

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Finance Committee
Meeting of March 12, 2020
Town Hall, 25 Green Street

With a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:41.

Finance Committee members present: Janice Clements-Skelton, Michael Dougherty, Walter Hartford, Michael Schaaf, Joseph Bourque, Timothy Goodrich, Rob White, Jamie Fay

1. Citizens Queries – Janice Clements-Skelton

- none

2. Acceptance of Finance Committee Minutes – Janice Clements-Skelton

- Motion to approve minutes from February 13th and February 20th made by Rob and seconded by Joe.
→*Vote: Motion passed unanimously, 8-0*

FY21 Ipswich Public Schools Budget Review

3. Opening Statement and Q&A – Dr. Blake & Principals

Dr. Blake said that he met with the Leadership Team this morning and he sent out a letter to the Ipswich School community and he discussed the current precautions being taken. He also went over a few corrections from Tuesday night's budget slides. One correction was that the Recreation Budget is continuing to support some programs at \$7,500. Also, within the time period between when the budget was presented to the School Committee and then to the Finance Committee there were some changes that had been made to the Special Education Budget, and Dr. Blake showed the updated slides. The information has been updated in the budget and in the presentation slides.

Dr. Blake then went over questions from FinCom. Questions and answers are as follows:

- How much money is left in the Ipswich Athletic Fund, how much was distributed last year, and who decides how it gets distributed?
 - There is approximately \$90,000 in the Ipswich Educational Foundation Athletic Fund. Nothing has been distributed so far. The IEF decides how it is distributed based on requests that Tom makes. Historically, they have funded things that are not funded in the budget such as replacing uniforms for teams and looking at equipment needs.
- How much money and where do the athletic ticket fees go? How are they distributed?
 - The money is deposited into the Athletic Revolving Account and is used to supplement the budget. This past year \$22,900 was generated. That fund also receives all of the payments that that students pay to be a part of sports. Everything that is funded for athletics comes from there.
 - The revolving account is handled by the schools.
- How does the Ipswich Education Fund Work?
 - IEF is redefining its protocol. In the past, requests have come through the Athletic Department Office and then IEF decides what to fund.
 - Rob said this is funded by a TIFF from the Biolabs and it is going away. Dr. Blake said the TIFF funds IEF for other purposes but it doesn't fund athletics. Dr. Blake said the TIFF funded a lot of the STEAM work and professional development opportunities. That was \$10,000 that they no longer get, but it had nothing to do with athletics. The IEF is an umbrella fund that has several groups under it, one of which being athletics.
- Why is Title 1 being reduced?
 - The title 1 fund is federal money which is being reduced state wide because the number of students that are eligible has been dropping.
- What is the present and future school choice plan and strategy?
 - This is a conversation that is being had at the School Committee level. Over the years there has been a significant change in the number and type of students that we are receiving for school choice. Historically there were many more students choosing into the system because of the situations in the sending districts.

The districts surrounding us have more up-to-date facilities now so the need has dried up. The town is opening up seats for school choice and they are not filling up, therefore, conversations are being had about whether or not we should participate in the school choice program. Dr. Blake said from a personal perspective there are some parameters that need to be put into place if we are going to continue to accept students, such as cut-off dates. Currently we are seeing a lot of students choicing in that are leaving other districts half way through the year. This isn't always for the best reason. The town is required by law to vote every year if they are going to participate in school choice, but once a student is in the district they will always be in the system.

- Walter asked about the \$1M in the existing fund for school choice. Barry said they draw down on it each year and that balance is getting lower. Walter asked what the drawdown is for. It is used to support the budget for hardware for IT, for insurance, and discretionary spending for principals. It has also been used on occasion for unexpected costs. There was a huge bump 20 years ago when the Middle School/High School went online, but now that other districts are also upgrading their facilities so it has gone down.
- Jamie asked what the balance is between choice-in and choice-out. Dr. Blake said it is 40 students choicing in and 14 tuition students out.
- Joe asked how much it costs. Joanne said we get \$5,000 per choice-in student and we pay out \$5,000 per choice-out student. It's slightly higher if the student is on an IEP. Walter asked where we see the money going out for tuition students, it comes off of the top.
- Has the expansion of the after-school program started or launched this year, what are the programs, and are they included in the FY21 budget? Rob said that the Recreation Department presentation showed a lack of funding for the youth, they said it was because the school would cover this. Rob asked what the after-school programming is and what it looks like.
 - Funding comes from a variety of sources. The Recreation Department, the Payne Grant, and some budgeted funds. Michael asked if there is a fee for the students, there is not.
 - Jamie asked if the Payne Grants are restricted to going to the schools as a recipient, or can they be expended to other organizations. Barry said they are re-writing the policy and anyone is eligible to make a proposal, but they have to be connected with a staff member from one of the schools. If an outside agency wanted to do something for the students, they would need a staff member to co-chair with them. This is by policy.
- In the past EDP had a large balance, can this be used?
 - The EDP fund is only for students enrolled in the program. Rob asked if that is trapped money or can we get at it in any way. Joanne said the way that fund was established was to receive tuition from families who send children there so it is intended for that use. The school does budget some of the money to support the budget for some building expenses. Currently, the budget is at \$68,000.
- Dr. Blake had Tracey put together a slide deck of the MCAS results historically by grade level and it was sent out to FinCom.
 - Are we above 50% growth in all areas?
 - Tracey Wagner, Director of Teacher and Learning. SGP should be between 40%-60%. She looks for growth within that range and also looks at it from year to year. The slide show lists SGP's for all grades and content areas.
 - Rob asked if there were any scenarios in any grades that were underperforming where they saw a need and then funded it in the budget? The goal is to make sure the budget is reaching the kids who need it. Tracey said that they use a range of metrics, not just MCAS, but the budget very much supports student needs based on the variety of metrics they use to evaluate needs.
- Why is the World Language Program, the Lexia Program, and the Illustrative Math Program important for students?
 - Dr. Blake gave handouts to explain the importance of the three programs.
 - Sheila McAdams said the goals of The Winthrop School mirror the goals of the district. There has been a lot of work and discussion around benchmarking and what students are expected to do at the end of each school year. There are funds in the budget for this. They changed and articulated the benchmarks within a new reporting tool and there are funds for that as well. Awareness of global impact and cultural proficiencies and replacement needs for those components are also in the budget. There is also money in undistributed and library media that talks about global partnerships. The World Language Program is a big part of this. Lastly, there are funds sitting in undistributed, after school programs, and stipends, that

are for programs that will help to educate the whole child. Walter asked if they will still be able to give the proper support for Title 1 since they won't be getting as much funding. Sheila said they have money that they have put aside into the budget for tutoring and RTI support. Jamie asked about the effectiveness of the World Language Program since its only one teacher for 350 students. Sheila said so far, they are focusing on culture more than language. This year its k-2 and next year it will also include grades 3 and 4, and the following year will be through middle school as well. At the end of the proposal there will be 3 new staff members shared within the three schools.

- Sheila Halloran, Principal at Doyon, said that while they share a lot of the same goals as Winthrop they also have a few that are different. They are putting funding aside for Social Studies programming, Lexia for the entire school, and they are piloting a math program. They are also working on the responsive classroom approach. Rob asked if they have had any negative feedback from parents that is reflected in the budget. Sheila said one thing she has received a lot of feedback on is the new math program and so far, the feedback has been positive.
- How is the Foeffee Fund being used?
 - Sheila M. said they have a district-wide grant for place-based learning which is used for field trips. It helps with entrance fees and payments for families that need help. They also get money for professional development opportunities, for the World Language program, and for a social emotional grant which is used for after school opportunities. Lastly, they receive funding for snacks for all students. Rob asked if the Y provides snacks to kids without a fee, they do at the middle school but not the Elementary school.
- What are the details of the Middle School's Annual School Improvement Plan and what is funded in this budget.
 - Cathy McMahon, Middle School Principal, explained the four major objectives of the Middle School's School Improvement Plan. The first one is to examine the Middle School model. They are confident that the model has highly effective means of supporting students. Teachers have self-selected which one of the four objectives they will work on. The switch to a humanities and STEAM model has helped the school continue to meet the needs of all students even with shrinking enrollment and staff. The co-teaching model has also been very effective and has given all students access to special education teachers. They are also looking at the report card system because the old system did not look at the standards and what is being taught. They are doing a social emotional learning piece as well. They invented a co-taught class at the 6th grade level that is taught by the Health Teacher and the Guidance Counselor. The class has been very successful and will continue for all 6th grade students. This also allows students to get to know the Guidance Counselors so they have someone they know that they can talk to. The Middle School has also increased the School Psychologist position from a .8 position to a full-time position, has added a School Adjustment Counselor, and now has two Guidance Counselors. A lot of the money in the budget goes to strong after school programs including athletics, Chess Club, and Robotics. They also added a Kindness Club for staff and students in which they do all kinds of activities that make people feel good. The last part of the School Improvement Plan is the humanities model. With the integration of ELA throughout all curricular areas, and they are finding ELA and Social Studies have been meshing together really well. They also brought in Lexia as a pilot this year. This will give the teachers more data about each student and about how they are learning and progressing in their reading skills, and it provides intervention right away. They have used money from the Payne Grant to send teachers to professional development workshops to become better teachers of ELA. They are also looking into a writing curriculum across all grade levels.
 - Jamie thanked Cathy for her response to the School Improvement Plan and said it seems like she is really on top of everything.
- How many students are applying to private schools?
 - This year there are only 3 students applying to private schools, but there are 12 students applying to Essex Tech and 14 students applying to Whittier Tech. This has gone up significantly while the number of private school applicants has gone down. There are more and more students applying to technical schools and they are not all getting in, so they would like to look at what they can do at the Middle School for the students who want to go to tech school but can't. Rob asked how many students typically go to private and tech schools. This year there are 8 students at Essex and 24 at Whittier. Dr. Blake said he isn't surprised by the number of students going to tech programs because there is a shift happening that people are realizing not everyone has to go to college to make a decent living. Michael S. said that it could be a big issue if the tech schools are aiming to send students to college, because the goal of the tech schools is

sent students to trades and the town pays a lot of money to send students there. Cathy said she is also concerned about that because she sees a lot of students who would do well there and in the trades and they are not able to get in.

- Where is the Feoffee Funding going?
 - There was \$766,000 that was allocated to the system this past year. All of it was committed to projects. They have a number of mini grants that are teacher initiatives. Google Goggles that allow for world travel, new classroom furniture that promotes active engagement and focus, funding for speech therapists, and a ukulele program. They have also received funding for resources for 6th grade humanities team and science probes for grade 8. Place-based learning is funded by the Payne Grant and includes scholarships for ecology school and the 8th grade DC trip, and pays for the entire sustainability program for grade 7. They are also using it for in-district trainings.
- What parent feedback are you hearing?
 - Cathy said so far, they have kickstarted School Council again and that has been going well. It is aimed to share what is going on in the school. They are also doing a book club to promote interaction with parents. So far feedback has been all positive. One parent feedback they have heard needs work is the Middle School/ High School transition. They have formed a committee to look at this.
- Middle School enrollment is declining and is that an issue?
 - Michael S. said this was partially covered in the discussion about choice. He asked if Dr. Blake thinks this is an issue or not. Dr. Blake said that the way projections look today is that there may be a decline of students over the next few years. There are some housing projects going in that have potential for a lot of students. Dr. Blake mentioned “right sizing” the district which has to do with making sure class sizes are sized correctly for the number of students and making sure the staffing numbers are also correct. It is a moving target and changes as they respond to the numbers.
- What are schools doing to support underperforming students and has it been working?
 - They have a variety of programs that are in place and are being put in place to support students. The expansion of the Lexia program will be school-wide for both Elementary Schools. Teachers work with the data to identify students who need extra support and are able to identify where they need help. Michael S. asked what kind of tools are available to support students that are identified. Dr. Blake said they have tutoring available and teachers in co-taught classrooms are able to work with small groups within the classroom to target specific needs. If students need more direct intervention there are a variety of resources available through Special Education. Michael asked if they have the necessary resources to respond to needs. Dr. Blake said they use the resources they have to get the work done to the best of their ability.
- Walter asked if there was a potential school closure, how does the technology that they have deployed support this and what would the plan be.
 - Dr. Blake said it would be easier to deploy the technology at the Middle and High School levels, the Elementary Schools would present more challenges. They are meeting tomorrow to discuss this.
- Are there any plans to do anything with the AP classes that scored under 65%?
 - Jonathan Mitchell, High School Principal, said that AP Physics is typically one of the smaller AP classes, usually under 10 students. They still provide it though because it is an important class to have for students that need it. The only scores that are reported are classes 10 and above because one student could skew the data quickly. AP World and AP US both scored under 65% and they were taught by the same teacher. Jonathan said it is challenging to teach an AP course well and very challenging to teach two, so he thought it would be best to split the two classes so they are each taught by a different teacher. One of the history teachers went to training and now teaches one of the courses.
- How will the staff or FTE changes improve the school for the upcoming year?
 - Jonathan said they had to replace a .4 teacher last year who ran the Robotics Program. They were not able to find a replacement so they decided to make it a 1.0 position to make it more appealing, and this will also allow them to add more programs for Technology and Robotics. The BRiTE program, when proposed, had 2 FT positions, one is a Teacher and one is a Teacher Aid. It is a program to help students re-enter and re-engage in the school system after long term absences. It has been very successful in helping students catch up on work. They are also adding a .4 Health Teacher to free up the Athletic Director. The other teacher that teaches Health also teaches Biology. The Biology class size was high last year, so this will free up time for the Biology Teacher to add more sections of Biology. Creating the

additional RN position is also important because students physical and mental health needs are expanding.

- Outside of FTE's how will the school improve next year with the upcoming changes?
 - One of the challenges they have faced has been student attendance. They changed the attendance policy, put in the BRiTE program, and did social emotional trainings with teachers to improve attendance. They have also been looking at academic performance trends. The department heads are also trying to leverage the personnel and expertise in the department chairs. They are going to start to do walk-throughs and book studies, they want to do more frequent non-evaluative feedback from peers. This allows for teachers to give each other helpful feedback that will not appear in evaluations. The HS is also introducing CNC machining which will help students to learn a useful skill which can be used for a career in machining. There are pathways that are designed to help students get into college, but they are trying to also do a better job of preparing students for a career right after High School. They are designing classes which produce certificates so students can show what they can do, and one of those classes was designed around the CNC machines and curriculum. Jamie asked if Jonathan had a sense of how many students would be interested in this, Jonathan said he thinks it would be between 15 and 20 students. It would work well for students that wanted to go to Essex Tech or Whittier Tech and didn't get it. Jonathan also said that it would be great if we could invest in a few different trades and it will give students programs that they will know they can make money when they graduate. Jamie asked if we will actually be able to offer the type of training students need to be able to do the job after school. Jonathan said the curriculum will focus on basics so students can have some confidence and experience, and then can adapt to any job they find. There will still need to be on the job training but this is a start. Rob asked if Feoffee funds could cover any of this, Jonathan said they will ask for a Payne Grant for one of the machines, which costs between \$12,000-\$18,000.
- How have the Feoffee funds been used this year at the HS?
 - New hardware for the graphic design class, funded the summer reading program, social emotional programming, and BRiTE program. They have not used the Payne Grant for any salaries.
- What has the parent feedback been like at the HS?
 - Generally, parents seem very happy.
- Why is the department chairperson called out in the budget?
 - Rob asked if there is money associated with chairs. Joanna said there is a stipend amount that the chair is paid and each year there is a different person as chair, so it's not tied to any specific person.
- Why is SAT performance up?
 - Jonathan said English and Math Teachers are better preparing students for the test. Also, there has been a change in the State Frameworks which requires content area reading and that has been helpful.
- Does the Guidance Department work with students on scholarship opportunities outside of town business?
 - Students receive a list of scholarship opportunities that include small groups and businesses.
- Michael S. noted that there are two custodians being added and noted to FinCom that it might be useful to look at how well the town and schools are working together with maintenance.

4. Long Range Planning – Dr. Blake & Principals

Carl said every year they monitor the success of the override budget and they are starting to look at what to expect in the years ahead. They gave a presentation on how well the budget has been working, and how they will formulate a plan for the next override. They also gave a history of how and why the schools asked for an override. The first slide showed a comparison of what they had planned for the stabilization fund and what they actually used. They committed to 5 years but they extended the funds to 6 years, and they may be able to extend some of into year 7 as well. Most likely they would have a discussion around FY 22 for another override. Jamie said to keep in mind that the per pupil spending includes funding from a lot of outside sources. The per pupil number is not all funded by the town. It includes Feoffees money, revolving funds, and grant funds. Michael S. asked if the State calculates the budget comparing it to other schools. Joanne said they calculate it with averages but no median. Janice said it looks like the State per-pupil averages are increasing consistently but our deltas are not, she asked if that is due to the fact that our population is declining but our funding is remaining consistent. Carl said the funding is consistent and the student population has dropped, Hugh said they should look at it. Walter said the costs are not really variable but enrollment is. Janice asked if there is a target they are trying to reach since they are taking the time to track the per pupil expenditure. As we look at the potential for another override, will we determine the dollar value of the override from a curriculum and student perspective, or will it be

targeted based on a per pupil spending average? It is the former. We could be looking at an override for the same or smaller population. Jamie said every override is unique and the past one seemed to be very successful. Hugh said the amount of progress the schools have been able to make because of the override has been incredible. Carl said the needs have changed dramatically from the previous override, especially when considering the social emotional component, and the talents and skills of the teachers to meet those needs have also changed. We need to continue to look at the needs to make sure they are successful. Carl said for the next override they plan to finish conversations with the School Committee so they can present the timing and the amount. They plan to use a similar structure to what they have had in the past. They now have some better experience with the additional contributions that extend the life of the override, so they will try to bake that in which will decrease the net ask. Hugh and Carl also discussed the new developments and how they might affect the budget, and they also talked about the upcoming student population decline. These are all variables that will affect the upcoming budgets. They will be going into the override with some money in stabilization so that they have some built in protection in case the override doesn't pass on the first time around. They are doing well and they want to sustain this.

Michael D. said that he wanted to warn against grant funds for FTE's because they have seen this happen a lot on the municipal side and those positions eventually have to be paid out of the operational budgets. Mike also said he would prefer to limit the number of questions that are asked ahead of time because he thinks the questions should be stated out loud for the record, but also because in the past a lot of his questions have been based off of other questions his colleges have asked and it seems to be a good conversation starter. Mike also said he thinks they need to focus solely on the Elementary Schools on night one and then Middle/High Schools on night two. Lastly, he said last year he thought it was helpful that the principals were at the table so they could easily answer into the microphones and take part in the presentation. Dr. Blake said the budget that was presented is the School Committee's budget, and that's why it was set up that way this year. Rob said he agrees that he likes to hear from the school principals because they are the people that are closest to the customers, which would be the parents and students. Rob said it is more for the audience. Janice said most of the town doesn't interact with the schools and this is the one time they get to hear from the principals.

Dr. Blake said they have made the decision to close school for tomorrow and cancel the Middle School play for tomorrow night. The leadership will meet tomorrow morning after Dr. Blakes conference call with the School Department and the Department of Public Health. The schools will be closed for cleaning. They will make more decisions tomorrow.

5. New/ Other Business – Janice Clements-Skelton

- Janice said next week will be the Warrant Hearings and that her intention was to get agendas out tomorrow and open Wednesday's Hearing with a brief discussion on the report.
- Rob said he is having a hard time with the term "Warrant Hearing" when they are voting the Warrant Articles after that. Janice said they will be voting the Warrants at the Warrant Hearing.

6. Adjournment – Janice Clements-Skelton

- Motion to adjourn made by Michael D. and seconded by Rob.
→Vote: Motion passed unanimously, 8-0

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
4-30-20

Response to FinCom Budget Questions

1. Starting with outplacements, what line on the budget does it hit when a student is outplaced?

The out-of-district placements appear in the budget documents for the respective school which the student would have attended in-district. There are several lines which are impacted in building cost centers, depending on the type of out-of-district placement:

- 40-9100 -refers to placements in state public school districts
- 40-9200 - out-of-state placements
- 40-9300 - private placements, both day and residential
- 40-9400 - public educational collaborative placements

2. How many are currently outplaced?

29 students attend out-of-district placements

3. Do you have (without student info obviously) a grid of students(+cost) outplaced by grade?

Because sometimes only one student per grade attends an out-of-district placement, the list is easily identifiable and it would impinge on confidentiality for families if this were shared. The list is simply a snapshot in time. In the projections for next year, no elementary students are currently scheduled to attend out-of-district programs. Sixteen of the 29 students are in grade 12 or PG (attending through age 22). Of this number, 8 students are scheduled to either graduate or reach age 22 in the upcoming fiscal year, and we have been working with the families to return an additional 4 students to the District. On the surface, this might appear to be a strong positive for FY'22, however, it is important to note that the system is not a closed one, but rather, one in which students may move in, or in which student needs are altered based on a change in circumstances, and so our projections can never be a guarantee.

4. I assume they are out for good once they get the initial placement?

No, to the contrary, we have had students return to the District. Students' Individual Educational Programs (IEP's) are regularly monitored and reviewed on an annual basis, and changes are made based on team recommendations. We have had several students return to the school district when they have shown growth in their IEP goals. We have also had students step down from more restrictive placements such as private placements and move into public day collaborative placements. In the current year, three students moved from private day placements to less restrictive public day collaborative programs. These programs are less costly, but the decision can never be about cost, but rather, the least restrictive program appropriate to a student's needs.

5. Are we as a district locked into any inflation rate that the receiving institution decides to pass along?

Rates are set by MA Operational Services Division (OSD) which is a division in the Executive Office for Administration and Finance. Increases are usually about a 3% increase from year-to-year. The rates for FY'21 were confirmed on Feb. 5 of this year, and can be found on the OSD website. The exceptions to this are when private schools petition for a larger increase based on adding new programs or capital improvements. School districts are notified of the petition, but usually do not receive the final rate until the fall.

6. Are there any special education populations (substantially similar issues) where there is a risk of outplacements if we do not staff the programs sufficiently?

The disability categories with the largest representation (25 out of 29) are in the emotional and severe Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) categories. Equipping all staff members---both general and special educators--- with training in socio-emotional supports, behavioral de-escalation, and trauma sensitivity is key to maintaining students in the District. DESE research has shown that students with disabilities who are educated in an inclusion setting experience more successful life outcomes. Important components essential in meeting the needs of our students include maintaining /expanding co-teaching, offering high quality programming from the start at the preschool, and ensuring the availability of special education staff with credentials appropriately strong enough to address the needs of a continuum ranging from low through the intense needs.

7. When we have mediations or Hearings with parents and their advocates, what law firms do we use?

We do not use legal assistance in mediations. There is no charge to the District, and mediation is an opportunity to maintain communication and positive relationships with parents. The Bureau of Special Education Appeals (BSEA) provides a trained, neutral mediator who has been highly effective at helping families and the District find common ground. For this reason, the District tries to engage in mediation when disagreements cannot be immediately resolved.

We have only participated in two Hearings since 2014, both of which were initiated by families, and in both of which the District prevailed. The law firm we use is Stoneman, Chandler, and Miller, who are also used by other districts and collaboratives including Lexington, Acton, Brookline, Bedford, Winchester, and Northshore Educational Consortium. Our primary attorney, Colby Brunt, Esq. has an excellent reputation in the special education community, and is often featured as a speaker at special education conferences.

8. Can you get a list of the law firms and the amount paid to the firms in FY19 and so far in FY20?

We paid Stoneman, Chandler, and Miller \$17,392 in FY'19, and in FY'20 so far received \$10,424 during the present year. In checking informally with other neighboring districts, I have learned that we are fortunately on the low side in regard to costs..

9. Just trying to get a sense of our strategy around special ed. I have heard from some parents where they fought and won getting their child outplaced.

Special education has several important tenets:

- Placement is made in the least restrictive setting for the individual student, so the ultimate decision is very student-specific
- The determination is made by the Team, which includes parents. Neither the superintendent nor the special education director has the authority to override such decisions.
- The student's **needs** drive the **services** which drive the **placement**, so out-of-district placements are only made when the required services (such as small groups for all subjects) cannot be readily addressed within the District
- If parents have "fought," they have not done so through a Hearing. We have had only two Hearings in the past six years and both were related to transportation, not placement. The District prevailed in both Hearings.
- By law, the District cannot use lack of funds or staff as a reason to not provide a needed service.

10. I worry about the cost, strategy, and incentives around the outplacement decision. I also have heard from some parents regarding dyslexia as well as autism, etc.

By nature of the fact that it is illegal to have entry/exit criteria, or to predetermine an outcome we cannot set quotas. Gatekeeping is also morally unethical in regard to the rights of students with disabilities. The team is charged with the responsibility of assessing the student need on an individual basis. Decisions for out-of-district placements are made at the building level, so the best incentive for families to accept in-district placements stems from building trust in the professionalism of the school portion of the team who know the student, and who adjust supports as the student's needs change.

In regard to dyslexia, we currently have a robust in-district inclusion support system consisting of co-teaching and structured phonics tutorials where needed. We also have general education supports including dyslexia screening to ensure that we have a continuum of services. We do not have a self-contained program in this area at present because we do not have a critical number at any one level. Although we monitor program needs regularly and always keep an open mind to other alternatives, we would have concerns about isolating a portion of the student population. Pull-out programs in other school districts have encountered problems including high staffing requirements and students feeling stigmatized by spending their day apart from peers. One nearby program allocates 5.0 FTE for each level program. With the co-teaching model, Ipswich is able to employ those 5.0 special education positions to cover a larger student population and address a continuum of needs ranging from those students requiring intense structured phonics support, all the way through general education students who benefit from an extra teacher (the co-teacher) in the classroom.

For students on the Autism Spectrum, we have in-district programming beginning at the preschool level. This means that in FY'21, we are able to keep all the current ASD students through grade 6 within the District. Autism Spectrum is a continuum disability, meaning that students in this disability category exhibit a range of need intensity. When students reach the middle school level, we still have a large component of this population remaining in the District; however, the academic gap widens at this level., and high-need students who have dysregulation issues may become more of a challenge.

Looking ahead to FY'22, as noted, we have 8 students graduating or aging out (reaching age 22) and 4 additional students whom we expect to return to the District. Because the special education process is a fluid one where new students will enter as they become eligible, this does not automatically translate into a total of 12 fewer out-of-district placements.

11. So what I am wondering is what are the major categories of need and what is our strategy around fulfilling the needs of the students, whether it be in the IPS or an outplacement scenario.

There are a total of nine special education disability categories. As noted, of the students in out-of-district placements, all but four are either in the Emotional category or on the Autism Spectrum. Parents of special needs students would---rightly---take issue with the use of the word “strategy” in dealing with their children’s needs. Our practice is to hire highly qualified professionals and provide them with needed materials and continued professional development that will allow them to address the varying needs of special education students within the required least restrictive setting. Consistent with the educational research, the longer our students with special needs have access to the high standards and challenging inclusion environment, the greater their likelihood of future success.

12. I do hate paying lawyers money unless it supports a clear strategy. At a minimum, I want to know how many law firms are being engaged. If it is one firm, I want to know how we are gauging their performance.

The District does not choose to have an attorney for litigation purposes. We prefer to work with families to amicably resolve disagreement. As indicated, we contract with only one firm, which specializes in special education work with school districts. We are gauging the firm’s performance based on several pieces of evidence:

- Counsel has provided us with effective guidance in remaining in compliance with interpretations of Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and Department of Education requirements.
- Our attorney has worked with the school teams to earn 100% success in the two Hearings brought forward since 2014.
- The main attorney with whom we deal is highly regarded by staff and well-received in trainings presented to District administrators and PPS staff, as measured by feedback surveys.

Response to FinCom Questions- High School

APs look good, any plans on Physics and US and World History?

I will work with the science department chair regarding Physics performance. It’s not a hugely popular class, so one or two students in a 8-9 person class ca really skew the data The College Board does not report data on classes smaller than 10, so there are years where there is no classroom level data even though the class ran. The same teacher taught both AP World and AP US- it’s just really hard to teach two AP courses at the same time. This year I split up the load and expect better results.

How will staff/FTE changes improve the school next year?

The FTE increases will better support students’ learning needs. As Dr. Blake explained, the additional tech teacher is needed to reinvigorate the tech offerings, including the new computer-based machining pathway we are planning to implement. Last year we posted the .4 tech position when the previous teacher resigned and

we had only one qualified applicant who accepted a 1.0 position elsewhere after we interviewed him. We need to get more competitive in a market with a shallow talent pool- the 1.0 will hopefully be more attractive to candidates. The BRYT program (2 FTEs) has received a lot of positive feedback from staff, students, and parents in our efforts to re-engage kids who were hospitalized and having a hard time re-integrating to school and catching up with their work. The School Council rated it as the top priority to protect should our proposed budget meet with opposition from either the SC or the FinCom. The additional .6 health teacher will simultaneously free up Tom Gallagher to attend to his AD duties as well as allow us to shift the more sections of Biology taught by a current teacher who is currently teaching a health/bio split schedule. Again, Dr. Blake explained all of this in his presentation.

Outside of FTEs, how will the HS improve overall next year with school changes?

This question sounds a bit out of the scope of the budget discussion before the board, but the high school's improvement plan is focused on continuing to improve student attendance and academic achievement in order to improve our accountability rating of "Partially Meeting Targets." To accomplish this, we will put greater attention on our lowest performing students (since they are their own reporting category in the accountability system), better and more explicitly integrate the Successful Habits of Mind into our current instructional and assessment practices, and implement a more structured system of peer observation and feedback. We also want to refine our current career pathways and orient them more towards those students looking to enter the workforce right after completion of high school. Currently the pathways are geared towards high-achieving students who are college bound.

How has the Feoffee funds been used this year and what results do we see in the budget/ school plan for FY21?

Feoffee funds were used to pilot the BRYT Program, support the summer reading program, pay for schoolwide PD on social-emotional learning bring in new hardware for the graphic design class, etc. Based on the success of the BRYT program, it is being absorbed into the appropriated budget for FY21.

What parent feedback are you hearing?

I would like more clarity on what this question is asking. Generally parents are very happy with Ipswich High School. Is this a budget question? The parents on the School Council who have seen the budget up close gave it the stamp of approval.

Why is department chairperson called out in the budget narrative?

I am not sure what this question is asking.

SAT performance up, why do you think?

SAT performance is up. Students are better prepared by our math and English teachers. Also, the tests themselves have undergone a mathematical re-calibration that has led to a slight uptick in scores.

Does the guidance department work with kids on scholarship opportunity outside of town business?

Reaction to 77% attending 4-year colleges. Students receive a comprehensive list of available scholarships from the guidance department. The list includes scholarships funded by businesses, charitable groups, social organizations, and private donors/organizations.