

Voting Meeting

August 11, 2026

BOARD MEMBERS

- Adam Krantweiss, Ph.D., **President**
- Jacob Shiffrin, **Vice President**
- Garrick Blalock
- Erin Croyle
- Sara Garner
- Todd Fox
- Jill K. Tripp
- Emily Workman
- Karen Yearwood

RECEIVING AND HEARING OF DELEGATIONS

PUBLIC COMMENT

(View the video recording starting at 4:50)

- **Cell Phone Policy**
 - Members of the Ithaca Principals and Directors Association (IPDA), including all four secondary principals, defended the district's first year of bell-to-bell cell phone policy implementation
 - Administrators emphasized that their firsthand experiences and data should be included in future board discussions and decisions
 - Staff feedback was generally positive: educators reported more student interaction, engagement, discussion, and focus
 - Administrators cautioned against major changes such as collecting phones at the start of the day without considering the impact on instructional time and school culture
 - Speakers emphasized that the goal is not simply removing phones but creating more opportunities for attention, curiosity, conversation, connection, judgment, self-regulation, and responsibility through collaborative implementation
- **Instructional Technology**
 - A member of the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council (SSAC) urged the board to have a broad, deliberate discussion about instructional technology and screen use, involving students, educators, administrators, parents, and the broader community, before rushing toward a policy
- **Student Safety / Hazing**
 - A community member raised concerns about student-on-student sexual offenses and hazing, particularly in secondary school athletics, calling for stronger prevention and response measures
- **Toileting and Diapering Regulations**
 - The president of the Ithaca Teachers Association (ITA) called attention to new NYS requirements concerning toileting and diapering practices in schools

- She asked the board to ensure:
 - Current toileting/washing facilities are assessed before school starts
 - Existing professional development and training are assessed
 - Board members familiarize themselves with the new requirements
 - The board considers whether additional policy is needed

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT/ANNOUNCEMENTS

DR. BROWN

(View the video recording starting at 49:15)

- Superintendent Brown highlighted Project Innovation, the district's inclusive summer program, noting strong student participation (389 students) and thanking educators, staff, and the board for supporting the program
- Board members asked about the program's future funding, noting that the current grant is ending
 - The superintendent said grants are awarded year-to-year, and the district will pursue additional grants and consider local funding in order to continue supporting this important program
 - The district expects to potentially bring a contract for grant-writing services to the board in the near future

SCHOOL DISTRICT BUSINESS

CELL PHONE UPDATE

(View the video recording starting at 52:31)

- The board continued its discussion of cell phone policy and implementation, following its July 20 resolution directing the superintendent to:
 - Make student cell phones inaccessible during the school day
 - Revise disciplinary practices to require immediate removal of phones when they are used during the school day
- **Superintendent's Proposed Plan**
 - Superintendent Brown presented a proposed implementation plan based on the board's directive
 - The plan focused primarily on secondary schools and assumed that an adult would immediately remove a phone when it was seen
 - Superintendent Brown considered various storage options, including lockers, pouches, and other secure systems
 - He raised concerns about how to collect and return 1,000+ devices at larger schools and how to respond to phones seen during the school day without placing additional burdens on teachers and administrators
 - The proposal would likely require hiring additional staff to manage implementation—potentially about \$500,000 in annual staffing costs—while making other staffing reductions to accommodate the expense
 - Superintendent Brown also noted that the state provided approximately \$20,000 for implementation, which would not cover the cost of significant new staffing or hardware
- **Differing Interpretations of the July 20 Resolution**
 - Board members disagreed on whether the intent of their resolution was to have the superintendent develop and present options for further board discussion, or to immediately implement a specific plan making phones inaccessible and requiring immediate removal

- Several members acknowledged that the wording of the resolution—particularly terms such as “inaccessible” and “immediate”—was not sufficiently clear and contributed to the disagreement
- **Stakeholder Input**
 - Board members discussed the need for additional stakeholder input and data:
 - Input from principals, teachers, students, and other staff
 - More information about how the current policy is working across schools, particularly at the middle school level
 - A possible smaller work session or working group involving board members, building leaders, staff, and community members
- **Superintendent's Process**
 - The superintendent said he had researched approaches used by other districts and noted that he had not seen other boards issue a similar directive requiring immediate phone removal on such a short implementation timeline
- **Vote to Rescind July 20 Resolution**
 - After discussion, the board approved a motion to rescind the July 20 resolution directing changes to cell phone accessibility and disciplinary practices
 - The board indicated that the cell phone policy discussion would return for further consideration

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE DISCUSSION AND VOTE

(View the video recording starting at 1:30:18)

- **Initial Motion**
 - The board considered a motion to establish a Capital Projects and Consideration of Accounts Committee for 2026–27
 - The rationale was that capital projects and consideration of accounts are recurring, routine matters that could be handled by a smaller group rather than the full board
- **Concerns About Restructuring**
 - Several members expressed concern that the discussion was part of a broader effort to dissolve and rebuild the existing committee structure
 - Members emphasized that certain committees, namely the policy, finance, and facilities committees, have historically provided opportunities for detailed work, collaboration, and public engagement
 - Concern was also raised that eliminating the existing structure and rebuilding it piecemeal could create confusion for board members and the community
- **Different Views on Committees**
 - Other members argued that major direction-setting work should remain with the full board rather than being delegated to standing committees
 - The proposed Capital Projects and Consideration of Accounts committee was viewed as appropriate for routine, narrowly defined work
 - It was noted that only the Audit Committee is legally required
 - Concerns were also raised about committees determining their own agendas or working outside the direction of the full board
- **Potential Guardrails**
 - Rather than dismantling the existing committee structure, an alternative solution would be to retain the committees while establishing clearer expectations that:
 - Committees operate within a scope delegated by the full board during annual board goal setting
 - The board determines issues committees are authorized to address
 - Committee work is time-bound and remains within its defined scope

- Committees provide more robust reports to the full board
- **Next Steps**
 - The motion was withdrawn because members wanted a broader discussion of the overall committee structure before voting on an individual committee
 - The board decided not to continue working toward a resolution that evening
 - Members were encouraged to develop specific proposals or motions for a future meeting, potentially August 25

APPROVAL OF DISTRICT COMPREHENSIVE IMPROVEMENT PLAN (DCIP) AND SCHOOL COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION PLANS (SCEPS)

(View the video recording starting at 1:59:01)

- The board approved the District Comprehensive Improvement Plan (DCIP) and the School Comprehensive Education Plans (SCEPs) for Beverly J. Martin Elementary, Cayuga Heights Elementary, and Boynton Middle School for 2026-2027
- **Current New York State Guidelines**
 - District and school plans were developed concurrently this year rather than schools developing plans independently and the district responding
 - The goal was to create greater coherence across the district and ensure schools are working toward aligned priorities
 - State guidance also shifted the focus toward the instructional core, with greater emphasis on teaching and learning rather than a broad list of school improvement activities
- **Public Engagement and Accessibility**
 - One board member raised concern that the lengthy plans were being approved with only a brief discussion and without a formal presentation
 - The member also questioned the accessibility of the plan documents, including screen-reader accessibility
- **Tier 1 Instruction**
 - The plans use a broad instructional vision focused on grade-level standards, maximizing opportunities to learn, cognitive demand, responsiveness to student learning, and academic and social belonging
 - The framework is intentionally broad enough to apply across subjects and grade levels; it does not conflict with explicit instruction in foundational skills such as phonics, which remains important
 - The district identified opportunities to strengthen the cognitive demands of phonics instruction, particularly students' ability to apply and encode what they have learned
- **Professional Learning**
 - The district is expanding and formalizing the learning lab model used last year for ELA and elementary math
 - Six K-2 lab classrooms for EL will provide opportunities for teachers to observe instruction, collaborate, and share practices—teachers are being trained to facilitate the learning cycles rather than relying solely on EL
 - Professional learning and release time are being coordinated district-wide to manage teacher coverage
- **Elementary and Middle School Supports**
 - Virtual tutoring will not continue in the middle schools because existing academic support labs with certified math teachers were found to be a better use of resources
 - Elementary tutoring will continue, particularly for math, where there is limited supplemental support and instructional time
 - Early feedback on the elementary program has been positive, although more formal outcome data is still being reviewed

- The tutoring provider uses live human tutors and curriculum aligned with the district's math curriculum
- **Teacher Pipeline and Workforce Development**
 - Exit interviews are currently being sent to departing employees, with the process potentially subject to further development
 - The district is using collective bargaining provisions to support employees pursuing teacher certification, including paid student teaching opportunities
 - Partnerships are also being used to provide access to coursework needed for certification
- **Measurement and Accountability**
 - The state has shifted the plans away from primarily using state test results as improvement plan measures
 - This year's plans focus more heavily on whether specific structures and practices are actually implemented
 - State testing and attendance data will still be collected and monitored and remain relevant to the state's identification process and the district's internal account
- **Middle School Curriculum**
 - A new or fully unified 6–8 curriculum is not specifically identified as a focus of this year's improvement plans
 - The district is beginning the process established in the collective bargaining agreement for evaluating middle school curriculum, including common assessments, data cycles, and instructional practices
 - Teachers will help determine whether existing curriculum is sufficient or whether additional or new curriculum is needed
 - For their plans, each school selected an instructional strategy, not a curriculum, to focus on
- **Vote to Approve the Plans**
 - After discussion, the motion to approve the plans was brought back for a vote and passed unanimously

SCHOOL DISTRICT UPDATES

(View the video recording starting at 2:29:45)

- The board reviewed and asked questions about a district update from the executive team
- **Purpose of the Agenda Item**
 - The item was introduced as an opportunity to review ongoing district work and help inform future board goal-setting and development sessions
- **School Consolidation and Enrollment**
 - One member asked whether the district was currently considering potential school consolidations, enrollment shifts, and the options identified in Cornell's study, or whether the administration was waiting for direction from the board
 - Administration explained that Cornell's study presented options rather than recommendations and that the district had not received direction to pursue consolidation, but would be prepared to develop a plan for community engagement if the board wanted to move forward
 - Administration noted that a thoughtful community process around consolidation would typically take six months to a year and recommended allowing sufficient time to plan and conduct the process well
- **Restorative Justice**
 - One board member asked about restorative justice training for administrators
 - Administration responded that the initial training started this summer with a focus on harm circles and re-entry circles

- The district plans to train a core team of approximately three to five staff members in each building who can provide training to the rest of the building
- **Future Board Discussion**
 - The board president acknowledged that the discussion could have been structured more effectively, noting that the lack of a presentation and clearer direction made it difficult to have a focused conversation
 - The item may be brought back with additional direction to facilitate a more structured discussion
 - Another board member said the updates were valuable for the public because they provide insight into work happening across the district and can help inform future board goal setting

FORMER DANBY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL UPDATE/DISCUSSION

(View the video recording starting at 2:37:22)

- The board discussed the next steps for potentially disposing of the vacant Danby Elementary School property
- Administration reviewed the legal process for disposing of a district-owned building, noting that obtaining an appraisal is an early step in the process
- One board member said Danby has been vacant for decades and currently costs the district money for maintenance, heating, snow removal, and repairs, and argued that selling the property could provide a one-time payment and eventually return the property to the tax roll
- Superintendent Brown emphasized that the district must follow the formal process and allow for substantial public discussion before making any recommendation, and cautioned against publicly signaling a decision to sell before that process occurs
- **Costs and Logistics of Selling the Property**
 - The superintendent raised concerns about the cost of an appraisal and the potential expense of relocating the materials currently stored at Danby
 - It was noted that moving and disposing of the contents of the building could potentially cost a significant amount and could outweigh the financial benefit of selling the property
 - The superintendent also noted that state requirements may govern the disposal or relocation of materials currently stored at the building
 - It was argued that the cost and feasibility of relocating the district's storage needs should be considered as part of the analysis
- **Danby vs the Broader Real Estate Portfolio**
 - The board discussed whether to evaluate Danby individually or conduct a broader review of the district's real estate portfolio
 - One board member argued that, given projected enrollment declines, the district should evaluate all of its properties in conjunction with building conditions and demographic data
 - Others viewed Danby as a unique case because it has been vacant for many years and is not expected to return to use as a school
 - Members noted that there are other non-instructional properties, including Hancock Street, the transportation facility, and the board building
 - The consensus was to structure the RFP broadly enough to obtain costs and options for evaluating Danby individually as well as the district's broader real estate portfolio
- **RFP Timing and Options**
 - The board discussed whether to move forward with an RFP for an appraisal of Danby and how the timing could align with upcoming budget development
 - Administration noted that RFP responses received in the fall could help inform budget and long-term planning discussions

- The board also discussed obtaining a broker's opinion of value as a less expensive preliminary step before commissioning full appraisals
- Administration noted that a broker's opinion could provide an initial estimate of a property's value, while a formal appraisal would provide a more comprehensive valuation at a higher cost
- Administration agreed that the RFP could seek pricing and options for both a broker's opinion of value and a formal appraisal so the district could determine which approach makes the most sense
- **Vote to Direct the Superintendent to Prepare an RFP**
 - A motion was made to direct the superintendent to prepare an RFP seeking a broker's opinion of value and/or an appraisal for the Danby property and/or all district-owned real estate properties
 - The board voted unanimously in favor of the motion

APPOINTMENT OF BOARD LIAISON TO BOARD STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

(View the video recording starting at 2:52:49)

- The board discussed appointing a board liaison to support student representatives
- The liaison would work with the student representative advisor to provide guidance, help the students understand upcoming agenda topics, and serve as a point of contact for questions or concerns
- **Vote to Appoint a Board Liaison**
 - Emily Workman was nominated to serve as the board liaison to the LACS and IHS student representatives
 - The motion was approved unanimously

TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

(View the video recording starting at 2:56:05)

- One board member requested a future discussion about how technology is used for instruction from pre-K through 12, including staff training and any limits on classroom use, with the goal of understanding current district practices and their impact on student learning, not to make an immediate policy decision
- **Proposed Presentation**
 - Superintendent Brown proposed a comprehensive presentation covering board policy, district practices, funding, and input from teachers, administrators, and students
 - The discussion would focus on how technology supports teaching and learning and could identify questions for future discussion
- **Timing and Next Steps**
 - The board agreed the topic should return as a future public agenda item, with a preference for September or October so teachers can participate

AWARDING OF CONTRACTS FOR THE CHES EMERGENCY PROJECT

(View the video recording starting at 3:03:01)

- **Contract Awards**
 - The board approved contracts for General Construction, Plumbing, Mechanical, and Electrical for emergency work at Cayuga Heights Elementary
 - The contracts totaled \$833,220 across the four bids
- **Project Cost and Funding**
 - The overall emergency project cost was approximately \$1.47 million
 - The district received approximately \$525,000 from an insurance claim, with about \$400,000 of the remaining cost expected to be covered by the district's capital reserve

- **Air Quality and Mold**
 - Board members asked about mold and air quality concerns raised by a member of the public
 - Asbestos abatement and initial air testing have been completed, with additional air quality testing scheduled after construction is finished
 - Testing will cover both affected and unaffected areas, and results will be shared publicly
 - The kindergarten classrooms are expected to reopen, while the main office and library will remain closed while additional work is completed
- **Vote to Approve the Contracts**
 - The board unanimously approved the contract awards

APPOINTMENT OF BOND, SCHOENECK & KING, PLLC AS SCHOOL ATTORNEY

(View the video recording starting at 3:09:05)

- The board discussed a motion to appoint Bond, Schoeneck & King (BS&K) as school attorney, which had been pulled from the consent agenda
- **Legal Services RFP Process**
 - The board discussed concerns about the process for selecting legal counsel after receiving a letter from BS&K stating that the firm would continue representing the district
 - Members noted that three firms responded to the RFP and that the administration provided the board with scoring results, but the board had not yet discussed or interviewed the firms
 - Superintendent Brown clarified that he had not represented to BS&K that the firm had been selected and that the letter appeared to have been sent prematurely
- **Procurement and Selection Process**
 - The board discussed the RFP scores and the importance of following the district's procurement process, including avoiding communications with respondents and ensuring the board makes the final decision
 - Administration recommended the board schedule interviews with the responding firms before evaluating the proposals and making a selection
 - The item was tabled pending completion of the RFP process, and BS&K will continue representing the district in the interim

APPROVAL OF JULY 20 MEETING MINUTES

(View the video recording starting at 3:32:26)

- The board discussed a motion to approve the minutes from the July 20 meeting, which had been pulled from the consent agenda due to several members not being present at the meeting
- **Vote:** The board voted to approve the minutes

APPROVAL OF AN INTERNATIONAL FIELD TRIP TO MOROCCO

(View the video recording starting at 3:33:35)

- The board discussed a motion to approve an international field trip to Morocco in spring 2026, which had been pulled from the consent agenda to discuss questions about insurance requirements and potential liability
- **Insurance and Liability**
 - The agreement with the Moroccan partner requires all participants to have international health, accident, and travel insurance
 - District counsel advised that the district cannot purchase health insurance for students as it could constitute a gift of public funds

- Parents are responsible for obtaining the required coverage, with the district responsible for verifying that students are insured
 - Counsel advised that parent waivers do not eliminate the district's potential liability if a student is injured
 - Additional risks discussed included accidents, personal injury, lost property, war, and other travel-related issues
 - Counsel also raised concerns to board members about international travel given current federal immigration enforcement
 - The district cannot inquire about students' citizenship or immigration status, creating concerns about what could happen if a student without appropriate documentation were detained while traveling
- **Educational Value and Trip Planning**
 - Administrators emphasized the significant educational value of international travel and noted that the Morocco trip has been offered since 2015
 - They added that the district takes the risks seriously and has worked with international travel offices at Ithaca College and Cornell University to develop safety checklists and additional safeguards
 - International trips are facilitated through third-party organizations, which do not assume the district's liability
 - The board is required under district policy to approve international field trips, although it does not approve routine domestic field trips
 - The policy allows the board to withdraw approval if circumstances change
 - Administration noted that teachers are already planning the trip with students and families and that costs may increase as the planning timeline progresses
- **Discussion and Vote**
 - Some members expressed discomfort voting before fully understanding the insurance and liability issues, while others noted that the district assumes responsibility for students during many school activities
 - One member said they would vote in favor but support a future discussion about the risks and benefits of district-sponsored international travel
 - The board approved the Morocco trip for Spring 2027

OTHER BUSINESS

OTHER DISCUSSION ITEMS

(View the video recording starting at 3:50:21)

- **TCIDA Proposal**
 - One board member reported on a meeting with Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency (TCIDA) leadership about the district's concerns regarding development projects
 - The TCIDA is considering requiring developers to communicate with the district about project timelines, tenants, and potential school-age children
 - Board members saw this as helpful for logistical coordination but insufficient to address the district's financial concerns
 - Board members also discussed pending legislation that would add a school district representative to the TCIDA
- **Downtown Restoration Initiative Award**
 - The same board member mentioned that the City of Ithaca received a \$10 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative award focused on the Commons
 - Youth-focused discussions identified potential projects that would likely involve GIAC, Beverly J. Martin, and Markels Flats

- Those properties are currently outside the initiative boundaries, but the boundaries could potentially be expanded
 - Board members expressed interest in pursuing boundary expansion to make youth-focused projects, such as a year-round indoor pool, eligible for funding
 - The next planning committee meeting is August 18, and proposals due October 1
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UPCOMING BOARD MEETINGS

Dates are subject to change. [View the up-to-date board calendar.](#)

Tuesday, August 25

- 5 p.m. Audit Committee
- 6 p.m. Voting Meeting

Tuesday, September 8

- 6 p.m. Voting Meeting

Tuesday, September 22

- 6 p.m. Voting Meeting

HELPFUL LINKS

- [Board Webpage](#)
- [Voting Meeting Recordings](#)
- [Committee Work Session Recordings](#)