintendent thought of the administrative structure ahead of time. The technology integration was insane. The elevator for accessibility was good. I liked their themes of ocean, sand, and wood. Felt disoriented at times, thinking the themes could be more present. I like how centralized the gym and cafeteria were. I liked how intentional they were in the choices that they made. My biggest takeaway is that this is such a huge opportunity for us.

JC: The school was in a beautiful setting with a lot of windows. I like the classroom sizes and what was in them. I liked the stage in the cafeteria and the seating. I liked how the gym could be divided into three sections. The alternative classrooms were good. I think the size was large for that age group. It was built for 900 and there were 750 students. They built for 20% more than current enrollment. We would need to consider how buses approach the new school. The size of the town vs. Ipswich is very different. Overall, they did a lot with the space that they had.

KE: This was closest to what Ipswich might be interested in. The size was similar and it was laid out with an upper school and a lower school. Visually, it was a large school from the outside, but it did not feel large on the inside. I liked that there were two distinct entrances for the two age groups. I liked the neighborhood set up with four classrooms, with a flex space in the middle. Each grade level had 8-9 sections. You were able to get a good sense of where you were in the building based on the colors and tiles. I liked the library, it was thoughtfully designed. They were really smart with strategic planning around the administrative team and staffing, and community building. Some of the spaces felt sparse, but they have not been in the building for that long. We could learn a lot from this district's approach. The safety and technology were amazing.

DF: Seeing the school made me realize that we can build a large school that still feels small. Everything was intentional and laid out well. There were minimal travel times between common areas. I liked how grade levels didn't need to walk by other grade levels in transitions. They were intentional about their Special Education spaces. It was a green building. They were able to uphold their commitment to staying within budget. Parking was a problem and there was no community space for families to drive and park ahead of school. Having the staff between schools get together was intentional. The PTO's collaborated together ahead of the project.

BB: I loved the building and the site, although it was tight. I liked the configuration they had, the upper and lower schools. They did a great job with the technology and the high safety standards. The thoughtful layout was good. The gym and cafeteria spaces were large. The stage was great where they could do full performances. The way they brought the two schools together was smart. Classrooms and teams were mixed up and not one school against the other. They built a shared culture for that building. They did a lot of community tours when it was safe to enter the building. The build felt a bit empty but only because it is brand new. They did not bring anything from the two older buildings with them. It's important to think about what we liked and didn't like as we plan our own project. If that was a model school, I would say "build it tomorrow".

KE: There seems to be thoughtful collaboration between the lower and upper grades. There was no mention about noise or flow of students within the building. It doesn't mean they don't have problems, but nothing was mentioned.

BB: If there are additional questions for Swampscott or if there are additional tours that you would like to have, please let BB know. It may be helpful for administrators, teachers, or members of town boards to tour the building.

JC: I want to make it clear that we did not deliberate while at the site. BB asked the questions and School Committee members listened and took notes.

The discussion continued about potential configurations and the timing of those decisions.

11. New Business*

No new business was presented.

12. Consent Agenda

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

13. Adjournment

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

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM