

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Finance Committee
Meeting of March 13th, 2019
Town Hall, 25 Green Street

With a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:37.

Finance Committee members present: Chair Janice Clements Skelton, Tammy Jones, Walter Hartford, Michael Schaaf, Rob White, Michael Dougherty, Chris Doucette, Jamie Fay

Not present: Kevin Murphy

1. Citizens Queries – Janice Clements Skelton

- No citizens queries.

2. Acceptance of Finance Committee Minutes

- March 7th minutes will be approved 3/18.

-----School Budget Hearing -----

3. Questions from FinCom

Walter asked about Special Education. Beverly said there are 3 core concepts in Special Education, one being that all students are entitled to a free and appropriate education, and determining this is based on a team decision by law and by ethics and morality. This decision needs to be made on best practice. In terms on the supports for the student, we are looking at an environment that is as close to the mainstream as possible, but at the same time understanding that some students may have some more intensive needs. The special education number fluctuates because students may require more or less services throughout the year. We are just below the state average in terms of the number students in special education in relation to overall school population. Janice said there have been years where the special education budget has grown exponentially, and asked if there are there any trends right now. Beverly said needs change based on the world we live in. There has been an increase in students found on the autism spectrum. The student needs will be addressed in a way that is least restrictive but that also effectively services the child, this can be through technology.

Janice asked to hear more about the decrease in health insurance. Sarah Johnson said the MIIA rep said they estimated trends higher than they actually came in. They were able to lower MIIA members' insurance rates. Janice asked what this translates to in dollars. Sarah said 30% of people do not take the insurance, we had \$90,000 in savings but we are losing some of that because two people just joined on. Sarah and Tony decided to leave the money where it is just in case there are more people that join insurance through qualifying events.

Next FinCom asked questions on the Special Education Expense Budget. Janice said she was happy to see that these costs have been stabilizing over the past few years. Janice asked how combining the preschool programs affects the program. Beverly said it will still be an integrated preschool and the role model students are supporting the special education population. This was a prime time to combine the programs because it allowed for cost savings without sacrificing in quality. This would combine staff members while still addressing the needs of the special education population. Sheila H. also said they already have staff that goes back and forth so this will help with that. Michael D. asked if there are space issues with this. Sheila M. said the program is still in the same space, but they are trying to be more creative about which days students come, and they also have less availability so that students will not be overcrowded. Michael asked what we would do with the extra space at Doyon. Sheila H. said there will be a space committee to decide what to do with the space, but they are already tight on space so it's not necessarily extra space. Rob asked how many students are in the Special Education program, Beverly said it is just below 17%, around 300 students. Special Education is the third of the budget. Janice asked if Special Education transportation is also captured in the Special Education Expense Budget, Beverly said yes. Rob asked how much of this budget is spent on transportation. Joanne said for contractors they have budgeted \$390,000, they also have about \$75,000 for vehicle supplies, gasoline, in-district drivers, and vehicle repair. Dr. Blake said that can be found in the Central Office Budget.

Compensation budget includes salaries and stipends for all staff. Janice ask if they are still in negotiations for contracts. Dr. Blake said the teachers' contracts and the clerical contracts are settled, but the custodians and TA contracts

are still in negotiations. Joanne explained the splits. Janice asked if we use any grant funds for salaries. Joanne said they use preschool revolving tuition to help pay for teachers in the preschool program. A grant is also used to pay for professional staff and TA's. Mike asked why the budget has increased about \$1M each year considering it has been a maintenance budget and student numbers have gone down. Dr. Blake said there is a number of things that drive that number but it is mostly salaries, health insurances, and special education. There is usually a delta of \$900,000 a year for the school budget. Jamie asked if we have been at roughly the same amount of staff over the last 5 years. Dr. Blake said some teaching staff has gone down because the overall population of students has been decreasing, but some support staff has been added due to student needs. Michael asked if we should be continuing to expect \$1M increases each year. A School Committee member said that the growth of the cost of staff will continue, which is why overrides are put in place to address the structural deficit. The community has to find funds to accommodate the settlements that we sign. This is predictable and routine, so perhaps overrides might not be the best plan, maybe these needs should be addressed in the budget since we know it will continue to increase. Rob asked if teachers are being compensated fairly compared to other communities. Dr. Blake said he believes so. Jamie said it looks like there is a 2.2% increase this year, which isn't too big. Rob said it appears that the highest paid teachers will be making \$100,000 within the next few years and wanted to bring that to the Finance Committee's attention.

4. Elementary – B. Blake & Principals

Janice asked Sheila H. and Sheila M. how they work together. Sheila H. said they do a lot of professional development together and teachers work together on every subject area. Sheila M. said that the kids get to know each other from joint town events and from playgrounds. There are also joint fundraisers, birth to three also helps students get to know each other at an early age. Dr. Blake said there is a working group this year that will look specifically at elementary education. After the failed building project, the working group was formed to make sure the curriculums are aligned and that students are having similar experiences in both buildings. Rob asked what the challenges are this year. Sheila H. said her biggest concern in the change in education is the social emotional needs of children and in order to be prepared for learning they have to be available mentally. There is good support staff in both buildings to help handle this. Sheila M. said the stresses on families are real and they filter down to kids. There aren't as many parents in the schools as there used to be. Communication becomes difficult and it's hard to make sure everyone is on the same page. Tech access is also a challenge in multiple ways. It is hard for parents to put limits on tech and reading is not as done as much at home as it used to be. Reading and vocab enrichment has become important.

Tammy asked about the enrollment numbers and wondered if they are declining or if there will need to be a drop in staff. Sheila H. said she does not think there will be a need to lower staff because students typically come in from other kindergartens which will bring the first-grade numbers up. She also said smaller class sizes are needed to provide students with effective teaching. Sheila M. said configuration is always complicated. Rob asked if they have any programs they would like to introduce using the Feoffees grants. Sheila H. said a number of the Feoffees grants that were written last year for were written for both buildings. Every time a grant is written, they check to see if both buildings are interested. Rob also asked about field trips. Sheila M. said she is on a working committee on field trips and found that other communities do far fewer field trips than we do. Jamie asked for a summary of staffing changes. Sheila H. is down a preschool teacher due to retirement, and some teaching assistants will be helping with this. Sheila M. said the preschool consolidation brought in a registered behavior technician instead of a TA. There is also an early childhood speech therapist that will come in. RTI services have also been added and a reading specialist has been cut. Instead, there will be one reading specialist as well as some tutors for cost savings. There was also a reduction in three special education behavior technicians within the schools due to a shift in student needs. Michael D. asked about the Doyon building condition and why Sheila doesn't have an office. Sheila H. said they have very old radiators so when they break the water comes out and floods the classrooms, so a classroom is now in Sheila's office. The roof also leaks in numerous places. Sheila said the roof leaks in different places every time it rains or snows, there is a new facilities person that is managing this. Michael asked what the other larger scale concerns are for Doyon. Sheila M. said the roof is the biggest issue. Dr. Blake said there is \$50,000 set aside in the budget for next year to address the roof. Walter also pointed out that the School Dude assessment will show what else is needed. Janice said this report should come out by early May.

Janice asked Sheila to go over the highlights at Doyon and if there are any accomplishments that she would like people to know about. Sheila said she couldn't be prouder of the students, staff, and parents at Doyon and how hard everyone works. The students love the STEAM projects, design challenges, and the literacy work that goes along with that. Jamie asked if there are any male teachers at Doyon, Sheila said there are three. Jamie asked if there are any initiatives to bring in male teachers. Sheila M. said that Ipswich is having difficulty recruiting a diverse staff that represents the school population. Tracy said that there is no data that suggests that students learn better from the same

gender of teacher, however there is very strong data that suggests that students of color have a much higher percentage of going to and staying in college if they have a teacher of color, especially if they have a teacher of color for two or more years.

Janice asked about the program in which teachers would have a combined grade class. Sheila M. said accountabilities have changed from the state. 2/3 grades can be complicated regarding testing. She thinks it is doable but it will take a lot of thought to make sure that there are no holes for students learning and progression. Sheila M. also presented the highlights for the Winthrop school. Sheila explained some adjustments in the support, it may look like there are cuts but it may be instead that the title has changed, for example it looks like the Kindergarten aid was cut, but the position just falls under Special Ed now because of a student need. Sheila also said trauma training was done to create trauma sensitive classrooms. Co-teaching has been working well and Sheila gave an overview of co-teaching. Most services and needs are met within the classroom and support is given all day long instead of in a short block of time for pull-out. This works particularly well for the older grades. Walter said he has had good experience with the Winthrop co-teaching model, his son is in one of the classrooms now. Jamie asked for specifics on the staffing changes. Sheila said last year there was a counselor added and there was no change in staff this year but it looks like there was a change in the budget. Michael asked Sheila what the biggest building challenges are. Sheila said they have had heating issues and leaks. A lot of proactive work was done to fix the heating issues.

5. Middle School – B. Blake & Principals

Tammy asked about class sizes and noted that they are smaller than typical and perhaps we can't afford this. David said they have been looking at class sizes and are looking to see how the current middle school philosophy can be carried out moving forward. They do recognize that the class sizes are lower, but eliminating a teacher would then create classrooms with too many students. Rob asked about private school interest in 8th grade. David said there are not as many students applying out as there have been in the past. David also presented the highlights from the past year. Janice asked if FTS's are a 1 for 1 if we were to track back in the budget book. Dr. Blake said people are moved around to meet the needs of the students, so not necessarily. David said they have moved toward a Humanities/STEAM model. There will be a lot of group activities and people moving around because of project-based learning. MCAS scores have gone up. Co-teaching model is also working well in the middle school. Rob said he has been impressed with the technologies in the classroom and asked if the cuts will affect this. David said it will not affect it. Jamie asked about the new TA, David said this is not a new staff person, it is just a position that was moved to TA from another line. Four positions were brought up from the elementary school. Jamie asked about the makeup of the faculty male vs female. There are 11 male teachers with no diversity. Tracy said that nationally 80% of teachers are white women, so although they can seek diversity there is a smaller pool of diverse candidates. David said that they always hire the best staff they can no matter what. Rob asked about field trips, David said they do a lot of field trips. Janice asked what the device policy is. David said that students are not allowed to have personal devices at all during the day or even on field trips. David also noted the school play, The Wizard of Oz, is this weekend.

6. High School – B. Blake & Principals

Jonathan, the new high school teacher, gave his background. He chose to come to Ipswich because of the well-rounded students that are coming out of the schools. Enrollment was discussed first. Rob asked about students choosing in. He also asked what some of the strengths and challenges have been so far. Jonathan said the nature of the students has been impressive. They have been kind to each other and have a great sense of humor and are interested in learning. He has also been impressed by the teaching staff. As far as challenges, the school has been doing well over the last 15 years or so and it can be easy to become complacent when everything is okay, so we will need to push to be not just good but to be great. Janie asked what would happen if there are no students choosing into 9th grade. She also asked about the move from block scheduling and if we are seeing any differences. Jonathan said there is no perfect schedule, but the students and teachers like this schedule because relationships are able to develop over the course of the year as opposed to ending in January. Janice asked about possible retirements in the next few years. Jonathan said he thinks there will be a few teachers retiring over the next few years. Rob asked about college acceptances for the senior class. Jonathan said it is always very strong and students seem to do well with financial aid. Chris asked about a financial literacy program. Jonathan said they did try a life skills/ financial literacy program for seniors this past year and there was also a pin given out to students if they complete the program. Chris said he has concerns about the number of students that have debt and that students are not really grasping what it means to go to college and come out with debt. He wondered if the school district is preparing students enough with the business aspect of college. Jonathan said he agrees that this is important but it is one of the downfalls of high stakes testing. If it isn't something that the school is held accountable for it becomes lower on the

priority list. Jonathan said he wouldn't be opposed to adding this to the curriculum as an elective. Janice said she thinks that a lot of students and families struggle with understanding what debt is going to be like after college when entry level jobs are not paying much and housing is so expensive.

Jonathan discussed the highlights from the year and also discussed the difficulties the building is having. The School Dude assessment will help with the building assessment to figure out what is needed. Boilers and heating have been a big issue. Dr. Blake said that the building is 20 years old now and these issues have been around for years. They have been working with the new Facilities Director to tackle what they can. Walter asked about the air quality and how that is being tracked. Dr. Blake said when problems with mold are identified they bring in companies to do air quality sampling immediately and it is taken very seriously. All of the test results are available in the Facilities Department. Rob asked Jon if he knows what percentage of students take AP classes. He said he would have to look it up but is probably around 20%. Rob asked about the virtual high school, Jon said they fill up all of their spots every year with this. Jamie asked how we are doing with the bottom 5% of students. Tracy said there is targeted support that looks at the bottom 25% of MCAS scores that is put forth by the state. Jon said the dropout rate is very low, .8%. Jon said they had a partnership with Salem State where they could take college courses for free that would also count toward HS classes. Salem State just decided to drop Ipswich from this program. Rob said perhaps we should reach out to Senator Tarr about this. Rob asked about chronic absenteeism. Jon said there is 10% of students that have chronic absenteeism and it can be very difficult to get students to come to school. They have even gone to students houses with the school resource officer to get students to school.

7. District Wide Building Operations – B. Blake & Principals

Janice asked about the overall budget increase. Joanne said that it has to do with a lot of smaller things like gas rate and increased electricity budget. Jamie asked about the basis for the increases and Joanne went over the details. Dr. Blake went over what is included in this budget. Rob asked Dr. Blake to go over the new Integrated Technology Specialist. Dr. Blake said this was a position that was in the budget and was cut last year. It was decided that this position was needed and is being added back in. This person oversees professional development and the computer science standards, and will also have a teaching background so he or she will be a liaison for the tech department and teaching staff. Rob asked if there are computer science courses. There are two AP computer science courses and coding initiatives for different grade levels. Rob asked about unemployment compensation. Joanne said the calculations were done in the early stages of building this budget. The total unemployment cost this year is low. They then took a look at the staffing changes that may occur in the year ahead, and did the math to figure out the number of weeks these benefits will need to be paid. Jamie said he appreciates the great effort that everyone is putting forth and how remarkable the schools are doing.

8. New/Other Business – J. Skelton

- None

9. Adjournment – Janice Clements Skelton

- Motion to adjourn made by Tammy, seconded by Rob
→*Vote: Motion passed unanimously, 7-0*

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
3.18.19