



Message from School Committee Chair, Chub Whitten

Welcome back to another school year! Summer is a distant memory, and our fall calendars are filling.

With the emergence of the Delta variant of the Covid virus our path to normalcy has not been a straight one. The School Committee is appreciative of all community members adherence to protocols set by the Commonwealth and the School District. We all look forward to them relaxing when conditions permit. For now, vigilance is the watchword that we all must live by.

I would like to thank all the parents of our District for their unwavering support to make last year a success for the students.

It is the School Committees hope that we take the best from what we have learned in this past year in crisis and apply those teaching methods to future educational practices. We should be seeing greater outdoor learning, increased use of selected technology, and improved communications because of our need to adapt to health situations.

It is great to see our students back on the sports teams, planning new theater events, and practicing and performing music together. Building back these and other programs are at top of mind for all our teachers and administrators. As a parent, I'm particularly appreciative to sit with family and friends in the stands again.

Recently, Dr. Blake was at Zumi's to meet with members of the community. He plans to have these gatherings at other locations in town monthly. Please keep an eye out and come introduce yourself to our Superintendent even if you may not have a question or a concern. The School Committee will be available at similar meet and greets throughout the school year.

This newsletter contains budget information, Feoffees grant highlights, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives that the District will be working on and implementing.

Thank you all for your support and for making our students educational experience exceptional,

Chub Whitten

School Budget Discussion

How much does it cost to educate our kids? The FY22 school budget amount approved at Town meeting was approximately \$33 million. That equates to about \$18,600 per student. This per pupil expense falls in line with most of our neighboring school districts... some are slightly higher and some are slightly lower. What we all have in common, though, is that all school districts struggle with how to provide high quality education for their students as costs climb each year.

About 80% of our school budget is allocated to pay salary and benefits for our staff. This 80/20 ratio is fairly standard across school districts nationwide. Contractual agreements with teacher unions include annual salary increases based on years teaching and on achievement of additional college credits beyond a masters degree. In addition to annual increases in salaries, schools must grapple with the rising costs of healthcare. Health insurance premiums paid by our district have increased at an average rate of 3.5% since FY2019. Health insurance expenses alone represent about 10% of the FY22 budget. Additionally, we face cost increases attributed to running and maintaining our buildings during the school year. Overall, our school district's budget increases at an average rate of 4.25% annually while revenue allocated to the schools from tax revenue collected by the Town increases by about 3.1% each year. This ongoing structural deficit is an issue many school districts face.

Schools were fortunate to receive Federal assistance to cover expenses related to the COVID-19 pandemic. That money was earmarked by the Federal government for very specific uses and could not be simply absorbed within our operating budget. Our district was able to purchase air filtration systems in the classrooms, stockpile PPE for all the school buildings and acquire the technology equipment needed during the time when kids were learning remotely. While this one time infusion of funds to aid our budget was very helpful, our district still faces uncertainty each year over the amount of Federal and State funds we will receive.

We all have an obligation to our students to give them an education that prepares them for a productive life. Our educators and administrative team spend a great deal of time each year putting forth a budget that provides a robust curriculum that benefits all the kids in our schools. Outside funding from the Feoffees Trust and Ipswich Education Foundation are a great help. The school stabilization account which was created by the operational override approved by taxpayers in FY15 has given us 7 years of financial stability. Our school committee is confident that we can extend those stabilization funds for one more year, but will anticipate needing to replenish those funds for long-term stability.

Over the next year, school committee members and Superintendent Brian Blake will be hosting casual get togethers in town to give residents the opportunity to ask questions in an informal setting. Anyone interested in learning more about the school budget or anything else the school committee is working on is invited to attend. Keep an eye out for upcoming dates.

Feoffees Trust: Paine Grants

The annual distribution from the Feoffees Trust represents a crucial funding source for our district. The Trust very clearly states that funds are to be used “for supplemental enrichment programs and uses that provide education enhancement for Ipswich Public School Students”. Each year, the School Committee decides how the annual distribution should be split between Traverso-Weatherall Innovation Grants (open twice a year for teachers to apply and capped at \$7500 per grant) and the William Paine Enhancement Grants (larger projects or initiatives that exceed \$7500). Separate committees then review the individual grant requests and determine if they meet the criteria of “enrichment and enhancement”.

This year, approximately \$590,000 in grants were approved by the Paine Grant committee. While they are all very worthwhile and will greatly benefit our students, we chose to highlight three in particular.

Outdoor recreation space at the Middle/High School: This grant will fund a space available for all Middle and High School students to enjoy. New courts for basketball, four-square and wall ball will be built. A new gazebo with tables and chairs will act as an outdoor space for teaching or use as a cafeteria.

Place Based Learning: This grant funds the cost of field trips for our students. Giving kids hands-on learning experiences outside of the classroom is something our teachers are passionate about. This grant allows that to happen without having to pass the costs along to parents.

College Boot Camp: Applying for college can be a daunting task for many students. The 5 day College Boot Camp offers them the tools and assistance they need to stay on track. Rising seniors get assistance with completion of the Common Application as well as help developing their college essays.

Details about all of the approved grants can be found on the district website www.ipsk12.net

Communications Subcommittee Update

A goal of the Communications subcommittee for 2021-2022 is to increase the type of outreach to the general community that was not possible during the 2020-2021 school year due to the pandemic. We have several major projects this school year including an ask for an operational override and restarting discussions about an elementary building project. It is the School Committee’s goal to maintain communication and transparency and be accessible every step of the way to answer questions, receive feedback, and educate the public on these important initiatives.

To that end, we are scheduling monthly meet-and-greets with School Committee members at locations throughout town. The first occurred this morning from 8:30-9:30am at ZUMIs with Greg Stevens and Kate Eliot. A 3-month schedule will be developed and posted to the district website. We hope you’ll take the opportunity to stop by, meet us, and bring your feedback and questions!

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Updates

The Ipswich Public Schools is actively engaging in discussion and activities that enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the public schools. Last year, a working group of the School Committee spent the year conducting listening sessions and discussing issues being raised in the community. This year, the working group will be focusing on School Committee policies that impact DEI throughout the district and making recommendations to the Policy Subcommittee.

Within the schools, the teachers and staff have spent considerable time over the past two years learning about unconscious bias, exploring their own life experiences around diversity, equity and inclusion, and participating in professional development activities focused on issues of race.

This year, a DEI Team has been formed within the Ipswich Public Schools to focus on issues of DEI within our schools. The initial committee membership is made up of staff and students from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The first meeting of the group will be held in the coming weeks. The goal of the committee is to explore and address issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion from the perspective of the students and staff within the school system. Discussions will focus on how to make the Ipswich Public Schools a more inclusive environment for all students and staff. The group will meet monthly throughout the school year and report out to the school committee on a regular basis.

School Committee Meeting Highlights

August

- Discuss Superintendent goals for 2021-2022
- Annual retreat to discuss School Committee goals for 2021-2022
- Negotiations with bargaining units continued
- Building inspection reviews

September

- School reopening update and discussions
- Discussion of memorandum of understanding with Ipswich Educators' Association
- Discussion of statewide mask mandate
- Indigenous Peoples' Day discussion and vote
- Special Town Meeting warrant article discussion

Upcoming District Events

- **October 11:** No school; Indigenous Peoples' Day
- **October 12:** No school for students; Professional Development for staff
- **October 16:** Special Town Meeting, 9am at IHS/IMS
- **October 21:** School Committee Open Session Meeting*
- **October 22:** Ipswich Class of 2022 Fashion Show
- **November 4:** School Committee Open Session Meeting*
- **November 11:** No school; Veterans Day
- **November 18:** School Committee Open Session Meeting*

* School Committee Open Session Meetings are typically held on the first and third Thursday of the month in the MS/HS Ensemble Room located at 134 High Street, Ipswich and begin at 7:00 PM. Meeting agendas, minutes, folders with applicable meeting documents, and calendar may be found on the [district website](#). These meetings are broadcast live on YouTube, with a link in the agenda for each meeting. To view past meetings, please tune into Comcast Channel 98 and Verizon Channel 31. Past meetings can also be viewed on the ICAM Ipswich website: www.icamipswich.com.

Contact Information

schoolcommittee@ipswichma.gov

Chub Whitten, Chair: cwhitten@ipsk12.net

Greg Stevens, Vice Chair: gstevens@ipsk12.net

Emily Cannon: ecannon@ipsk12.net

Kate Eliot: keliot@ipsk12.net

Pavica Kneedler: pkneedler@ipsk12.net

Hugh O'Flynn: hoflynn@ipsk12.net

Jeff Poirier: jpoirier@ipsk12.net

Brian Blake, Superintendent: bblake@ipsk12.net; 978-356-2935

The Ipswich School Committee places great value on feedback from our community and welcomes the opportunity for dialogue and transparency. Per our policy, communication sent to the School Committee as a group is replied to by the School Committee Chair.

Ipswich Public Schools Links



[Twitter](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[School Newsletters](#)