

TOWN OF IPSWICH  
Finance Committee Minutes  
March 7, 2023  
Ipswich Town Hall, Meeting Room A  
25 Green St. Ipswich, MA

With a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:30pm.

Finance Committee members present: Michael Dougherty, Emilie Smith, Walter Hartford, Michael Schaaf, Ken Swenson, Joseph Bourque, Rob White, Robert Chambers, Jamie Fay

**1. Welcome – Michael Dougherty**

- Michael welcomed Dr. Blake, the principals, and the School Committee. Michael went over the agendas for the upcoming meetings.
- Kate Elliot, Chair of the School Committee introduced Tom Markham, Director of Finance and Operations. Kate also thanked the budget subcommittee for all of their work.

**2. Citizens Queries – Michael Dougherty**

- None

**3. Meeting Minutes to Approve – Michael Dougherty**

- None

**Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Hearing:  
Schools – Budget Overview, Winthrop, Doyon**

**4. FY 2024 School Budget Overview – K. Elliot/ Dr. Blake**

Dr. Blake said this is his 6<sup>th</sup> year with Ipswich schools. He presented the FY24 budget and said it represents a collaborative effort to meet the current and future needs of the students. Much of the budget was put together by the former finance director, Cheryl. Tom has come up to speed quickly and has done a great job of providing the team with additional information regarding the budget. Dr. Blake went over how the budget subcommittee helped to build the budget. The original budget presented an 8.2% increase. After cutting some items and looking for other funding sources, the budget presented now has a much lower increase. Dr. Blake thanked the leadership team and the budget subcommittee for their hard work at putting the budget together. The vision and mission of the schools has not changed. Dr. Blake went over the strategy for district improvement and frameworks for success. This year the schools underwent an overview from the DESE and received favorable reviews with some areas for growth. The budget presented tonight has an increase of 5.79%. They are adding 4.62 FTE's. The projected budget amount is \$37, 580,266. Dr. Blake went over the superintendent's budget, the choice funds, health insurance expenses, and funding sources. He also went over enrollment totals and new positions. Both elementary schools have requested full time assistant principals to support a variety of needs. The assistant principals will meet with parents and teachers, conduct home visits with students, supervise safety in the building and at recess, assist with conflict resolution amongst both students and staff, and create and implement disciplinary plans.

**5. Winthrop School– A. Sullivan**

Amy Sullivan, Principal of the Winthrop School, is in her second year as a principal in Ipswich. Amy presented an overview of the Winthrop Budget and school mission, and gave a summary of the school improvement plan. The school is in its first year of the school improvement plan. The first goal focuses on meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of all students. To achieve this goal the team looks at data and develops targeted interventions for students who need additional support. Under this goal the team has also been looking at safety measures, parent communication, and social emotional curriculum. The second goal is to create innovative learning environments. The

team will do this through supporting and extending the World Language Program, implementing ways for students to have ownership of their own learning, and continuing to develop place-based education. They also plan to reimagine project-based learning, build upon literacy practices, and renew and sustain Responsive Classroom practices. The third goal is to build best practices to support diversity, equity, and inclusion. They will do this by providing cultural enrichment, examining school traditions through the lens of cultural inclusion, and providing outreach and support to welcome families and foster partnerships with the ELL population.

Amy then presented the Winthrop budget. The budget increase is \$277,485 with a net budget increase of 5.54%. There is a new paraeducator to support student need and IEP's in kindergarten and grade one. The extended school year budget has increased as well. Winthrop houses summer programming for any elementary school student in Ipswich, but the budget is in the Winthrop school. There is also an increase of \$5k in purchased services to fund contracted therapy services. In administration, there is an increase due to the assistant principal role. Amy also went over the enrollment numbers and showed the budget breakdown and comparisons.

Michael asked if a preschooler typically already has an IEP established upon entering preschool. Amy said the preschoolers that they support typically come to them from early intervention and have already been identified. Any parent can have their child go through the preschools developmental screening to make sure their child is meeting milestones. But the majority of students that come into the program are children that have already had intervention services.

Amy also went through funding sources. Winthrop is a Title 1 school which is established by the number of students that qualify for free and reduced lunch. Through the title 1 grant they receive payment for part of the reading and math specialists 1 full time paraeducator, and an administrative secretary. They also receive a Burley Fund grant for library supplies, and IDEA Grant, and they have a special education revolving fund. The ESSER funds will last through next year. Emilie asked about the IDEA grant that funds 5.5 FTE's. Amy said the IDEA grant is ongoing. It's an entitlement grant but they also had additional funds in the grant last year due to the federal stimulus plan. Emilie asked if there is a risk of it going away. Amy explained that how much they receive can fluctuate from year to year.

Amy discussed the need for the assistant principal, and said she has always had an assistant principal in the other schools she has worked in. For new teachers, there are 7 observations and write ups. This year there are 8 new teachers, so that is 56 observations and write ups. Then she also has to do an observation and write up for all of the other teachers in the school. Having an assistant principal would allow Amy to share in the work load and allow her to have more connections with families and teachers. Joe asked about the enrollment comparison between the two schools and said Doyon had an additional slot for the k/1 classroom. Amy said they do not have a multi-graded classroom although she has in previous schools. The group this year has a lot of needs so there is no need for a multi-graded classroom currently. Walter asked about the special ed revolving fund and asked what funds that. Amy said she believes it comes from tuition over the years but she will double check.

Jamie asked how many FTE's are at Winthrop. It's 67.5 FTE's and 81 staff total. There are well over 50 teachers and 21 classrooms. Jamie asked Amy how she manages the staff. Amy said the teachers are amazing in terms of their dedication and collaboration. They have a teacher leadership team, a program manager that oversees special education, a school adjustment counselor that helps with family needs, a district school liaison that helps with attendance needs and parent communications. The school resource officer helps with ALICE training or school planning, and they also have an administrative secretary and administrative assistant. Jamie also asked about MCAS and what they are learning from that. Amy said MCAS is just one piece of all of the assessments they look at. Last year the scores came in strong at grade three. The STEM scores at grade five were also very strong. More often than not, day to day progress monitoring is what is used to guide the trajectory of curriculum and instruction. Jamie said he noticed the goals do not specifically mention academic achievement.

Michael S. said the Special Ed budget has increased 8.6%, and asked why that is. Amy said it's the additional paraeducator, the contracted services, and extended school year. Michael asked how many students are usually on the waitlist. Amy said 10 students. Michael asked about the condition of the school. Dr. Blake said the buildings continue to deteriorate. The staff does the best they can but it is putting band aids on things and the more patches we put on the more leaks we find. Ken asked what percentage of students are taking the MCAS. Amy said they have to take attendance rates

into account and they also provide alternative assessments for some students.

Rob asked what the school adjustment counselor does. Amy said she problem solves with students, works with students and classrooms with day to day situations, she goes into classrooms to teach social thinking curriculum, and is the 504 coordinator. Rob asked if they have in their goals a plan to close the gap between the pre-pandemic scores and the post-pandemic scores. Amy said they focus on this on a daily basis and double dose the curriculum a lot. Formal intervention would include an 8-week plan where they track a student's intervention and if it's not working they would refer for testing. They are also starting a tutoring program and would like to grow that program through grants so it can be offered more consistently throughout the year.

Kate said she is in support of the request for the assistant principals. This is a request that has been in the budget for 5 years, even with the prior administration. They have looked at all possibilities including eliminating other positions and having the assistant principal take on those additional responsibilities, and have been told that would not work. The schools are facing so many needs post-pandemic, and we need to give them the support that is needed for the students. Michael said he thinks messaging will be key so the town understands the need.

## **6. Doyon School – S. Goodale-O'Brien**

Sarah Goodale-O'Brien is in her second year as the principal at the Doyon School. Sarah presented the mission and gave a summary of the school improvement goals. The first goal is centered on the social emotional health of students. In order to achieve this goal, they use the responsive classroom philosophy which follows and values each individual student in the classroom. They also do weekly meetings that bring the whole student body together. The second goal is centered on the schedule. This is the end of a two-year school improvement cycle so they are making some changes this year. They have now gone to a block schedule which allows students to really dive into what they are learning, and have integrated a flex block which works well with intervention services. They are also focusing heavily on balancing indoor and outdoor time. The third goal is about embracing the cultural, ethnic, and gender identity of students and families. They continue their work with the district wide Diversity Equity Inclusion Committee, and Doyon has established a no place for hate group through the Student Leadership Team. They also focus on culturally responsive instruction and teaching. Lastly, the fourth goal is centered on communication and collaboration which includes improving the physical spaces and outdoor spaces. There is a new playground structure being built this spring, and they are valuing student voices and student leaders.

Budget highlights include preschool increases which reflect a large enrollment increase and a large needs-based increase. They will be opening a fourth classroom, and rather than it being an integrated classroom it will be a severe disabilities classroom. They are also adding the assistant principal position. Teachers expressed needs for updated instructional supplies and classroom materials, so that is also in the budget. The school is projecting a consistent number of students next year. Sarah also presented a breakdown of the funding sources.

Michael asked how the k-1 class is going. This is the first year of the class and Sarah said it is going well. Children do not necessarily grow in categories. They are doing their grade level curriculum, but also helping and supporting each other and getting what they need from their teachers when they need it. Michael asked if the preschool programs are tied to which schools the students will go to for kindergarten. Sarah said they try to place children where they will go in the future but sometimes they can't. Michael asked Sarah if she had an assistant principal at the last school she was at. Sarah said she was at a private school and there was a much larger number of administrators compared to staff.

Emilie asked if preschool and kindergarten is full day or half day. Kindergarten is full day all week and preschool is full day, but depending on placement may not be every day. Emilie asked what the gaps are now that the assistant principal will fill. She asked for a job description comparing the two. Sarah said the assistant principal will be providing more supports particularly to faculty. Having the instructional leadership will allow for more planning and less reactive leadership. Rob said he fears that the vice principal's interactions with parents may make it so the principal no longer interacts with parents as much. Sarah said she believes that all involvement is good involvement.

Walter asked if the new positions are in the special ed line in the budget, or are they in the salaries line. Sarah said the preschool special needs teacher is in the special education line. Jamie asked about MCAS. Sarah said they saw some

wonderful things come through this year. Teachers spent a lot of time diving in and looking at the details provided by the state. They are able to look at every standard, every classroom, how they compare to other schools, as well as student growth. They have a lot of work to do but they saw a lot of student growth. Their 5<sup>th</sup> grade scores in science and engineering were very high compared to other schools. Jamie asked if they could request the information, Sarah said she can send it along and is happy to talk about it offline. Michael S. asked if we are seeing an increase in the number of students requiring special education services. Sarah said yes, partly because the state is requiring more of the schools. Michael asked why it appears only 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of students go to preschool. Sarah said that only reflects the students that attend public preschool. There are many private preschool programs as well. Michael asked if there are students that would like to attend preschool but can't because of funding. Sarah said no, but there are students that would like to attend and can't because of space. Michael asked about increasing student population and if there are any hindrances. Sarah said the building is a hindrance. We won't have space for everyone. We also are unable to offer full time preschool because of space limitations. Rob asked what percentage of students have IEP's, Sarah said she they have around 20%. Rob asked about the students that entered kindergarten in 2019 and asked if they have any MCAS scores from that group yet. Sarah said they will take the MCAS this year for the first time, but the fourth and fifth graders now were also heavily effected and will be taking MCAS as well. Michael asked about the playground updates, Sarah said they were able to get funding from the FEOFFEE's and from parent donors. They were able to fully fund the first phase of the playground which is being installed in April. The playground will be moveable to go to a new location when needed.

Jamie asked how many FTE's are at Doyon, Sarah said 83 and most are full time. Jamie asked if there is a list of FTE's in the budget book, Sarah said there is. Jamie asked if all 83 people report to Sarah, or is there a leadership team. Sarah said she is the only licensed administrator in the school so technically she is the one that is in charge of the staff and students. The leadership team includes the special education staff and special education manager, a student adjustment counselor, and the teachers. Emilie said that is helpful to understand in regards to the need for the assistant vice principal. It is crazy that one person has 84 direct reports so it is very understandable to add the vice principal role.

Jamie said he is concerned with the sustainability of the growing budget and positions and said we can't keep going like this forever. Michael S. said he is looking forward to the analysis on sustainability. Michael S. asked about the choice funds increasing, Dr. Blake said that is money that is being spent form the revolving fund to offset healthcare costs and IT. Rob asked what the revolving fund balance is. It was \$1.594M and with the planned expenditures this year it will be \$1.511M. They plan on using \$560k next year. Dr. Blake said in the past they had a lot of students coming in for school choice because of the new high school. Now a lot of the surrounding towns have newer schools and we are not seeing the numbers of applicants for school choices as we have in the past. At this point there are 57 incoming school choice students and 14 outgoing. Jamie said he thinks the characterization of the physical buildings is one part, but the real driver used to be the music and arts program. Michael S. asked about the "required positions" that are being added, Dr. Blake said that is the additional ELL positions because they are mandated to provide services for the students in need and we don't have enough coverage for those students. Rob asked how many layoffs would happen if the ESSER Funds disappear, Dr. Blake said 6. Rob said we should see how many people take health insurance and perhaps offer an incentive for people who don't take the insurance. Dr. Blake said he used to have a benefit where he received extra money if he didn't take the health insurance and he liked it. Emilie wondered if it would be a cost savings or not. Rob asked about Chapter 70 money. The increase last year was \$540k, this year is about \$200k ballpark. It will gradually go down over the next few years. Michael said he was surprised by the positions funded through other funding sources. One thing we should consider is that we just spent a decent amount of time discussing the administrative support needed, but it looks like we have about 4 FTE's funded with ESSER funds alone. Michael said he would hate to see them fund the assistant principals in the budget and then we lose the ESSER funds and have to lose those other funding sources and positions. Are we going to be able to absorb all of these costs on top of the assistant principals?

## 7. New/Old Business – Michael Dougherty

- none

## 8. Adjourn – Michael Dougherty

- Motion to adjourn made by Joe, seconded by Jamie  
→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Respectfully Submitted By  
Alyson von der Esch  
3-14-23